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# PUBLIC SPACE

## From the Urban to the Rural

Lefebvre and Since

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# CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** **9**

**PREFACE** **11**

On the Philosophy of Space 13

Beyond the Division, through Henri Lefebvre 19

**INTRODUCTION** **22**

The Backdrop of the Study 23

The Research Question 24

The Theoretical Frame of Reference 25

The Methodology 28

**1. THE FLOWING SPACE** **33**

1.1 Space as a Social Product 34

1.2 Everyday Life, the Setting of Counter-space 43

1.3 Rhythmanalysis and the Investigation of Daily Publicness 50

1.4 Beyond Lefebvre: from Theory to Practice 56

**2. PUBLIC SPACE, THE SOCIAL PRODUCT *PAR EXCELLENCE*** **59**

2.1 Public Space or Public Spaces? Between Domain and Use 62

2.2 The *In-Between* of Public Space 64

2.3 The Public as the Stage of "Throwntogetherness" 68

2.4 From the Public Space *as* a Network to the Public Space *of* the Network 71

2.5 New Rhythms of use of the Traditional Public Space 73

2.6 Possible Scenarios of Future Development 80

**3. THE COUNTRY SIDE OF PUBLIC SPACE** **82**

3.1 An Apparent Oxymoron, between "Nature" and "Culture" 85

3.2 Rural Public Space. A Renewed Form of Public Space 89

3.3 The Rural Historical Landscape and its 'Proactivity' 93

**4. LEFEBVRE 'APPLIED'. WORKING IN THE 'FIELD': THE ESINO VALLEY** **97**

4.1 The Descriptive Moment. Setting the Stage: the Rhythms of the Esino River 103

4.2 The Analytico-Regressive Moment. Sailing the Past 109

4.3 The Historico-Genetic Moment. Back to the Present, Peeking at the Future 122

**CONCLUSION** **127**

**LIST OF REFERENCE** **132**

*'Change life!' 'Change society!'*
*These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space. . . .*
*To change life . . . we must first change space.*
Henri Lefebvre

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# PREFACE

The crisis of socio-political, environmental and economic balances, together with the enormous challenges globalization imposes us to face (Agamben, 2008; Augé, 2005, 2007, 2009, La Cecla, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2015; Secchi, 2013), require a critical reflection, both in analytical-descriptive and evaluative-prescriptive terms, on the role architectural practice and urban planning play in everyday life. Sure enough, the "crisis in dwelling" Martin Heidegger (2000) denounces in the lecture *Man and Space* he gave in Darmstadt in 1951 is far from being solved.[1] As Heidegger puts it, somehow anticipating Hans Jonas's (2000) appeal for "the imperative of responsibility":

> The real plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses… The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell (Heidegger, 2000, p. 104).

The distinction between the notions of *habitat* and *habiter* is later redrawn by Henri Lefebvre (2003; 2015), whose argument "suggests that the space of dwelling, of *habiter,* is not separated from urban and social space, whereas *habitat* is merely a box, a *cadre*" (Elden, 2006, p. 190). If the practice of *habiter* pertains to indoor private spaces as well as collective ones, the structural transformation of public sphere, that is, "the social space originated by the communicative action" (De Simone, 2011, p. 235, own translation) resulting from "the private development of puzzling social situations"[2] (p. 236, own translation) imposes, as Habermas observed, a careful analysis of public

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[1] The latest earthquake devastating central Italy on August 24 has sparked, once again, the debate on the weakness of human dwelling against catastrophic events. On this subject, the Italian architect Francesco Venezia (2016) denounces the "free fall of the education system" and highlights the "immediate relevance of building in a state of normalcy", especially when dealing with public buildings.

[2] Original: "L'elaborazione privata di situazioni sociali problematiche, le quali risuonano sul piano delle storie di vita" (De Simone, 2011, p. 236).

[2] Original: "L'elaborazione privata di situazioni sociali problematiche, le quali risuonano sul piano delle storie di vita" (De Simone, 2011, p. 236).

[3] The French architect Odile Decq defines this disciplinary "confluence" a "normal evolution". When

space. Assuming that the issue of human dwelling concerns all scales of everyday life and different branches of knowledge, public space, that is, the place where the 'eco-conflicts' (ecological, economic and so on, from *oikos,* 'house') arise more bitterly, requires a joint scholarly effort.

The conventional division among established disciplines has long been debated in the academic world. Almost fifty years ago Lefebvre (2002), among others, questioned about the relationship between philosophy and everyday, wondering if philosophy still had to deal with "serious" matters such as nature, divinity and humanity or rather with what occurs everyday. In the light of the excessive fragmentation concerning the theme of everyday life, in particular of daily spatial experience, Lefebvre wishes philosophy to overcome its limitations by starting undertaking subjects it has always overlooked. In his view, "the limitations of philosophy – truth without reality – always and ever counterbalance the limitations of everyday life – reality without truth" (Lefebvre, 2002b, p. 14). He claims:

> We are about to undertake a fairly important inquiry into facts that philosophy has hitherto overlooked and the social sciences have arbitrarily divided and distributed. Indeed, the experts of specialized sciences tend to isolate facts to their own conveniences, classifying them according to categories that are both empirical and distinct and filling them away under such headings as family sociology, consumption-psychology, anthropology and ethnology of contemporary communities, or the result of costumes and behaviour; while the task of extricating some kind of pattern from this jigsaw devolves to the practitioner (advertiser or town planner). Or they ignore everyday facts such as furniture, objects and the world of objects, time-tables, new items and advertisements and join the philosopher in his scorn for the quotidian (Lefebvre, 2002b, p. 27).

The latest awakening of interest in a multidisciplinary reflection on the relationship between philosophy and architecture infringes this traditional division between theorists and practitioners Lefebvre calls into question. Its absolute 'authority' finds an echo in the contemporary paradigmatic 'explosion' of a philosophy of space (in its many forms of philosophy of architecture, of the landscape, of the urban and so on) where epistemological, aesthetical and political dimensions coexist (D'Angelo, 2010).[3]

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[3] The French architect Odile Decq defines this disciplinary "confluence" a "normal evolution". When introducing her new didactical project launched in Lyon, a school of architecture for innovation and creative strategies named *Confluence*, she emphasizes the need for a multiplicity of "knowledge and expertise" along the educational path of each architect. For this reason, Confluence's teaching staff is

## On the Philosophy of Space

The *building-dwelling-thinking* conceptual triptych that Martin Heidegger (2000) consecrated in the above-mentioned illustrious conference is by no means unprecedented in modern times. In fact, the practice of dwelling has always represented a subject of considerable debate among human sciences (Cantone & Taddio, 2011; Taddio, 2011, 2012). Space, in its various acceptations of territory, environment, landscape, urban tissue, city, dwelling, habitat, place, site and so on, has consistently merged different intellectual figures (Amato & Ferrara, 2009; Baudrillard & Nouvel, 2000; Ferraris, 2009; Paquot & Younès, 2009). The term 'architect' itself, which derives from Latin *architectus,* contains the Greek words ἀρχή (*árche*) and τέκτων (*técton*). Therefore, the architect, literally the 'chief builder', revokes the 'beginning', the 'source of action' from which the philosophical thought originated (Emery, 2007; Papi, 2001).

In *Filosofia e architettura* Fulvio Papi (2001) attempts a philosophical reflection on architectural forms starting from two of the major interpreters of modern philosophy, that is, Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. As is known, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant entitles an essential chapter of the book *The Architectonic of Reason*. Here, the 'building' of reason is assimilated to an architectural artefact for its solidity, balance among the parts and harmony as a whole. According to Kant, works of architecture are useful objects also performing an aesthetic function. On the one hand, they pursue a practical goal fulfilling the criterion of Utility; on the other hand, they are subject to the aesthetic judgement, since buildings are beautiful if capable of arousing the feeling of the Beautiful.

In Hegel's system, architecture, as an art, is an expression of the Spirit. Its subject is the divine image on which the architectural practice is the means. Hegel's broadest treatise on architecture is developed in the third part of his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, consecrated to the examination of the five major arts. Every single art (architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry) acts as the sensitive fulfilment of the idea of absolute contained in each epochal

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composed not only of architects, but also "critics, artists, thinkers, philosophers, moviemakers, neuroscientists, engineers, and artisans" (Bucci, 2014).

truth. They form a progression that goes from architecture, tied to the gravity of the matter, to poetry, the silence of which represents the peak of artistic sensitivity. As Hegel puts it, architecture - which is associated with the system of needs in *Philosophy of Right* – has become a practice at the service of the bourgeois utility. After the dissolution of the Gothic art, architecture has lost its symbolic value of representation of the divine it held in Egyptian and Greek cultures, and of God's house it had in the Middle Ages, by being submitted to the middle-class needs.

Because of the rigidity of his conceptual structure, Hegel provides that reductionist reading of architecture doomed to feed the modern prejudice according to which the practice of building precedes that of dwelling - then scattered by Heidegger a century later (Papi, 2001).

Among the XX century philosophers dealing with architectural design and mostly influencing professional theory and practice, it is worth mentioning Georg Simmel, Henri Bergson, again Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Walter Benjamin, Gaston Bachelard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Henri Lefebvre, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, Fulvio Papi himself, Emanuele Severino and Maurizio Ferraris, just to name a few. In the following lines, I will draw a rough outline of some of them.

For Georg Simmel, one of the major interpreters of modernity as well as the first philosopher who showed interest in the urban condition of human being, the image of space is built through the reciprocal action deriving from the process of socialisation. As he puts it, space does not represent a simple Kantian *apriori*, something to experience. On the contrary, it is "the way you experience", "a soul's activity", both "condition and symbol of human relationships" (De Simone, 2005, p. 23). When dealing with the "Sociology of the Senses", the author of *Philosophy of Money* observes that both proximity and distance are determined by the sensory apparatus since some senses are associating and some others dissociating. The sight performs as the sense of space *par excellence.*

One of Simmel's most influential essays regarding 'existential geography' is *Ponte e porta* (Simmel, 2012). According to the Berliner, man is the only living being capable of "joining and separating" natural elements. Therefore,

bridge and door are the architectural elements symbolising how "man is the limited being who has no limit". More precisely, the bridge achieves the same unification of landscape the eyes bring about in practical reality. In bridges, separation and unification meet in such a way that the first one seems to belong to nature, the second to man. Conversely, in doors both the moments occur as a result of human interventions. Moreover, contrary to the door, for which a considerable difference lies in the way you cross it, in bridges the sense of crossing makes no difference. That is to say, the door represents the limit between finite and infinite, while the bridge establishes a connection between finite with finite, as the earthly life does (Cassani, 2014).

Martin Heidegger, according to Papi (2001) the most influential philosopher among architectural theorists,[4] will evoke Simmel's metaphor a few years later. As is known, in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* Heidegger (2000) reflects on the notions of dwelling and building as essential to the spatial experience. More precisely, Heidegger investigates the "essence" of dwelling and the connection between building and dwelling, reaching the conclusion according to which if "dwelling is the way in which mortals are on the earth", the way we live derives from the way we inhabit. On the one hand, inhabiting the world means safeguarding the "Fourfold" (*das Geviert*), that is, the unity of Earth, sky, gods and mortals. In other words, by inhabiting the world man internalises the exterior through the double process of space spiritualization and spirit spatialization. On the other hand, building means making people inhabit the world, hence 'poetically' commensurating the architectural work with the nature (Emery, 2007). Not all the buildings are houses, but all of them belong to the sphere of dwelling. Among them, the bridge is the one that better captures the essence of the dwelling, inasmuch as it connects by producing a "place" which did not exist before. The bridge does not join pre-existing banks along the river. On the contrary, it is crossing the bridge that the banks appear as such (Cassani, 2014).

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[4] Heidegger's thought represents the starting point of Christian Norbelg-Schulz's (1979) *Genius Loci. Paesaggio, Ambiente e Architettura.* According to Schulz, the spirit of a place is contained in the essence of the site and architecture has the task of fulfilling it without altering it (Bevilacqua, 2010). Therefore, "protecting and preserving the *genius loci* means materializing its essence in new historical contexts". To this end, *stabilitas loci,* that is, the essential condition of existence, has to be conciliated with dynamics of change, since "the history of a place should be its self-fulfillment" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, p. 18, own translation).

Undoubtedly influenced by Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard has emerged in modern times as the theorist of the XX century scientific revolutions of microphysics shaking the relationship between space and time. However, throughout his scientific work he has never ceased to investigate the imaginative world of forms, movements and matter (essentially, the four elements of fire, water, air and earth). In *Le nouvel esprit scientifique,* one of his seminal works, before, *La Terre et les rêveries du repos* and *La Poétique de l'espace* later, Bachelard attempts to move on from the debate on empiricism and rationalism. He analyses the fundamental relationships existing between man and the world, those of scientific abstraction and poetic *rêverie.* In both modes of expression, human thought meets the external world that appears in space and obeys to a temporal succession. However, while the scientific abstraction erects a mathematical representation of the object, the poetic image aims at exceeding the dualism between subject and object, inside and outside. Contrary to the geometric world of sciences, the poetic soul allows both to capture the endless dreamlike resonances of the surrounding world and to enrich and appropriate it with emotions, unconscious projections, body and place childhood memory.[5] Through a real "polyphilosophy" (Paquot & Younès, 2009) which tries the different problematic approaches of rhetoric, psychoanalysis, phenomenology and ontology, Bachelard attempts to reconcile space and time connecting perception, imagination and memory. However, if Bachelard's paves the way for a new philosophical language on *rêverie*, the philosophical-political implications arising from Jacques Derrida's speculation represent one of the most authentic forms of 'radicalness'.

For Derrida (2008), nothing is taken for granted since everything is exposed to the dissolution of deconstruction. As a result, the themes of building and dwelling are irrelevant to Derrida's spatial thought. For him, making architecture means deconstructing space, as it is in the "just now"

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[5] *The poetics of space* draws from his personal life experience, memories of the country house where he was born, in Bar-sur-Aube, as well as the place where he lived during his studies, in Dijon. The dwelling, acting as the primary connection with the world, acquires an archetypal, dreamlike, value. However, it only represents one layer of spatial imaginary. Similarly to space, the *rêverie* is not restricted to present images, but it reactivates ancient archetypal figures by drawing from timeless memories.

that the architectural gesture explores its range of possibilities. To surpass the "metaphysics of presence" to which the Western philosophical culture (Heidegger in particular) has bound itself, he aspires to re-examine architecture as the "last fortress of metaphysics". Deconstructing architecture does not mean destroying it. It entails achieving that architecture without project capable of recognising the possibility of the emergence of an enhanced "event" and writing space. To properly understand what the Algerian-born French philosopher means for "writing of space", we have to take a glance to *De la grammatologie*, one of his first books. Here, Derrida evokes André Leroi-Gourhan's thesis according to which human evolution is the direct consequence of the techniques man develops to interact with the external environment. Among them, the phonetic-alphabetic writing has exerted a strong influence on the human spatial tradition by denying the spacing experience (*espacement*), that is, the inborn process of opening to the external world. Therefore, a new system of writing must be accomplished, based on different experiences of spacing and new forms of architecture. In other words, human memory works as a track, an "archi-writing", that is, a kind of pre-given writing that precedes both speech and writing. This native language originates the spacing experience of *ipseity*, which is later removed by the phonetic-alphabetic writing. Hence, the phonetic-alphabetic writing has to be replaced by a multi-dimensional one, that is, the "mythography", a kind of writing capable of matching both verbal and non-verbal sign systems and exploring new possibilities of meaning. After all, the spacing experience pertains to everyone (Vitale, 2012). During his lecture at the Columbia University in September 1992, Derrida (2008) claims that "every institution is an architecture", so "willy-nilly, the problem of space and of being inscribed, through the language, in space, makes everyone unconsciously deal with space" (pp. 157-158, own translation).[6]

As for Michel Foucault, the problem of space assumes biopolitical significance.[7] According to the "archaeologist of knowledge", space

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[6] Original: "Ogni istituzione è un'architettura . . . . Dunque il problema dello spazio e dell'essere inscritto, attraverso il linguaggio, nello spazio, senza alcuna possibilità di dominare questa situazione, ti costringe a trattare con l'architettura senza che tu ne sia cosciente" (Derrida, 2008, pp. 157–158).

[7] It is worth stressing that the goal Derrida strives for is political too. Politics makes deconstruction essential in architecture. For the Algerian philosopher, achieving the new experience of the politician

experience occurs through "micro powers". Urban territory represents a privileged domain of life control where spatial transformations run parallel to government techniques. Even though he acknowledges that the practice of architecture has always been connected to political-historical systems, Foucault identifies its radicalization since XVIII century, when the passage from *souveraineté* to *surveillance* (terms Foucault himself uses in *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison,* 1975*)* in power occurs (Cantone & Taddio, 2011). Since then, cities have become the places of surveillance, control and rationalisation carried out by police. To better describe the profound transformation taking place in the relationship between power and space, Foucault refers to the *Panopticon,* that is, the prison designed by Bentham in 1791, since it expresses how "the perfection of power tends to make its exercise unnecessary" (p. 219). For Foucault, power does not belong to anyone, as it consists of a set of mechanisms and forces running through all human relationships and spatial configurations. As a result, biopolitics represents a "polymorph system aiming at ruling both the body and the space"[8] (Villani, 2009, p. 162, own translation) with the aid of power and knowledge. Within this pervasive hegemonic system, however, the French philosopher identifies the existence of some "lines of flights" acting as 'powers of subtraction' from the mechanisms of control. These are what he calls *heterotopias,* that is, spaces of *otherness* performing as physical representations or approximations of a utopia, "counter-sites" where existing social and spatial arrangements are "represented, contested and inverted".

In his critical action, Michel Foucault, last author of this short overview, designates the truth as the permanent function of discourse (e.g. in his works *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* and *Naissance de la biopolitique*). In particular, for him, knowledge plays a pivotal, critical role in the urban space as the instrument of power *par excellence*. Once again, the interconnection among *truth*, *knowledge* and *space* recurs, bridging philosophical action with design practice, inhabitants and professional experts, to whom both ordinary and extraordinary everyday life belong.

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means destructing the old architectural structures supporting the Western political tradition (Vitale, 2012).

[8] Tiziana Villani defines biopolitcs a "sistema polimorfo attraverso il quale si prova a governare il corpo e il territorio" (Paquot & Younès, 2009, p. 162).

## Beyond the Division, through Henri Lefebvre

> *The architect occupies an especially uncomfortable position. As a scientist and technician, obliged to produce within a specified framework, he has to depend on repetition. In his search for inspiration as an artist, and as someone sensitive to use and to the 'user', however, he has a stake in difference. He is located willy-nilly within this painful contradiction, forever being shuttled from one of its poles to the other. His is the difficult task of bridging the gap between product and work, and he is fated to live out the conflicts that arise as he desperately seeks to close the ever-widening gulf between knowledge and creativity.*
>
> Henri Lefebvre

Henri Lefebvre[9], according to Edward Soja (1996) the "metaphilosopher who has been more influential than any other scholar in opening up and

[9] Born in Hagetmau, in the Landes, in 1901, and graduated in philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1920, Henri Lefebvre joined the French Communist Party in 1928 and became one of the leading Marxist intellectuals during the 1920s, before taking part in the resistance in Southern France in the Second World War. Because of his radical political and theoretical views, he was expelled from the PCF in 1958, ironically becoming one of the severest critics of the party. He directed research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) from 1949 to 1961, and enjoyed a brilliant career as a respected university professor in Strasbourg from 1961 to 1965, where he collaborated with the Situationists, and Nanterre, from 1965 to 1973, where he analysed the May 1968 student revolt. Even though most often remembered for his engagement as a forward-thinking and prolific Marxist intellectual, his "relevance within and across disciplines" (Fraser, 2015, p. 1) proves his thoroughness and versatility. He wrote more than sixty books and copious other publications, ranging over an astonishingly vast number of topics. Above all, he consecrated a significant number of philosophical writings to the issue of the production of space "with the explicit aim of contributing to the revolutionary and emancipatory project of Marxism" (Shields, 2013, p. 19). As such, he has established himself as a path-breaking "urban philosopher, spatial theorist, and cultural studies pioneer" (Fraser, 2015, p. 16). Lefebvre's battery of books on spatial issues include *La vallée de Campan – Étude de sociologie rurale* (1963), *Le Droit à la ville* (1968), *Du rural à l'urbain* (1970), *Revolution urbaine* (1970; *The Urban Revolution,* trans. R. Bononno, 2003), *La Pensée Marxiste et la ville* (1972; *Marxist Thought and the City,* trans. R. Bononno, 2016), *La Production de l'espace* (1974; *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, 1991), the entire series of his *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (2014, *Critique of Everyday Life the one-volume edition*), that is, *Critique de la vie quotidienne I: Introduction* (1947; *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I: Introduction,* trans. J. Moore, 1991), *Critique de la vie quotidienne II: Fondements d'une sociologie de la quotidienneté* (1961; *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday,* trans. J. Moore, 2002), *Critique de la vie quotidienne III: De la modernité au modernisme (pour une metaphilosophie du quotidien)* (1981; *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III: From Modernity to Modernism (Towards a Metaphilosophy of Daily Life,* trans. G. Elliott, 2005*)* and *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (1968; *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. S. Rabinovitch, 2002), and its follow-up *Éléments de*

exploring the limitless dimensions of our social spatiality" as well as the author of "the most important book written about the social and historical significance of human spatiality and the particular powers of the spatial imagination" (p. 6), can be considered one of the most representative endorsers of the interaction of architecture and urban planning with philosophy and human sciences in general. Both his intense intellectual commitment and his colourful life history attest the dual nature of his soul, suspended between a prolific theory of space and his real empirical engagement with everyday practices of dwelling in postwar France (Stanek, 2011). His fieldwork persuaded him of the double 'social' nature of architecture:

> Today, architecture implies social practice in two senses. In the first place, it implies the practice of *dwelling*, or *inhabiting* (the practice of an inhabitant or, to use a more problematic term, a *habitat*). Secondly, it implies the practice of the architect himself, a person who exercises a profession that has developed (like so many others) over the course of history, one with its own place (or perhaps without a place: this has yet to be verified) within the social division of labor; a profession that produces, or at least contributes to, the production of social space (Lefebvre, 2014b, p. 4).

All his life he cultivated deep intellectual friendships with a great amount of urbanists and architects, such as Jean Baudrillard, Hubert Tonka, Paul Virilio, Ricardo Bofill, and Giancarlo De Carlo, just to name a few. In particular, the collaboration with the member of Team 10 proved to be remarkably fruitful, inasmuch as it resulted in the Italian translation of the multidisciplinary magazine *Espace et société* – founded in 1970 by Lefebvre himself and the French urbanist Anatole Kopp (Stanek). In the first issue editorial of the restored form *Spazio e Società*, appeared in Italy in 1978 after

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*Rhythmanalyse: Introduction à la connaissance des rhythms* (1992; *Rhythmanalysis. Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. S. Elden & G. Moore, 2004). *Writings on Cities* (1996, trans. E. Kofman & E. Lebas) provides a selection of Lefebvre's urban essays, while *Toward an Architecture of Enjoymen*t (2014) contributes to an extension of Lefebvre's theory of urban space to the question of architecture. In the body text of the dissertation, Lefebvre's works are cited in their English translation, when available. If not, the original work is quoted. Moreover, the list of reference at the end of the monograph exclusively refers to works analysed and cited in this dissertation. For a systematic review of works written and edited by Lefebvre, see S. Elden (2006, pp. 257–262). For a detailed account of the critical literature on Lefebvre, see L. Stanek (2011, pp. 314–348). Among the most recent significant contributions on space, it is worth mentioning K. Dale, S. Kingma, & V. Wasserman (forth.), R. Koch & A. Latham (forth.), T. Edensor (2016), N. Coleman (2015), B. Fraser (2015), A. Madanipour S. Knierbein & A. Degros (2014), and L. Stanek et al. (2014).

two ‘transitional’ numbers, Giancarlo De Carlo highlights the main goal architecture strives for, that is, the public interest. In his view, the relationship between *space* and *society* should pertain to “all professionals directly or indirectly engaged in studying and changing the physical and human environment” at all scales as well as to “those who have no chance of studying, much less of changing, the physical and human environment and are therefore more severely affected by the results of superficial studies and inconsiderate changes” (De Carlo, 1978, pp. 3–4). By declaring that “change in the physical environment produces – and is produced by – other ways of changing human environment” (De Carlo, p. 5), he discloses his affiliation to Lefebvre’s theory of *production of space,* published just four years before. Moreover, his categorical assertion about contemporary architecture which "tends to produce objects, while its real role should be that of generating processes" (De Carlo, p. 6) seems to revoke the austerity of Lefebvre’s statement on the role of philosophy. According to Urbino's foster son:

> This distortion has very serious consequences, for it confines architecture to a very narrow strip of its whole spectrum, so segregating it, leaving it open to the risks of dependency and megalomania, and leading it to social and political indifference (De Carlo, 1978, p. 6).

Despite these multiple exchanges with architects and planners, Lefebvre has long raised suspicion in the architectural *milieu.*

# INTRODUCTION

*It is possible on the basis of a particular knowledge – that of the production of space - to entertain the idea of a science of social space (as space both urban and rural, but predominantly rural).*

Henri Lefebvre

Public spaces have been and still are the central topic of a countless number of studies (Amin, Massey, & Thrift, 2000; Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992; Madanipour, 2003, 2005, 2010). Their significance is nowadays even more relevant than some decades ago as they are increasingly undergoing a process of redefinition of their identity (Lefebvre, 1991b; Degros et al., 2014; Madanipour, 2007), running parallel to a silent 'violation' of their status promoted by the cyberspace (Castells, 1994; Featherstone, 1998). Surprisingly, there has been hardly any professional and academic in-depth debate on what public spaces are outside the city walls and how they take part in this process of transformation. Even though rural areas represent the 90% of the European Member States' territory, hosting more than 50% of the European population (European Commission, 2013),[10] studies concerning public spaces usually refer to cities and their 'multistimoli' realities (Baird, 2011; Benjamin, 1999; De Simone, 2005; Highmore, 2002b; Whyte, 1980), often registered in terms of rhythms (Amin, 2008; Lefebvre, 2004). However, 'public space' does not necessarily imply city settings.

The purpose of the current study is to spark this debate, by staking out an alternative vision of public space centred on the peculiar local rhythms of a rural area and geared towards figuring out the complexity non-metropolitan frameworks can show. That is, one the one hand, local rural spaces can,

[10] According to the *Report 2013 on the Rural Development in the EU,* the EU regions classifiable as "predominantly rural" represent the 52% of the territory (and the 23% of the population), while the "intermediate rural" regions the 38% of the area (and the 35% of the population). Therefore, the amount is equivalent to the 90% of the EU territory. For further details, see Chapter 3 of this monograph.

sometimes, present all features of an *abstract space* (Lefebvre, 1991b) for their high level of implications (public-private dialectics, quality-quantity contradiction, integration and differentiation, climate changes effects etc.) almost comparable to city ones. On the other hand, their character of 'otherness' allows them to find a shared 'moderate' response to global changes – here less manifest and rapid than in urban contexts. Furthermore, the fact that "people's experience is increasingly local" (Castells, 1994) proves the cogency of this topic.

The aim of the study is to provide an overview of how the *production of space* has occurred in public space in last decades "on the basis of the interaction between everyday life, work [included], and the imaginary" (Castells, 1994), action and memory. In this context, particular attention will be granted to rural areas, which the Esino River Valley represents an instructive and intriguing example of, to trace a possible, even though hard-to-find, synthesis between *place* and *flows* (Castells).

## The Backdrop of the Study

Before introducing the research question, it is worth tracing the outline of the analysis. Since it started in November 2013, the present research project was framed as an Industrial Ph.D. in the context of the *Eureka* Programme. The programme implied a partnership among three institutions, the University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Marche region and Loccioni Group,[11] a family run engineering company established in the Esino River Valley in 1968. This joint venture resulted in the collaboration between the *Department of Humanistic Studies* of Urbino, the *Identity lab* (the communication and marketing office) and, later, the *Facility Team* of Loccioni Group. The aim of

[11] Loccioni Group is a family business started by Enrico Loccioni in Rosora, a small village in the Province of Ancona, in 1968. The company, originally specialized in electric materials for industrial plant design, now provides custom-built turnkey solutions in a wide variety of fields, ranging from *energy* to *environment*, from *industry* to *humancare*, from *mobility* to *train & transport* and *aerospace.* It is a medium-sized business, as it counts more than 500 employees and an annual revenue of about 80 millions of euro (Origlia, 2015).

the scholarship was to ‘make use’ of the concrete case of a river restoration project promoted in the Marche’s countryside by the business itself to discover what the Esino River and its banks meant and still mean to the local community. Unquestionably, this ‘blue infrastructure’ originating on the Penna mount, in the province of Macerata, and crossing the countryside of the province of Ancona before flowing into the Adriatic Sea near Falconara Marittima, traditionally performed as a *social space* (Lefebvre, 1991b). This statement, however, already raises questions about how to frame the use and perception of this rural area as a public space. Even though the riverscape dominating Rosora, Maiolati Spontini, Castelplanio and Cupramontana, the four municipalities involved in the project, still preserves both the signs and the collective memory of its recent *métayage* past, historically it retained all the features of public space, ‘label’ usually attached to cities. The remarkable transformations in the needs and demands of users occurred over the last few decades, moreover, have profoundly modified the spatial experience of this area. Investigating these transformations implies taking part in the current debate on public space.

## The Research Question

Inspired by the reclamation project currently underway in the Esino River Valley, this research aims at going through the transformations public spaces, particularly rural ones, have undergone over the last decades, examining the reasons of their undeniable contemporary relevance. In a period where the character of public space is increasingly examined purely as a city debate and its significance questioned, a twofold position is roughing out (Baird, 2011). On the one hand, a faction arguing on the crisis or even the death of public space as traditionally meant advances, often appealing to the new *Network Society* paradigms (Castells, 2000; Sennett, 1974, 1990). On the other hand, an arrière-guard group resists, by putting forward the principles of a persistence of the physical forms of public space

the former group declares superseded as well as the emergence of new forms of public spaces, both physical and virtual.

This research intends to contribute to this debate taking the issue from metropolitan areas and positioning it in the countryside. In other words, a 'disconnection' of the notion of 'public' from that of 'city' would allow the study to understand *to what extent does the local dimension of a rural public 'place' represent a potential in the process of transformation of the definition, use and perception of spatial publicness.* That is to say, what concerns me here is to analyse *how does country public space daily react to the current changes global public space is undergoing* by investigating, in particular, *how rhythms of everyday life have been evolving within the last half-century in the public space of the Esino waterfront.*

With the aim to give an answer to those questions, the study seeks to explore different interpretations of the notion of public space running parallel to its extensive everyday uses. Later on, social uses of country spaces will be traced. Finally, the Esino cultural landscape (Jackson, 1980) is observed and investigated as an 'ordinary' place of everyday life, in both its biological aspects and sociocultural ones, where the *production of space* (Lefebvre, 1991b) occurs through its daily experience.[12]

## The Theoretical Frame of Reference

As mentioned earlier, the theoretical frame of reference of this study is built around Henri Lefebvre's philosophical inquiry into the social production of space.

In retrospect, my encounter with Lefebvre was extremely pleasant and not at all unexpected. As a student of architecture in Naples, I had always been exposed to and interested in the social construction and characterisation of

[12] Particularly relevant to our discussion is John Brinckerhoff Jackson's (1980) interest for commonplace and everyday landscape. While observing the transformations both natural and human landscapes are undergoing, he highlights the importance of cultural landscape studies. As he puts it (Jackson, 1980), "old landscapes disappear, and new landscapes involving new relationships, new demands on the environment are slowly taking form. And as I see it, it is in those places where what we call landscape studies can be particularly rewarding" (p.18).

space. As a "participant observer" (Lefebvre, 2004), I was continuously astonished by the Parthenopeus theatrical use of *social space*, the Mediterranean “public space, the space of representation, [which] becomes ‘spontaneously’ a place for walks and encounters, intrigues, diplomacy, deals and negotiations” (Lefebvre, p. 96). All that, together with a natural tendency towards "otherness" (Czarniawska, 2014), made me choose a social housing restoration project for my graduation thesis. From Lefebvre's perspective, the Luzzatti neighbourhood, that is, the district in the Eastern suburb of Naples hosting the questioned residential complex, could be considered a concrete example of *appropriated* space (Lefebvre, 1991b) for the extensive modifications that the residents have made to the buildings over time. Having residents, often illegally, adapted spaces to suit their needs, the buildings bear now little resemblance to the blueprints drawn up by the Italian rationalist engineer Luigi Cosenza. As a consequence, my task was that to elaborate the best solution between locals' demands and the original architectural design, by minimising environmental impact and costs.[13]

Later educational and working experiences on open spaces increasingly led me to focus on the human, both intimate and relational, experiences of public spaces and their everyday place-space dialectics (Tuan, 1977).[14] Clearly, this concern made my confrontation with Lefebvre inevitable. As a keen interpreter of socio-economic changes underway, both producing a *timespace* (May & Thrift, 2003) fragmentation and a multiplication of rhythms, Lefebvre provides powerful analytical tools for the definition of spatial publicness and the investigation of its deep modification underway both in metropolitan areas and in rural ones. Through his prolific critical writings, he encourages scholars to explore space by means of three main theoretical turns:

> The shift of the research focus from space to processes of its production; the embrace of the multiplicity of social practices that produce space and make it socially

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[13] As Shields (1999) puts it, "slums, *barrios* and *favellas* are seen by Lefebvre as localised 'reappropriations' of space that might furnish examples of such 'representational spaces' . . . by which certain sites are removed or severed from the governing spatialisation" (p. 165). Bey (1991, as cited in Shields) considers them "prophetic, temporary autonomous zones" (p. 165).

[14] The Chinese-U.S. geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) talks about a "dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom" (p. 54), the latter evoking "freedom" and "movement", the previous "security" and "pause".

> productive; and the focus on the contradictory, conflictual and, ultimately, political character and the processes of production of space (Stanek, 2011, p. ix).

However, his reading of space based on the irreducible everyday

> not only posed the question of generalization as a major theoretical challenge for his theory but also prevented him from formulating a fully operative method of sociological research. This resulted, until very recently, in the scarcity of empirical studies developed along the lines of his theory, in France as much as elsewhere (Stanek, 2011, p. ix).

The complexity of his theoretical *apparatus* does not represent the unique reason why Lefebvre's influence has extended to urban research and, mainly, design practice, only slowly. Conversely, the initial mistrust his theory on *production of space* encountered in the field was due to two main factors. On the one hand, his 'architecture as space' displayed a strong affinity with the architectural avant-guards of the 1920s and 1930s, the main architects of the second half of the XX century (such as Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Rem Koolhaas) opposed. On the other hand, his theory contrasted with the assertions of modern architecture and functionalist urbanism (Stanek, Schmid, & Moravánszky, 2014, p. 8). His claim for a "perfect incompletion" in architecture necessarily bothered coeval professional trends:

> The architect will value the multifunctional and the transfunctional rather than the merely functional. He will cease to fetishize (separately) form, function, and structure as the signifiers of space. In place of the formal, or rather formalist, idea of perfection, the architect will substitute that of incomplete perfection (which is pursued, which is sought in practice) or, preferably, that of perfect incompletion, which discovers a *moment* in life (expectation, presentiment, nostalgia) and provides it with an expression, while making of this moment a principle for the "construction of ambience" . . . It is not through form but content that the architect . . . can influence social practice (Lefebvre, 2014b, p. 151).

However, the recent emergence of a growing number of studies applying Lefebvre's general orientation to empirical cases proves both the relevance and the topicality of his thought. This evidence makes the possible choice of Lefebvre as a reference for architectural research "still an endeavour and an adventure, and an expedition into unknown fields" (Stanek et al., 2014, p. 17). Here lies my exploration of rural public space. Spatial publicness, as socially produced and productive, opens "new prospects for a transdisciplinary research on space" (Stanek, 2011, p. xiii) where to pay particular attention to the varied everyday life rhythms (Lefebvre, 2002b, 2004) resulting from "the

different temporalities of modernity, tradition, memory and transformation" (Amin, 2008). In rural historical landscapes this coexistence, even though crucial, seems to be more silent as socio-spatial changes occur there more gradually than elsewhere. However, their balances can be radically altered and their pace suddenly quickened, as do rivers' flows. After all, natural events themselves, such as floods, can be read in terms of rhythms, as well as a flood prevention and control project as a way "to strengthen or re-establish eurhythmia" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 68).

> All becoming irregular (or, if one wants, all *deregulation*, though this world has taken on an official sense) of rhythms produces antagonistic effects. It *throws out of order* and disrupts; it is symptomatic of a disruption that is generally profound, lesional and no longer functional. It can also produce a lacuna, a hole in time, to be filled in by an invention, a creation. That only happens, individually or socially, by passing through a *crisis.* Disruptions and crises always have origins in and effects on rhythms: those of institutions, of growth, of the population, of exchanges, of work, therefore those which make or *express* the complexity of present societies (Lefebvre, p.44).

In this critical 'rereading' of the concept of public space, rhythms can support the study of the *fieldwork* both in its transformation process and in its current essence of *public space.* Finally, provided that "rhythmanalytic therapy would be preventative rather than *curative,* announcing, observing and classifying the pathological state" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 68), it will hopefully provide valuable clues about how to increase the aggregating role country spaces - such as rural riverbanks - play for contemporary local sociality.

## The Methodology

The investigation aims at analysing the issue of public space by applying the *cultural studies approach* (Pickering, 2008; Williams, 2013) to landscape architecture and, in doing so, it will pre-eminently privilege a philosophical perspective.[15] To this end, the study will ground on a qualitative

[15] It is worth mentioning the *urban cultural studies approach* - which Benjamin Fraser (2015) defines as a "corrective" against the absence of a "humanities-inspired understanding" of processes in urban culture

methodology, where data collection is ensured both from theoretical and archival research, and participant observation.

Even though an *integrated*, *multi-scalar* and *multidisciplinary* approach to research and design is implied in the "territory project" and in the architectural practice itself (Magnaghi, 2014), the methodology employed is strictly connected to the choice of Lefebvre as the theoretical frame of reference (Czarniawska, 2014, p. 16). Since the essay *Recherche interdisciplinaire en urbanisme* (Lefebvre, 1970) and the book *The Urban Revolution* (Lefebvre, 2003b), the French philosopher highlights the necessity for the *urban phenomenon* to be observed through interdisciplinary lenses.[16] He states:

> This complexity of the urban phenomenon makes the «interdisciplinary» cooperation necessary. The urban phenomenon cannot be fully covered in all its amplitude by any specialised science, but by all sciences. Even if we start by saying that no science has to renounce its founding principles, indeed, that each field has to draw fully from its resources, none of them can exhaust the matter. That being said, difficulties will arise (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 246, own translation).[17]

Then:

> Neither the separation of fragment and content nor their confused union can define (and therefore express) the urban phenomenon. For it incorporates a *total reading*, combining the vocabularies (partial readings) of geographers, demographers, economists, sociologists, semiologists, and others (Lefebvre, 2003b, p. 172).

Later on, the author strives for a more general "unitary theory" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 11) of space, capable of achieving a rapprochement between *mental* space, that of the philosophers, and real space, the *physical* and *social*

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(p. 15) - as especially relevant to our discussion. Merging "cultural studies" with "urban" ones, *urban cultural studies* aims at positioning the debate on "the relationship between a project and its formation in the context of a necessarily and unavoidably urbanised (and urbanizing) society" (Fraser, 2015, p. 21). According to Fraser (2015), a real engagement of the humanities areas, which urban theorists should deal with, would be necessary since they influence the formation of architects themselves. However, in spite of Fraser's caveat on the acceptation he confers to the label "urban", that is, that of "urbanized", the primary focus on cities it holds in urban scholarship would make its use in this context misleading.

[16] For further details on the concept of "urban" in Lefebvre's work see Chapter 3.

[17] Original: "Cette complexité du phénomène urbain rend explicite la nécessité d'une coopération «interdisciplinaire». Le phénomène urbain, pris dans son ampleur, ne relève d'aucune science spécialisée mais de toutes. Même si l'on pose en principe méthodologique qu'aucune science ne renonce à elle- même, et qu'au contraire chaque spécialité doit pousser jusqu'au bout l'utilisation de ses ressources pour atteindre le phénomène global, aucune de ces sciences ne peut prétendre l'épuiser. Ni le régir. Ceci admis ou établi, les difficultés commencent" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 246).

experience of space, through a *metaphilosophical* inquiry. His goal is to cover the gap between theory, too often reducing space "to the status of a message" and the dwelling "to the status of a *reading*" (Lefebvre, p. 7), and practice. Simultaneously, by reconciling them, he aims at solving the disciplinary fragmentation of space and time (e.g. between the logical-mathematical spatial thought and the philosophy of time, of duration). As for the process to go through, when talking about rural sociology Lefebvre (1970) reveals what he considers the weaknesses of many methods and techniques of exploration, such as *ethnography* or *ethnology*, *archeocivilisation*, *cultural-historical theory*, *monographic method*, and *technological* one.[18] Accordingly, he illustrates a different method, the *progressive-regressive*, consisting of several auxiliary techniques, which better suits the analysis of rural contexts. More precisely, he envisages an investigation made of three complementary moments: a *descriptive*, an *analytic-regressive* and a *historical-genetical* stage. He explains:

> We propose a very simple method that puts together several moments by employing the auxiliary techniques:
>
> a) *Descriptive*. Observation, both informed by experience and general theory. First of all, participant observation on the field. Prudent use of the techniques of investigation (interviews, questionnaires, statistics).
>
> *b) Analytical-regressive.* Analysis of the described reality. Research of the exact *date*.
>
> *c) Historical-genetic.* Studies of the changes made to the earlier dated structures. Effort for classifying the formations and structures and explaining them (Lefebvre, 1970, pp. 73–74, own translation).[19]

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[18] Lefebvre (1970) finds ethnography and 'archeocivilization' reductionist. For him, the first one "runs the risk of considering as natural social events", while the second esteems rural community as extinct, therefore to reconstruct. The cultural-historical theory is even more 'dangerous' than the former ones, as "it authorizes the arbitrary construction of «complexes»". Finally, researchers producing monographs "get lost in local details, in descriptions of habitats and cultures, etc." while the technological method "shows the general limits of technology", which often position it outside of the social context (Lefebvre, pp. 72–73, own translation).

[19] Original: "Nous proposons donc une méthode très simple, utilisant les techniques auxiliaires, et comportant plusieurs moments:

a) *Descriptif.* Observation, mais avec un regard informé par l'experience et par une théorie générale. Au premier plan : l'observation participante sur le terrain. Usage prudent des techniques d'enquête (interviews, questionnaires, statistiques).

*b) Analytico-régressif.* Analyse de la réalité décrite. Effort pour la *dater* exactement (pour ne pas se contenter d'un constat portant sur des «archaïsmes non datés», non comparés les uns aux autres).

The structure of the monograph mirrors the co-presence of these different but simultaneous exploratory stages, while the experience on the ground outlined in the last chapter roughly retraces these steps. A first prevailing theoretical-speculative part based on a wide-ranging thematic literature review will mark the territory of study presenting an overview of Lefebvre's theory of space and its possible application to public space. After a brief analysis of Lefebvre's contribution on social spatiality, the research will grapple with a transdisciplinary analysis conducted through the critical tools provided by some selected thinkers of the XX-XXI century. Lefebvre's assumption of space as a social product and its application to the latest evolution of public spaces will conduct the study to relocate this discussion and focus on rural areas. However, the arguments advanced, together with the scarcity of empirical and theoretical depth in the existing literature, will arise the need to test and support them by "stepping into the field" (Czarniawska, 2014, p. 4). Here lies my professional experience at Loccioni Group. By participating "in the daily life of the people under study . . . observing things that happen, listening to what is said and questioning people, over some length of time" (Becker and Geer, 1972 as cited in Nightingale, 2008, p. 108), I have acted as an *immersed* researcher since I was "(1) . . . a member of the group, (2) authorised (either tacitly or explicitly) by the group to undertake the research, and (3) [who] pursues a research task that serves interests the group has identified as important" (Nightingale, p. 119).[20] That is to say, during this long-term physical immersion in the studied area – a twenty-six-month period -, I had the opportunity to collect evidence while being part of the group, taking photos, notes and sketches, attending formal and informal meetings, informally interviewing people and so on. In this respect, the research itself has performed as a socio-spatial production process inasmuch it has "relied on interactions and exchanges

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c) *Historico-génétique.* Etudes des modifications apportées à telle ou telle structure précédentement *datée*, par le développement ultérieur (interne ou externe) et par sa subordination à des structures d'ensemble. Effort vers une classification génétique des formations et des structures, dans le cadre du processus d'ensemble. Effort donc pour revenir à l'actuel précédemment décrit, pour retrouver le présent, mais élucidé, compris: *expliqué*" (Lefebvre, 1970, pp. 73–74).

[20] Nightingale (2008) underlines the difference between an *immersed* and an *embedded* researcher. Contrary to the *immersed* research practices, the *embedded* ones imply conformity between the research subjects, but not belonging to the group.

between researcher and research participants" (Nightingale, p. 105) and their environment.

Certainly, the exercise of critical self-reflexivity represents a crucial aspect both of the fieldwork experience and of the research report. In order to enrich my theoretical framework, as well as to preserve an attitude of "outsidedness"- always required to a participant observer, in my case also guaranteed by a "non-native" condition -, I planned a prolonged stay at the Centre for Public Space Research of the Institute of Architecture, Urbanism and Landscape, School of Architecture of Copenhagen. This study period abroad allowed me to reach the essential spatio-temporal distance to elaborate a thematic synthesis, aiming at understanding "not [only] by identification . . . . but by the *recognition of differences*" (Bakhtin, 1981 as cited in Czarniawska, 2014, p. 45). As Lefebvre (2004) himself puts it, understanding the rhythm means being outside it, but not completely, acting as a bystander looking out "from the window" (p. 27) simultaneously experiencing the "rhythm of the self" and the "rhythm of the other".[21]

[21] In Lefebvre's (2004) view, social life results from the encounter of a twofold kind of rhythm, the "rhythm of the self" (the private sphere) and "rhythm of the other" (the public dimension). However, it does not entail a polar opposition, as " there are multiple transitions and imbrications between these poles" (p.95).

# 1. THE FLOWING SPACE

> *[Social space] is equivalent, practically speaking, to a set of institutional and ideological superstructures that are not presented for what they are (and in this capacity social space comes complete with symbolism and systems of meaning – sometimes and overload of meaning); alternatively, it assumes an outward appearance of neutrality, of insignificance, if semiological destitution, and of emptiness (or absence).*
>
> Henri Lefebvre

The first step in trying a reinterpretation of the notion of public space is to understand space as a dynamic identity. In this chapter, I begin my exploration of the major factors determining this spatial 'vitality' by providing a bird's eye view of Lefebvre's thought on production (and reproduction) of space. Indeed, his assumption about the close interrelationship among *energy*, *space* and *time* aims at overcoming the Cartesian logic of the empty static space, that is, the geometrical or mathematical space traditionally exposed to aesthetic appreciation, in favour of the specificity and dynamism of each space (Coleman, 2015). Lefebvre (1991b) states that

> when we evoke 'energy', we must immediately note that energy has to be deployed within a space. When we evoke 'space', we must immediately indicate what occupies that space and how it does so: the deployment of energy in relation to 'points' and within a time frame. When we evoke 'time', we must immediately say what it is that moves or changes therein. Space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction, likewise energy and time (p. 12).

Therefore, in Lefebvre's writings, space is portrayed as a tangible, producible and reproducible, that is to say, living entity, since it is the result of individual and group life. The encounter among *energy*, *space* and *time* makes space the product of a specific culture, with its own, unique social practices.

## 1.1 Space as a Social Product

For Lefebvre (1991b), “space is a (social) product” (p. 26) playing an active role, as knowledge and action, in the current mode of production. In his view, this assumption, which tries to obscure the common vision of space as a passive *milieu* of social relations, has four main implications. On the one hand, it suggests (1) that “(physical) natural space is disappearing” (Lefebvre, p. 30) in its original centrality and downgraded to a mere background, being it seen as the raw material thanks to which human activities take place. On the other hand, it implies (2) that “every society . . . produces its own space” (Lefebvre, p. 31), which (3) both reproduces and expands the process of production. As a result, (4) “the shift from one mode [of production] to another must entail the production of a new space” (Lefebvre, p. 46), recalling the historical dimension of social space. After all, spatial experience has changed throughout the centuries, evolving from the Medieval aptitude for a ‘bodily’ understanding of space to the capitalistic scheduled grid pattern of the *abstract space* - still perpetuated and reproduced through administrative policies, social conventions and technological systems.

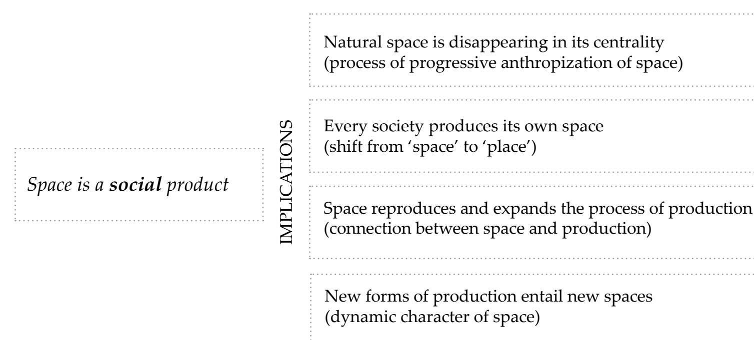


*Figure 1. Implications the reading of space as a 'social product' carries.*

To outline how space is a social happening, Lefebvre (1991b) theorises a dialectical triad contributing to the process of production of space, consisting of *spatial practice, representation of space* and *representational space* - the *perceived-conceived-lived* triad. More precisely, the *spatial practice* "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation" (Lefebvre, p. 33). The *representation of space*, on the contrary, is "the conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent" (Lefebvre, p. 38). Finally, the *representational space* is the "space as directly lived" (Lefebvre, p. 39).[22]

[22] This triadic approach is developed further by Christian Schmid (2009). In his investigation on *Henri Lefebvre's Theory of Production of Space*, he draws a parallel between Lefebvre's three-dimensional analysis of spatial production and the system of words, attributing:

1. the *syntagmatic* dimension of language to the *spatial practice*, since it "denotes the system resulting from articulation and connection of elements or activities" (Schmid, p. 36);
2. the *paradigmatic* dimension of language to the *representation of space*, considering that "one representation can be substituted by another that shows similarities in some respects but differences in others" (pp. 36-37);
3. the *symbolic* dimension of language to the *space of representation*, as they refer "to the process of signification" linking them "to a (material) symbol" (p. 37).

According to Schmid, these spatio-temporal dimensions of social reality have caused dialectical confusions in some of the contextual reconstruction of Lefebvre's theory of space. In particular, Schmid questions Soja's (1996) reading on the "third space", in his view denying the coexistence of "three dialectically interconnected processes of production" (Schmid, 2009, p. 42).

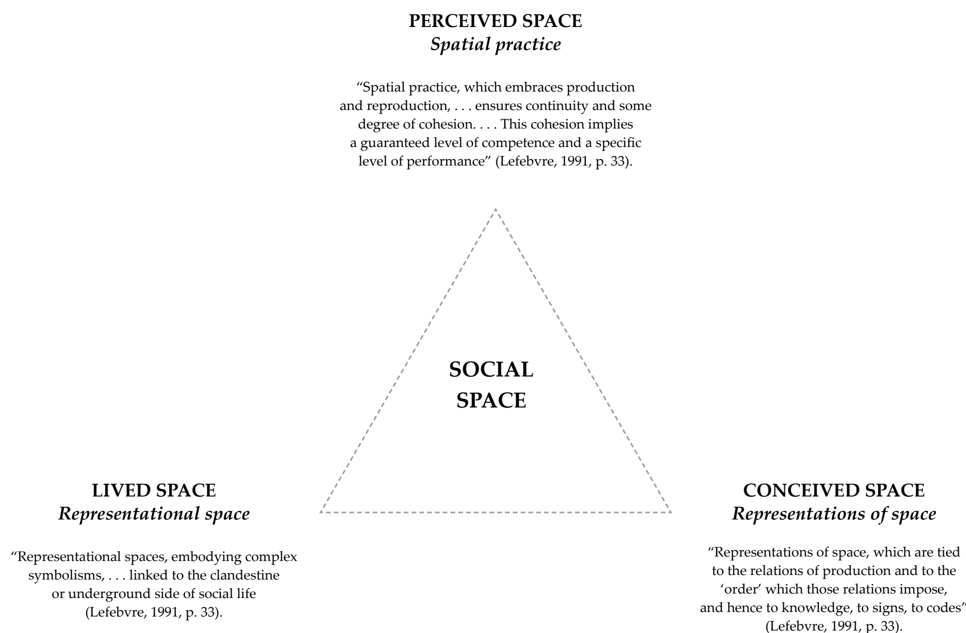


*Figure 2. The graph schematises the perceived-conceived-lived triad, corresponding to the threefold acceptation of spatial practice, representations of space and representational space. They both produce space and are produced in space. Particularly interesting to our argumentation is the difference between the two latter kinds of space. The representations of space are intellectualisations of lived space. The representational spaces, on the contrary, embody the 'clandestine or underground side of social life'.*

This triad reveals that when Lefebvre (1991b) refers to space he does not mean "a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, [space] subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder" (p. 73). As a consequence, space cannot be considered a mere *apriori* condition for social superstructures, being it both a cause and a result of them – social relationships become real when having a social existence. He states:

> Is space a social relationship? Certainly – but one which is inherent to property relationships . . . and also closely bound up with the forces of production . . . ; here we see the polyvalence of social space, its 'reality' at once formal and material. Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, it is also a *means of production*; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it. Thus this means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge, or from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and the superstructures of society (Lefebvre, p.85).

Therefore, social space – or rather social spaces, as they are many - is made of a multiplicity of objects, both natural and social, and their interrelationships, that is to say the pathways and networks allowing the exchange of material things and information. This variety results in the hypercomplex character of social space, "embracing as it does individual entities and peculiarities, relatively fixed points, movements, and flows and waves – some interpenetrating, others in conflict, and so on" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 88).

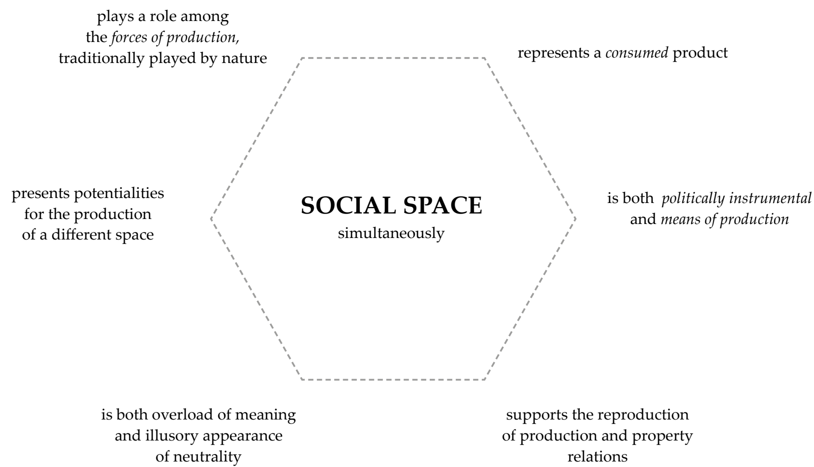


*Figure 3. Main features of social space.*

From a social point of view, space has a dual nature: on the one hand, it states the individual and public identity of the 'subject'; on the other hand, it plays an intermediary role among bodies and objects (Lefebvre, 1991b, pp. 182–183). It is not a *socialized* space, rather, "it played a socializing role (by means of a multiplicity of networks)" (Lefebvre, p. 191). It is both a *field of action* and a *basis for action, actual* (given) and *potential* (source of possibilities), *quantitative* and *qualitative,* a collection of *materials* and of *materiel.*

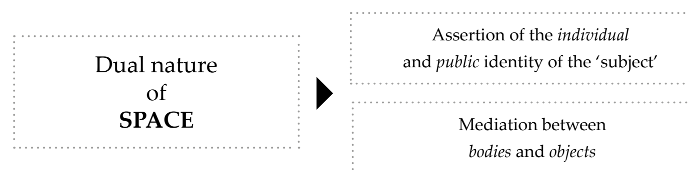


*Figure 4. The dual nature of space.*

The qualification of social space occurs through the *living body* (its gestures, traces, marks), which represents both the point of departure and destination within the production of a certain space. For it, "becoming social does not mean being inserted into some pre-existing 'world': this body produces and reproduces – and it perceives what it reproduces and produces" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 199), both cyclical and linear. The body reveals itself in the space, penetrating and crossed by *rhythms*, and social practice is made of rhythms (from this point of view, *lived* and *conceived* are close). As a consequence, the production of space could be investigated in terms of 'rhythm analysis', focussing on the concrete reality of rhythms and their appropriation. Rhythmanalysis would allow the researcher to discover the most secret of rhythms, those only perceived through mediations. Lefebvre explains:

> A rhythm invests places, but is not itself a place; it is not a thing, nor an aggregation of things, nor yet a simple flow. It embodies its own law, its own regularity, which it derives from space – from its own space – and from a relationship between space and time (p. 206).

As for the history of space, according to the French philosopher, it is strictly connected to the history of time, beginning with the spatio-temporal rhythms of nature as transformed by human actions - not by single individuals but by social groups. The first factors of appropriation of nature to be considered are the anthropological ones (numbers, oppositions and symmetries, images of the world, myths). In this way, mental and social activities impose themselves upon natural space, "upon the Heraclitean flux of spontaneous phenomena, upon that chaos which precedes the advent of the body" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 117). Nevertheless, social space, Lefebvre (1991b) alerts, is not "the result merely of a *marking* of natural space, a leaving of traces upon it" (p. 141), as asserted by semiologists and anthropologists. Physical and abstract marking and symbolisation of course occur in the 'reading' of space, that is, in spatial decoding, but they cannot lead the 'reader' to interpret space as "a blank page upon which a specific message has been inscribed . . . Both natural and urban spaces are, if anything, 'over-inscribed'" (Lefebvre, p. 142). Put another way, the 'reading'

of space is a secondary practice to production – except when space is produced for the purpose of being read.[23]

Once a natural space is "modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 165), it has been *appropriated* by that group. Ideally, *appropriated* space and *dominated* space, that is, a "space transformed – and mediated – by technology, by practice" (Lefebvre, p. 164), ought to be combined, to the extent that power should pander to collective interests. In reality, the dominance of dominated space, mainly due to military and political power, causes a dissonance between the two.

Appropriation is closely related to another practice, that of *diversion* (*détournement*) of space, occurring when "an existing space may outlive its original purpose" and becomes "susceptible of being diverted,

[23] In this regard, it could be interesting to draw a parallel between Henri Lefebvre and Eugenio Turri (1927- 2005), the Italian geographer having the merit of achieving an epistemological and conceptual revision of the nineteenth-century concept of landscape. In *Antropologia del paesaggio*, Turri (2008) goes beyond the old vision of the picturesque character of the landscape by shifting his attention from the "territory" to the society itself, its productive structures, its culture. Acting as an eye witness of the transformations Italy was undergoing under the so-called "economic miracle", he aims at illustrating "the Marxian historical and social formations as evolutionary sequences connecting modes of production and social organizations. [The book] recognizes, however, that these are functionally oriented towards culture, . . . . [that is] both the synthesis and the tools of the dialectical relationship between society and environment" (Turri, 2008, p. 18, own translation). In order to outline the essential steps of this process, on a spatial level mainly affecting the dialectics urban-rural, he refers to the concept of "culture" as the set of institutions through which every society moulds itself through the contact with nature. Within this practice, societies "humanize" nature by "naturalizing" human actions, and the landscape represents the measure of this "cultural annexation" of nature. In other words, "the set of visible signs has a very signifier value, as it allows you to go back to society, to its fundamental components" (Turri, 2008, p. 56). As a consequence, landscape holds a double function: on the one hand, it represents the intermediary between man and nature, on the other hand, it performs as a witness of human actions. This dual role corresponds to two different moments of the relationship man-landscape: a first practical, utilitarian one, and a second contemplative, cognitive one. More generally, Turri (2008) indicates five main factors as responsible for human modifications (and signification) of the landscape. They are the human physical presence, mobility, sedentariness, economic exploitation of the environment, offence and defence. All these factors come under the endogenous reasons of a culture, in Turri's view a wider concept than that of society. He explains: "When you talk about culture man is globalised. On the contrary, when referring to the notion of society only some of its components are emphasised. Without affecting Marxian vision, it is possible to say that "modes of production" and its "social formation" are part of the inner motivations of each culture. They are intimately connected with religious events, political institutions, aesthetic activities, etc. (Turri, 2008, pp. 148–149, own translation). Religious activities, aesthetical incidences, socio-economic and political reasons represent, therefore, the specific cultural motivations. Clearly, "every human action is socially justified" (Turri, p. 162), and it mirrors the modes of production. Every possible increase in productivity corresponds to new signs in the landscape (vast fields, industrial depots, etc.). Together with political inferences, they represent the very motive of spatial transformations.

reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 167). Diversion, which sets forth the production of new spaces, under the capitalist mode of production, has become, according to Lefebvre, more substantial than creation. Nevertheless, even if closely connected to production, it "is in itself merely appropriation, not creation" (p. 168), hence a temporary halt to domination.

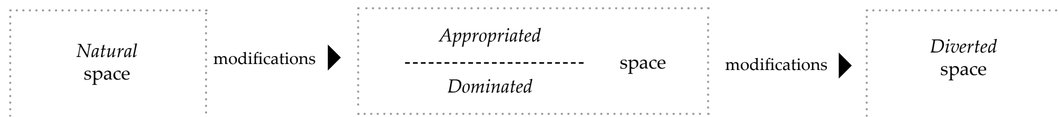


*Figure 5. The process of appropriation of natural space.*

As a consequence, "an indefinite multitude of spaces" has been produced over the centuries, from an *absolute* space, having no place in so far as it contains all spaces and its existence is symbolic, to more complex ones, socially produced. The capitalist triad of land-capital-labour has drawn up an *abstract* space, a geometric, visual and phallic space, originally both political and institutional, which is simultaneously *global, fragmented* and *hierarchical.* It "is *not* homogeneous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 287). Here, spatial practice, simultaneously defining places (with their relationship local/global), spaces of everyday life and their representation as desirable or undesirable ones, produces relations of inclusion and exclusion. The "contradictory" character of abstract space derives from this binomial of inclusion and exclusion:

> There are places that are prohibited (holy or damned heterotopias) for various reasons, and others that are open of access, or to which access is encouraged; in this way parts or subdivisions of space are dramatically defined in terms of the opposition between beneficent and maleficent, both of which are also clearly distinguished from neutral space (Lefebvre, p. 294).

Clearly, abstract space often embodies relations of exclusion and spatial prohibitions more than inclusion or stimuli – except when dealing with consumption. These prohibitions, frequently invisible (physical barriers such as gates and ditches, only represent the most extreme examples) but trenchant enough to cause inappropriateness in the passer-by while crossing some threshold, are "the reverse side and the carapace of propriety, of the

negative appropriation of space under the reign of private property" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 319). From this perspective, abstract space proves to be *divided* inasmuch fragmented both into designed areas and prohibited ones, into spaces for work and leisure, into daytime and night-time spaces and so on. So, "how does this space, which we have described as at once homogeneous and broken up, maintain itself in view of the formal irreconcilability of these two characteristics?" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 320) Lefebvre attributes that dual ambiguous power to the political action, aiming at fragmenting space to control it - through the sequence force-repression-oppression. However, this cannot be interpreted as a mode of production of space, nor does space have power in itself. As Lefebvre puts it, "it is not political power *per se* that produces space; it does reproduce space, however, inasmuch as it is the locus and context of the reproduction of social relationships – relationships for which it is responsible" (p. 321). Hence,

> one of the most glaring paradoxes about abstract space is the fact that it can *be* at once the whole set of locations where contradictions are generated, the medium in which those contradictions evolve and which they tear apart, and, lastly, the means whereby they are smothered and replaced by an appearance of consistency (p. 363).

Clearly, these spatial contradictions embodied by abstract space (quantity/quality, production/consumption, global/fragmented, centre/periphery, exchange value/use value, propriety/appropriation, forces of production/social relations of production, violence/knowledge, production/reproduction and repetitiveness) express socio-political conflicts. These conflicts become even bitterer in public space, theoretically the antithesis of private sphere for its character of openness. Lefebvre (1991b) warns:

> It is therefore in appearance only that the 'private' sphere is organized according to the dictates of the 'public' one. The inverse situation (the world upside down – and waiting to be set on its feet) is the one that actually prevails. The whole of space is increasingly modelled after private enterprise, private property and the family – after a reproduction of production relations paralleling biological reproduction and genitality (pp. 375-376).

In the light of these considerations, a *counter-space* (to abstract one) is needed in order to change life and society. After all, space is assuming an increasing role nowadays, since "its effects may be observed on all planes and in all interconnections between them" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 419). Within

the revolutionary movement Lefebvre wishes for, “space assumes a regulatory role when and to the extent that contradictions – including the contradictions of space itself – are resolved” (p. 420). This new "regulatory" space is represented by the *differential space,* that is, space assuring the *right to difference* to the individual body, the social body and the corpus of knowledge. As well as living bodies, the social body “cannot live without producing, without creating differences” out of repetitions (Lefebvre, p. 396). To that regard, Lefebvre resorts to the organic metaphor of the “fleshy body of living being” (p.396), as such comparable to natural flows and measurable through rhythms. As Neil Smith points out in the foreword of *The Urban Revolution,* “for Lefebvre . . . space holds the promise of liberation: liberation from the tyranny of time apart from anything else, but also from social representation and exploitation, from self-imprisoning categories – liberation into *desire*” (Lefebvre, 2003b, p. xiii).

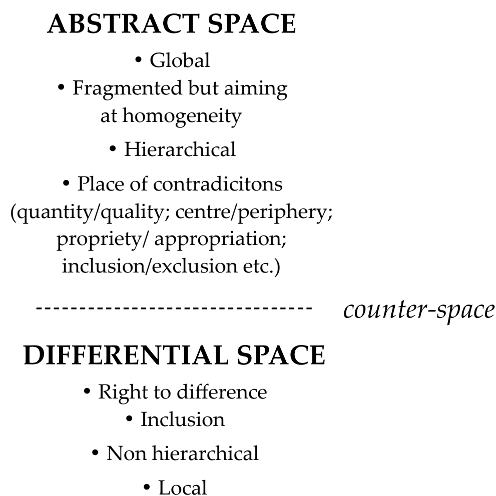


*Figure 6. From abstract to differential space. A comparison.*

## 1.2 Everyday Life, the Setting of Counter-space

Lefebvre envisages, therefore, the prospect of an emerging form of space, the *differential space,* acting like a reactionary force against the homogenization of abstract space. In order to make this new form of space possible, a social transformation celebrating "the bodily and experiential particularity as well as the non-negotiable 'right to difference'" (Merrifield, 2006, p. 104) is necessary. However, this "social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 54), both the realm of commodity and alienation and the arena of the possible, resonant social changes.

Everyday life, *ça va sans dire*, had long been representing a subject for debate among Lefebvre's predecessors. "Arena for the reproduction of dominant social relations" as well as "site of resistance, revolution and transformation" (Highmore, 2002a, p. 17), it had formerly been questioned by Simmel, Benjamin and Braudel, among others.[24]

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*Excursus*. George Simmel (1858-1918), one of the first philosophers of modernity, carries out "a form of sociological microscopy, which employs impressionistic descriptions of everyday life within a philosophical approach where the particularity of the everyday is made to register more general social forces" (Highmore, 2002a, p. 37). The Berlin philosopher incomparably uses "the fragments of daily life to articulate modern experience"

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[24] In an attempt to develop a definition of everyday life, whether it is "characterised by singular, individual acts (an accumulation of particularity, so to speak) or . . . understandable as an overarching structure common to a large group of people", Highmore (2002b) underlines how the two visions of the particular and the general simply represent one aspect of the several dialectics affecting everyday life (e.g. Particular *vs.* General, Agency *vs.* Structure, Experience/Feelings *vs.* Institutions/Discourses, Resistance *vs.* Power, Micro-analysis *vs.* Macro-analysis). From this perspective, investigating daily life means analysing its "micro tendencies", weaving the particular with general and occurring in the micro-location of the daily, both indoor, in domestic settings -"feminization" of male professionals - and outdoor, in the street - "masculinization" of women (p.16). Of course, what happens on a local scale inevitably reverberates at a more global level. As a result, according to the author, Michel Foucault cannot be considered as an interpreter of everyday life, being his *espaces autres* the expression of "macro tendencies" completely assimilated and dominated by networks of power.

(Highmore, 2002b, p. 35), that ambivalent existence swinging between hypersensitivity and lack of sensitivity. In his *The Philosophy of Money*, the modern monetary economy produces a determination of everyday life and "an acceleration of social lifetime in its three dimensions of (a) quality o intensity . . . (b) quantity . . . and (c) heterogeneity and diversity of stimuli" (De Simone, 2015, p. 248). The amplification of emotional life resulting from the dissonance between the "absence of character" (Simmel as cited in De Simone, 2015, p. 239) of the internal life and external strong stimuli of metropolitan life produces, on the one hand, the neurasthenic and agoraphobic, on the other hand, the *blasé*. Both the individuals, however, are incapable of negotiating with everyday life.[25]

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) carries the study George Simmel conducts in the field of everyday modernity on from his point of view. As well as Simmel, Benjamin frames the argumentation in a wider context, stressing the urban and unavoidable character of everyday life, "partly . . . due to the spectacular technological changes brought about by modernity, partly . . . to a romanticism of the city" (Highmore, 2002a, p. 74). However, Benjamin seems to express a more optimistic vision about modern dailiness than the latter one. More precisely, while Simmel believes that the only solution to the battered bodies and minds of modern life is represented by the cultural forms themselves responsible for the battering, Benjamin trusts the new revolutionary cultural forms modernity will be capable of providing.

Benjamin's approach to modernity can be assimilated to that of a *chiffonier* (Highmore, 2002a). What animates Benjamin is not the splendour of the everyday, but its ruin. Suspended between a sentimental nod to the past and a revolutionary nostalgia for the future, the author of the *Arcade Project* fulfils

[25] For Simmel, dealing with everyday (see *The Sociology of the Meal*, *Bridge and Door*, *The Philosophy of Fashion*) is a form of aesthetics. He firstly announces his avant-garde plan inspired by social interactions in his sociological essay *Sociological Aesthetics* of 1896. However, he completely develops his sociological project in the preface to *The Philosophy of Money* (Highmore, 2002a). Here, the German philosopher simultaneously tries to understand the meaning of everyday life through its fragments and to investigate the reasons of the modern philosophy of money producing individualism (De Simone, 2015; Highmore, 2002a), both resulting in freedom and egotism. His "sociological impressionism", as defined by Karl Mannheim and later taken up by David Frisby -, describes the early XX century Berlin, the centre of the "technological, civilising modernity". According to Simmel, the odd character of his home city produces two different spatial experiences: "a centripetal process of concentration and a centrifugal process of spatial expansion" (Nedelmann, 1993 as cited in De Simone, 2015, p. 249).

a dual task. On the one hand, he operates a rejection towards the celebration of progress; on the other hand, he holds up a melancholic process back to the past. According to him, modernity has lead to a loss of experience. However, what is missing nowadays is not the lived experience itself (*Erlebnis*), which has conversely become a 'shock experience', but its 'transmissibility' (*Erfahrung*).[26] As a keen supporter of early cinema, the solution Benjamin proposes is the *poetic of distraction*. So, assuming that new technological and industrial forms represent the very phenomenon of modern life, they have to perform as "poison and cures" (Highmore, 2002a, p. 69), inasmuch they act both as the cause of alienation and the potential solution to it.[27] Benjamin's distraction, however, does not perform as "an 'empty' or 'neutral' form of consciousness". On the contrary, it represents "an urban and *learned* mode of experience", therefore an "acquired awareness" of the modern *politikòn zoon* (Highmore, 2002a, p. 69). Maybe influenced by Simmel's notion of *blasé*, for Benjamin, distraction makes the citizens bear the asphyxiating intensity of modern life.[28]

As for Fernard Braudel (1902-1985), finally, he plays an ambiguous role within the dialectics of everyday life. On the one hand, his notion of *longue durée* seems to contrast with a day-to-day social history, since his *Annales*

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[26] The widest Benjaminian argumentation about everyday life can be found in *Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, an essay dating back to 1939. Here, Benjamin distinguishes lived experience (*Erlebnis*) from the communicated one (*Erfahrung*). In particular, while the first one is immediate, the second kind of experience is the one making the first 'socially' meaningful. Accordingly, what is missing in the Modern Age is *Erfahrung*, its transmissibility. For this reason, Benjamin considers Baudelaire as the poet of ordinary modern 'shock' experience, since he is capable of identifying "his having been jostled by the crowd as the decisive, unique experience" (Highmore, 2002a, p. 67)

[27] In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin defines the concept of "distraction" as opposed to that of "concentration". While "a man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it", in the "Age of Mechanical Reproduction" it is the work of art which is absorbed by the "distracted mass" (Baird, 2011, p. 43). As Baird (2011) puts it, "most people, most of the time, do not pay close ongoing attention to the architectural settings within which they pass their daily lives. Indeed, expanding on Benjamin's insight, we may even go so far as to state that it would be impossible for them to do so, without soon suffering a kind of psychic exhaustion – or perhaps, eventually, even a kind of psychological crisis. Concentration is, after all, a substantial psychological effort, and such effort cannot be summoned up for indefinitely extended periods of time" (p. 44).

[28] For George Baird, the condition of distraction, as Benjamin drafts it, owns several aspects in common with many other prominent XX century theoretical constructs, such as Louis Althusser's *ideology*, Ferdinand de Saussure's *language*, Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, Hannah Arendt's *behaviour.* In this regard, the author tries to conduct a crossbreeding between Benjamin's *distraction* and Arendt's *action*, proposing a reading of the two "not simply as opposites, but rather as the respective limits of a spectrum of consciousness of persons in society – or, to put it another way, of bodies in proximate space" (Baird, 2011, p. 52).

stresses the slow and often imperceptible space, technology and climate on human actions. On the other hand, the attention he draws to daily elements such as food, fashion, furniture and other social customs in his works *La Méditerrané* and *Civilisation Matérielle, Économie et Capitalisme* positions him among the interpreters of everyday modern life (Highmore, 2002b).

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Returning to Lefebvre, everyday life does not at all represent a virgin territory at the time when he approaches it. Conversely, the puzzling dailiness of existence has already become the territory for diffuse reflection. Nonetheless, "the intellectual significance of Lefebvre's critique is that it identifies an undeniable body of experience . . . and challenges its naturalness" (Wander in Lefebvre, 2002, p. VIII). As Highmore (2002a) puts it underlining Lefebvre's amazing versatility, "if Simmel offers something like a social psychology of urban modernity, Lefebvre's explicit emphasis on everyday life incorporates everything from a critique of urban planning to a poetics of movement" (pp. 132–133). For the latter, it is in daily living itself that everyday life contradictions find their solutions (Merrifield, 2006).

In *La Somme et le reste*, Lefebvre (2009) depicts the priceless value of everyday life, "so precious because . . . so fragile" (p. 2). However, it is in his *Critique* (Lefebvre, 2014a) that he deploys his persuasive argumentation about everyday life. The series places the everyday into the richness and confusion of a "multiple perspective offered by a traditional and yet changing countryside mixed with a profound engagement with the transformation of urban life that can occur for the huge scale of the project" (Highmore, 2002a, p. 115). Indeed, it is when analysing the effects new forms of production exert on rural areas that he first remarks a deprivation in everyday life. As mentioned above,

> although Lefebvre is well known for his work on cities, his earliest research was focused on rural sociology in transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist production, and the negative effects of these transformations on community life. Throughout his life, he maintained an interest in the relationship between city and country (Coleman, 2015, pp. 22–23).

Hence, the relationship between town and country animates all his philosophical dissemination on daily life. This binomial, however, only represents one aspect of the complexity Lefebvre's analysis of everyday life reveals, summarized by Highmore (2002b) as follows:

> As a philosopher, the everyday signalled for Lefebvre a speculative attempt to register the social as a totality, and in this work can be seen as a continuation of Simmel's. But the everyday also signalled a frustration with philosophy and a desire to connect with the lived actuality of the present … As a Marxist, he saw contemporary everyday life as exploitative, oppressive and relentlessly controlled … As a romantic he sought the energies with the everyday that could be used to transform it (pp. 114-115).

Both a means for philosophical investigation and socio-political activity, the everyday embodies the effort Lefebvre makes to shift the focus of philosophy, always concerned about "serious" matters such as Nature, Divinity and Humanity, onto 'common' problems.

As Lefebvre (2002b) explains, capitalism has resulted in the division of the two entities of *space* and *time* and the dominance of *space* on *time* (except when referring to the mechanised, clockwork time). The challenge is, therefore, to understand how capitalism is 'spatialised' and to what extent can its 'abstract space' be contrasted by the memories of 'absolute space' of everyday life. The historical evolution occurring since the XIX century has produced multiple consequences on the social level, such as "the gradual dissociation of quotidian and non-quotidian (art, religion, philosophy)", "man's estrangement from nature, accompanied by a sense of loss (of nature and the past) and an absence of rhythm", "the substitutions of signs – and later *signals* – for symbols and symbolism" (Lefebvre, pp. 38-39), among others. In this context, "everyday life has the potential for subverting social processes and spatial practices that otherwise can seem total and eternal" (Coleman, 2015, p. 64). But what does Lefebvre mean for everyday life? In his view, the everyday is both the ordinary, the recurrent, the tedious daily tasks as well as simple pleasures compensating the fatigue and actions falling outside of the ordinary - the weekends, birthdays, and so on. In short, everyday entails "gestures of labour and leisure" (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 18) and their interrelationships.[29] Leisure should be framed together with the social

[29] Talking of everydayness, we cannot avoid mentioning Lefebvre's 'theory of moments'. In *La Somme et le Reste*, a "moment" is defined as "the attempt to achieve the total realization of a possibility" in

spheres of work and family, since it is not represented by a single activity, but by several ones - the only common orientation of which is their differentiation from the working world. Despite this 'common orientation', however, two different and 'structurally' opposed kinds of free time activities can be identified:

> a) Leisure integrated with everyday life (the perusal of daily papers, television, etc.) and conducive to profound discontent as it creates situations like that of the Kierkegaardian character who . . . tore his newspaper to shreds screaming: 'Everything, everything has now become possible!'; b) the prospect of departure, the demand for evasion, the will to escape through worldliness, holidays, LSD, debauchery or madness (Lefebvre, p. 85).

Here lies the dialectic of the French philosopher: on the one hand, leisure is the continuation of work, producing alienation, on the other hand, it represents the occasion to criticise labour (Highmore, 2002a). Even though present in other Western Marxists, the dual reading of leisure is crucial in Lefebvre. Festivals are considered paradigms of an authentic everyday life for their "socially cohesive" and liberating functions (Merrifield, 2006), and social participation in general entails its possibilities of everyday transformation. As he puts it, "festivals [traditionally] contrasted violently with everyday life, but they were not separate from it. They were like everyday life, but more intense; and then the moments of that life – the practical community, food, the relation with nature – in other words, work – were reunited, amplified, magnified in the festival" (Lefebvre, 2014a, p. 468). As such, festivals arouse his strong opposition to all forms of "social atomization", such as fragmentation of life into specialised areas of activities and partition of intellectual life in specialist knowledge and expertise. Merrifield explains that

> the critique of everyday life must be seen as both attending to such separations (intellectual and social) and holding out the limitations of transforming any one particular sphere in isolation. Similarly, the criticality of the study of everyday life is

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everyday life (Lefebvre, 1959 as cited in Merrifield, 2006, p. 27) performing the same function as white spaces between words did in Stéphane Mallarmé's verses. As Andy Merrifield observes, "Mallarmé's poetry disrupted linear textual time much as Lefebvre's theory of moments sought to disrupt Henri Bergson's notion of linear real time – his *durée*, or duration" (Merrifield, p. 27). Acting as "the modality of presence", the Lefebvrian moment is a fullness, a "partial totality" having a certain duration, therefore relatively absolute. It represents a significant time, as observed by Stuart Elden, "when existing orthodoxies are open to challenge, when things have the potential to be overturned or radically altered, moments of crisis in the original sense of the term" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. X).

only guaranteed by the purposeful interdisciplinarity (or anti-disciplinarity) of the investigation (pp. 129–130).

In particular, Lefebvre refuses any kind of separation among *political* sphere, *aesthetic* dimension and *daily life*, being the claim to transform society through economic or political solutions not only a mistake, but also a misunderstanding of the revolutionary project. His claim "Let everyday life be a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life!" (Lefebvre, 2002b, p. 204) acts as representative of both his romantic and utopian view. Romanticism and Utopia, which also justify the enormous relevance of the French philosopher's writing for both architectural and urban renewed theory and practice, are what Coleman (2015) outlines as crucial aspects of Lefebvre's thought. The "tension between progress and its costs – in terms of loss of 'the splendour of everyday life' –" (Coleman, p. 28) is the main expression of Lefebvre's Romanticism, which is not, however, a nostalgic one. Even though being the stage of many contradictions producing alienation and socio-spatial fragmentation (such as the ones between producer and consumer, life and work, urban and rural, and "within communities themselves"), Modernity is still the "locus of our possibilities" (Coleman, p. 31). Here, the memories of the past everyday come forward and support the *possible impossible* through producing social and spatial renewal. That *possible impossible,* therefore the *extraordinary of the ordinary,* represents the fulcrum of Lefebvre's utopianism. In daily routine activities, "out of alienation, boredom and meaningless repetition, can arise transformative 'moments' of dis-alienation that hold a potential as the seeds of collective change" (Shields, 2013, p. 25). That is to say, "the everyday holds out the promise of an in-depth understanding of the present while also being the source of its radical [economic and socio-political] re-invention" (Coleman, 2015, p. 36).

## 1.3 Rhythmanalysis and the Investigation of Daily Publicness

Among all Lefebvrian key concepts (those of ‘differential space’, ‘possible-impossible’, ‘theory of moments’ and so on), it is rhythmanalysis the "most relevant [one] for the elaboration of alternative modes of architectural practice” (Coleman, 2015, p. 95). The counter-space emerging in daily life and originating from the knowledge and experience of the body becomes, again, the main reference of the architectural practice, with its senses, its rhythms, its scale. The rhythms to analyse, as seen in the previous paragraph, are those observable in the everyday, the *locus* of possibilities, and explained in his last work *Elements of Rhythmanalysis.* With regards to this essay, Coleman asserts:

> While the book is literally the culmination of Lefebvre’s life’s work for being his last, it is also a capstone inasmuch as it is remarkably lucid evocation of a method for becoming alive to what is, or ought to be, the object of architects’ interests and designs: the lived city and social life, in all of their spatial and temporal richness (p. 13).

In the final elaboration of the method of analysis developed by Lefebvre in *The Production of Space,* Lefebvre (2004) seeks in effect to conduct a new theoretical practice, “the analysis of rhythms, with practical consequences” (p. 75), through the investigation of movement and process. Published posthumously after his death by his friend and colleague René Lourau, the pamphlet aims at performing an analysis of biological, psychological and social rhythms (and repetitions) of everyday life through the interrelation of space and time. It places, as Stuart Elden states in the preface of that book, Lefebvre among the most important Marxist thinkers of the XX century, “but simultaneously illustrates how his work critiqued and moved beyond that paradigm, incorporating insights from elsewhere in an intoxicating mixture of ideas, illustrations and analyses” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. VII), resulting in a political endeavour significantly contributing to cultural studies. The purpose of the work is promptly declared by its author at the very beginning. His ambition is “nothing less than to found a science, a new field of knowledge: the analysis of rhythms, with practical consequences” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 3). This project, which may be fulfilled by proceeding in two (potentially complementary) ways, namely an analytical method and a

speculative one, "can seem disparate, because it appeals to, in order to bring together, notions and aspects that analysis too often keeps separate: time and space, the public and the private, the state-political and the intimate" (Lefebvre, p. 100).

The neologism 'rhythmanalysis' was coined by the Portuguese philosopher Lucio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos, whose unpublished and untraceable work *La Rythmanalyse* (1931) owes its popularity to Gaston Bachelard - who refers to it in *La dialectique de la durée* (1936) and *La Psychanalyse du feu* (1938). In particular, in the eighth chapter of the *Dialectic of duration* (Bachelard, 2000), he illustrates the phenomenology of rhythms on three different levels, namely, a material, a biological and a psychological one. With the aim of operating a reversal of Bergson's theory of continuity, he proposes discontinuity as the 'donné immediate'. Lefebvre will develop the notion further some decades later, and it is thanks to his dissertation that the concept of rhythmanalysis reaches its peak, because of the practical aims he attributes to the method. For Lefebvre (2004), "disruptions and crises always have origins in and effects on rhythms: those of institutions, of growth, of the population, of exchanges, of work, therefore those which make or *express* the complexity of present societies " (p. 44). Hence, rhythms fully disclose the current social intricacy. This assumption persuades him that

> intervention through rhythm . . . has a goal, an objective: to strengthen or re-establish eurhythmia. . . . Rhythmanalytic therapy would be preventative rather than *curative,* announcing, observing and classifying the pathological state (Lefebvre, p. 68).

Lefebvre's analysis of rhythms intends to strengthen the study already conducted by the author on everyday life, deepening certain aspects of it. In particular, his project is based on three main hypotheses:

1. The existence of two different ways of measuring time (*clock* and *rhythms*);
2. The divergence between *time* and *use of time;*
3. The compliance of quantified time to general laws of society, making it both monotonous and parcelled (like space).

The person responsible for undertaking this challenging day-to-day task is the *rhythmanalyst*, acting as the *metronome* of everyday life. Accordingly, the

rhythmanalyst performs a function that is very close to the role the psychoanalyst plays. The only difference between the two professionals lies in the approach to adopt towards the studied phenomenon. While the psychoanalyst has the difficult task of rendering himself passive and forgetting his knowledge, the rhythmanalyst is required to "perceive distinct rhythms distinctly, without disrupting them" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 19). In other words, the rhythmanalyst is "not … obliged to *jump* from the inside to the outside of observed *bodies*; he should come to listen to them *as a whole* and unify them by taking his own rhythms as a reference: by integrating the outside with the inside and viceversa" (Lefebvre, p. 20). As a consequence, the rhythmanalyst has to be sensitive, to rely on all his senses without preferring any one of them, transforming everything he perceives into presences:

> For him, nothing is immobile. He hears the wind, the rain, storms; but if he considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, he understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm. This object is not inert; time is not set aside for the *subject*. It is only slow in relation to our time, to our body, the measure of rhythms (Lefebvre, p. 20).

The rhythmanalyst will use all sources of information, such as graphs, curves, images, adopting a transdisciplinary approach in the comparative analysis of rhythms. He is "strictly speaking neither psychologist, nor sociologist, nor anthropologist, nor economist" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 87), although "he borders on each of these fields" (p. 87). However, he first has to pick up evidence from his whole body, matching data acquired from all the sciences (psychology sociology, ethnology, biology) and "separating as little as possible the scientific from the poetic" (Lefebvre, p. 87). Understanding the rhythm means being outside it, but not completely – like a bystander seeing "from the window" (Lefebvre, p. 27). So, by registering and intervening in the daily rhythms, the rhythmanalyst takes part, without any declared political purpose, to the "*revolutionary* transformation of this world and this society in decline" (Lefebvre, p. 26). Hence, what does the Aquitanian philosopher exactly intend for *rhythm*? As Lefebvre (2004) puts it, "everywhere where there is interaction between a *place*, a *time* and an expenditure of *energy*, there is a rhythm" (p. 15). Rhythms fluctuate between the cyclical, where social organisation manifests itself, and the linearity of the everyday, that is, the quotidian grind dimension. That is to say, in daily life

we can distinguish cyclical processes, whose “returns and rotations are innumerable” (Lefebvre, p. 76), from linear facts, “separated by long or short periods of time” (p. 76). They are in a relation of endless struggle, which is inexorably mediated and scanned by the quantitative measure of clock and watches. Cyclical and linear nature of rhythms, therefore, mirrors the double character of time, which is “at once fleeting, ungraspable . . . , and grasped, timed *chronometrically*” (Lefebvre, p. 51).

The concept of *rhythm* is strongly connected to that of *repetition* (of movements, situations etc.), but the latter one does not imply uniformity, being simple repetition just a product of logical and mathematical thought. Repetitions are mechanical in animals, ritualised in humans (e.g., introducing ourselves or other people presents both “stereotyped” actions and – mainly - “consecrated” ones). However, gestures people make are not natural, inborn, but the result of a process of *dressage*, producing “an automatism of repetitions” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 40). As a consequence, most of human rhythms are driven by *dressage*, meaning that the vast majority - but not all - of social rhythms are educated ones.

Besides *repetition*, rhythms also introduce the notion of *difference*. En effect, “when it concerns the everyday”, Lefebvre (2004) observes, “rites,[30] ceremonies, fêtes, rules and laws, there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference” (p. 6).

Linear repetition and circular one, lived time and perceived space, coexist influencing each other, producing both quantitative and qualitative aspects and elements which human body measures. “In short, rhythms escape logic, and nevertheless contain a logic, a possible calculus of numbers and numerical relations” (Lefebvre, p. 11).

Plurality of rhythms can be firstly classified as:

- *Secret* rhythms, when physiological and psychological (e.g. memories);
- *Public*, therefore *social*, rhythms, both real and virtual ones (e.g. fêtes or tiredness);

[30] In *Attempt at the Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities,* Lefebvre (2004) distinguishes three kinds of rites: a) *religious*, e.g. "fasting, prayers, ablutions, the muezzin, the angelus and the ringing of bells, etc."; b) general, *simultaneously sacred and profane*, e.g. "festivals and carnivals …, rites of intimate convivialities or external sociability"; c) *political* ones, e.g. "ceremonies, commemorations, votes, etc." (p. 94).

- *Fictional*, therefore verbal and gestural, rhythms, related to false secrets (e.g. calculations and estimations)
- *Dominating- dominated* rhythms, made up ones, aiming for external purposes (Lefebvre, 2004, pp. 16–18).

As Lefebvre and Régulier (2004) remark, "acquired rhythms are simultaneously internal and social. In one day in the modern world, everybody does more or less the same thing at more or less the same times, but each person is really alone in doing it" (p. 75), depending on the experience and knowledge of his own body, determining his "place in the space-time of the universe" (p. 82). "Rhythm therefore brings with it a differentiated time" (Lefebvre, p. 95), which is the differential between the *internal measure* and the *external* one. "In a reciprocal action, the external measure can and must superimpose itself on the internal measure, but they cannot be conflated" (p. 78).

Of course, the "rhythm of the self" and "rhythm of the other" do not represent the only forms of rhythms. Beyond this polar opposition, a great variety of rhythms animates both *everyday* and *extra-everyday* life through multiple transitions, the 'threshold' areas. As Lefebvre and Régulier (2004) explain,

> this polar opposition should not lead us to forget that there are multiple transitions and imbrications between these poles: the bedroom, the apartment, the house, the street, the square and the district, finally the town – even the immediate family, the extended family, the neighbourhood, friendly relations and the city itself. The Self and the Other are not cut off from one another (p. 95).

This coexistence of diverse rhythms introduces the notions of *polyrhythmia* (simultaneity of rhythms), *eurhythmia* (harmony of rhythms), *arrhythmia* (discordance of rhythms) and *isorhythmia* (uniformity of rhythms), defining the mutual connection of rhythms. In particular, while polyrhythmic and eurhythmic conditions designate a normal state, the other two conditions denote respectively divergence in time, space and use of energy, and equality of them.

An example of how rhythms interact, reveal and hide is shown by *music*. It goes without saying that everyday life provides a greater diversity in rhythms (e.g. all times of the day, the simultaneity of past, present and possible etc.) than music itself. Though, it is possible to draw a parallel

between the two dimensions. The analysis of cosmological reality and its rhythms has to be based on the inseparable triad *time-space-energy*, corresponding to the combination *melody-harmony-rhythm* in music. Through rhythm, music becomes worldly, such as energy "animates, reconnects, renders time and space conflictual" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 60). Musical rhythm, therefore, has both an aesthetic and an ethical function - through its relation with body and time it describes everyday life acting a cathartic succession.

If music suits as an appropriate example of multiplicity in everyday life, *mass media* represent the 'enemy' undermining diversity. That is to say, the simultaneity of mass media dissimulates difference in places, rhythms, cultures and people. As Lefebvre (2004) points out, "the media enter into the everyday; even more: they contribute to producing it. However, they do not speak of it. They content themselves with illusions" (p. 48), masking their action and affecting communication and information by utilising rhythms. In his view, mass media efface immediacy and dialogue, which is reduced to a dispute. Put differently, communication devalues dialogue. This condition stresses the necessity of reaffirming the dialogue as a value - which doesn't mean to devalue the informational.

Against this general social flattening, Mediterranean cities perform as the place where "all forms of hegemony and homogeneity are refused" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 98). This assumption leads Lefebvre to conduct, together with his long lasting wife and fellow Catherine Régulier, the unusual experiment on Mediterranean cities through the tools provided by rhythmanalysis. As they discuss in the essay *Attempt at the rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities*, in Mediterranean town all rites, codes and relations become visible, the streets becoming the stage of everyday life and noticeable differences among diverse but interdependent local cultures. Here, daily pace is characterised by a slower and more cyclical sense of temporality, as well as by varied geographies of place, and public space "becomes 'spontaneously' a place for walks and encounters, intrigues, diplomacy, deals and negotiations – it theatralises itself. Thus the time and the rhythms of the people who occupy this space are linked back to space" (Lefebvre, p. 96). That is what happens in the Esino Valley (see chapter 5).

## 1.4 Beyond Lefebvre: from Theory to Practice

Understanding Lefebvre's argumentation on space and employing it "as an instrument of analysis and as a tool for practical application" (Schmid, 2015, p. 34) means reading his writings within their historical condition, that of a radical revision of modern architecture and functionalist urbanism taking place in France between the death of Le Corbusier in 1965 and the establishment of 'postmodern' architecture in the 1970s.[31] Within this climate of wholesale experimentation, Lefebvre tries to develop his theory by merging research, critique, and project (Stanek, 2011).

As seen in the introduction, if there is one point of complete agreement of all critics, it pertains to the potential practical implications arising from the developments of Lefebvre's inquiry on production of space (Edensor, 2016; Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom, & Schmid, 2009; Stanek et al., 2014). Even though his theorising of a 'total' social space opens multiple prospects for researches on space, far there has been an adequate discussion on how to apply it to architectural practice. Despite his premises about a metaphilosophy, that is, a philosophy which effectively becomes part of the world, Lefebvre himself does not provide practical support in that direction and "his books remain elusive when it comes to this question" (Schmid, 2015, p. 35). Therefore, Lefebvre's claim for a differential space capable of overpassing the homogeneous and fragmentary space we experience every day, parcelled out into functions and crossed by boundaries, still awaits its

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[31] As Shields (1999) remarks, Lefebvre takes part in this 'radical revision' by shifting the previous philosophical debates on the nature of space and spatialisation "to present a coherent theory of the development of different systems of spatiality in different historical periods" (p. 146). Even though he recognises the outstanding value of Lefebvre's texts, Shields (2013) considers his periodisations too much rigidly attached to Marxist historiography. In Shields's view, Lefebvre's use of ideal types such as 'Feudalism' and 'Primitive Communism' prevents him from analysing the "diversity of empirical evidence" while attaching his argumentation to "a deeply entrenched narrative of modernism and the triumph of the West" (Shields, p. 31). His lack of attention to topics such as colonies and global peripheries would originate from these "modes of production [that] are in effect modes of spatialisation" (Shields, p. 30). As he puts it, "by using a nineteenth-century historiography, Lefebvre’s system of thought denies his radically enlarged three-part dialectic. In his view, Lefebvre ties ‘l’espace’ and spatialisation to a model of extrinsic periods derived from economic rather than spatial analysis" (Shields, p. 30). To that respect, one of the most radical critiques of Lefebvre's theory of space was provided by Manuel Castells in his *The Urban Question*. According to the Spanish sociologist, Lefebvre "comes closer and closer, through a rather curious intellectual evolution, to an urbanistic theorization of the Marxist problematic" (1977, as cited in Stanek, 2011).

full development. What prevented him from effectively keeping his promise was

> his attempt to rethink the production of space at this stage of the historical process of entanglement between power and knowledge . . . and his attempt to challenge the institutionalization of the translations among research, critique, and project by identifying the gaps between them as possible sites for a politics of space (Stanek, 2011, p. x).

These shortcomings fuel Lefebvre's theory, which "not only serves as an analytical framework, but might even become a generating force" (Schmid, 2015, p. 34) for current studies. The hoped-for new politics of space, claiming the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968), that is, "a global struggle for citizenship" (Merrifield, 2011, p. 471), is nothing but a "politics of encounter". As such, it represents "something that can mediate between the lived and the historical, between an individual life and dynamic group fusion" (Merrifield, p. 471). In Lefebvre's (1991b as cited in Soja, 2010) words:

> The right to the city, complemented by the right to the difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (*citadin*) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of the users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (p. 99).

The social centrality (Shields, 1999) lying behind Lefebvre's "politics of encounter", that is "potentially more empowering because it is politically and geographically more *inclusive*" (Merrifield, 2011, p. 474), spatialises itself in "a blurry liminal and subliminar zone in which it makes no theoretical or political sense to differentiate between what's city and what's countryside, between what's urban and what's global" (Merrifield, p. 473).[32] As such, it necessarily singles out the issue of public space.[33]

[32] As Soja (2010) puts it, "the struggle over the right to the city, despite Lefebvre's occasional remarks to the contrary, extends regionally to the countryside, to rural areas and the rain forest as well" (p. 97).

[33] All the photos present in the monograph are explanations, metaphors, memories of public spaces taken from personal photo itineraries from Italy, Ireland, Denmark, Portugal, Germany, USA, throughout these years.

*Figure 7. High Line, New York. An example of diverted space.*

# 2. PUBLIC SPACE, THE SOCIAL PRODUCT *PAR EXCELLENCE*

> *[Abstract space] is not homogeneous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its 'lens'. And, indeed, it renders homogeneous. But in itself it is multiform.*
>
> Henri Lefebvre

The first chapter of the monograph has provided a brief excursus on Lefebvrian theory of social space as the daily produced stage of everyday life. The emphasis on the transformation of spatial patterns brought about by human actions is something I want to develop further in this chapter, by applying it to public spaces. My argument here is that all these socio-spatial ongoing processes so skilfully illustrated by the French philosopher can be useful tools for the investigation of the controversial notion of spatial publicness. As living environments *par excellence*, their *definition*, *use* and *perception* evolve continuously. However, the material and symbolic socio-cultural, political and aesthetic value they hold still confer them a pivotal meaning within human experience of space, selfhood and otherness as the '*locus* of possibilities'. As Lefebvre (2003b) points out when talking about "urban space":

> The void, the nothingness of action, can only be apparent; neutrality is a limiting case. The void (a place) attracts; it has this sense and this end. Virtually, anything can happen anywhere. A crowd can gather, objects can pile up, a festival unfold, an event – terrifying or pleasant – can occur. This is why urban space is so fascinating: centrality is always possible. At the same time, this space can empty itself, expel its content, become a place of pure scarsity or power (p. 130).

Before starting this exploration of public spaces, however, it is worth spending some words on the concept of 'urban'. In effect, when stating that "in the history of writing on public culture, the semiotics of public space has been read as the symptom of the urban, and sometimes human, condition"

(Amin, 2012, p. 73), much of the scholarly literature positions public space is the city debate, reading it as "peculiar to cities" (Bodnar, 2015, p. 2). Conversely, I hereby refer to a wider notion of 'urban', suggested, once again, by the reading Lefebvre gives to the term, in an attempt to later shift the analytical register away from the traditional metropolitan setting. In Lefebvre's view,

> society has been completely urbanized. . . An *urban society* is a society that results from a process of complete urbanization. . . The above definition resolves any ambiguity in the use of our terms. The words 'urban society' are often used to refer to any city or urban agglomeration. . . Here, I use the term 'urban society' to refer to the society that results from industrialization, which is a process of domination that absorbs agricultural production (Lefebvre, 2003b, pp. 1–2).

In effect, when arguing about the Urban Revolution, Lefebvre (2003b) identifies three layers, representing "not simply social phenomena but sensations and perceptions, spaces and times, images and concepts, language and rationality, theories and social practices" (p. 28): the *rural*, the *industrial* and the *urban*. They are "superposed, telescoped, sometimes absorbed into one another" (Lefebvre, p. 125).[34] Urban space diverges completely from industrial space as it tends to differential space - against the homogeneity of the latter. That is to say, "in urban space, something is always happening. Relations change. Differences and contrasts can result in conflict, or are attenuated, erode, or corrode" (Lefebvre, p. 129).

Nowadays, "the urban assumes cosmic significance; it is globalized" (Lefebvre, 2003b, p. 123). Therefore, urban goes beyond the city itself, which is "a clearly defined, definitive *object*" (p. 16), in order to encompass a "way of being" or, as Wirth (1938) writes, "a way of life" of all society. To put it another way, "while the city is the characteristic locus of urbanism, the urban mode of life is not confined to cities" (Wirth, p. 1). It is a 'total' phenomenon, both related to rural and city living. No longer anchored in a physical shape

[34] Lefebvre (2003b) identifies a major barrier to the possibilities of the Urban Revolution making the urban unseen, a "blind field". The current moment is an intermediate phase of conflict, a black box. What blinds us is that "we focus attentively on the new field, the urban, but we see it with eyes, with concepts, that were shaped by the practices and theories of industrialization" (Lefebvre, p. 29). This sightless mainly affects the conceptualization of space-time. Urban is characterised by a renewed space-time, different from the agrarian and industrial ones. The former cyclic and homogeneous space-time have been replaced by *differential* ones, "each place and each moment existing only within a whole, through the contrasts and oppositions that connect it to, and distinguish it from, other places and moments" (Lefebvre, p. 37).

(Stanek et al., p. 11), the urban entails several scales, extending from the local to the global and mediated by everyday life (Goonewardena, 2014).[35] Therefore, it performs as a "force field marked by constant debates, controversies and struggles" (Stanek et al., p. 11).

As "sensory metaphors which capture the transitivity and rhythm of urban life" (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 26), public spaces are those epitomizing the most this state of 'unrest'. Performing as the measure of the varying pace of the environment hosting them, they even "anticipate urban life transformations. By observing them, they activate the seismograph of peaks and pauses of both individual and collective activities deploying in the city and they measure their intensity" (Paquot, 2009, p. 102, own translation).[36] Hence, they represent the place where to start to solve urban contradictions, those generated by the *abstract* space:

> To resolve this contradiction [of urban space], we can imagine the complete mobilization, not of population, but of space. A space taken over by the ephemeral. So that every place becomes multifunctional, polyvalent, transfunctional, with an incessant turnover of functions. . . In this way, u-topia . . . will absorb and metamorphose the various topoi. . . Parks and gardens make the 'elsewhere' sensible, visible, and legible. . . The gardens, the parks, are both, absolute contrasts that have been forced together, but in such a way that they evoke liberty, utopian separation (Lefebvre, 2003b, p. 132).

Multi-functional spaces, such as gardens and parks, act as the achievable "elsewhere". By evoking freedom and difference, they own *in fieri* all characters of u-topian places. As such, they seem to be the starting point for the complete fulfilment of a *differential space*.[37]

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[35] Goonewardena (2014) emphasises how, in Lefebvre's argumentation, "this urban level exists in a mediated relationship with two other levels of social reality that have their own spatial scales: the level of 'everyday life' consisting of our quotidian routines and aspirations and the level of 'the global' consisting of the state and capital" (p. 221).

[36] Original: "Les espaces publics (privés ou non juridiquement parlant) préfigurent les modifications de la vie urbaine, les observer revient à établir le sismographe des pics et des pauses des activités individuelles ou collectives *en* ville et à en mesurer l'intensité" (Paquot, 2009, p. 102).

[37] According to Stanek et al. (2014), the importance of Lefebvre's hypothesis on complete urbanisation lies on three main factors: the shift of attention from urban form to urban process; the multidimensional analysis of the urban phenomenon and the focus on its "projective energy".

*Figure 8. Islands Brygge, Copenhagen.*

## 2.1 Public Space or Public Spaces? Between Domain and Use

Before delving into the far-reaching changes affecting the use and perception of public space, suggesting the (re)emergence of new forms of spatial publicness, it is worth illustrating some bare bones of the broad notion of public space itself.

Even though the theme of public spaces seems to have been overwhelmingly dominant in the last two-century sector studies because of the increasing awareness of the condition of contingency of social issues and inadequacy of planning policies in the field (Françoise Choay, 1965),[38] the concept of public space still proves to be extremely controversial. According to the *Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement*,

> there is no agreed definition of the notion of 'public space', the use of which is relatively recent in city planning. 'Public space' can be considered as the unbuilt part of public domain consecrated to public use. 'Public space' is, therefore, made of a certain property and end use (Merlin & Choay, 1988, p. 273, own translation). [39]

[38] As Françoise Choay (1965) points out, "industrial society is urban. The city represents its horizon. It produces metropolises, conurbations, industrial cities, large housing complex. Nevertheless, it fails to manage them" (p. 7, own translation).

[39] Original: "D'usage assez récent en urbanisme, la notion «d'espace public» n'y fait cependant pas toujours l'objet d'une définition rigoureuse. On peut considérer «l'espace public» comme la partie du domaine public non bâti, affectée à des usages publics. «L'espace public» est donc formé par une propriété et par une affectation d'usage" (Merlin & Choay, 1988, p. 273). Accordingly, the notion of 'public space' recalls that of outdoor space, since it implies mineral and green areas. However, when referring to the public domain, it acts as the opposite of 'public building'. By and large, the two authors

Pierre Merlin and Françoise Choay (1988) seem to agree upon the twofold dimension of the term, which simultaneously implies a *juridical* and *functional* state, or, as Jordi Borja (1998) asserts, both a *legal* and a *socio-cultural* notion. More precisely, on the one hand, "it is a space that is subject to specific regulation by the Public Administration, the owner, or whoever has the power of control over the site and who guarantees access to it for all", on the other hand, "it is the place where people relate with each other and a space of *identification,* of contact between people, of urban animation, and sometimes community expression" (Borja). By and large, the three dimensions of "public domain, collective social use and multi-functionality" (Borja) define the publicness of a place. However, it is the *use* that categorises the most a space as a public one.

Thierry Paquot (2009) also emphasises the importance that *common use* assumes in the definition of the publicness of a certain space. For him, its character is barely depending on the juridical condition. In fact, they are the actions taking place there that confer the social and public dimension on it (Paquot, p. 92).[40] Through them, "the self-experiences the other. It is in public space that everyone perceives in the strangeness of the other the guarantee of his own difference" (Paquot, p. 7, own translation).[41] By recalling Lefebvre's notion of *difference* and Niklas Luhmann's concept of *inter-systemic communication* (p. 23), Paquot joins Richard Sennett's focus on the 'intimate' dimension of public space. In particular, from the American sociologist he borrows the *psychological* categories of public space, which in turn recall the Arendtian "in-common".

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tackle one of the deepest paradoxes of current public spaces, that is, even though their formal definition of their status is relatively recent, they progressively experience a decrease in the direct participation in daily civic life. However, Merlin and Choay (1988) acknowledge the centrality of the issue of public space when stating: "Whatever the solutions adopted, and the attempts to restore its polyfunctionality are, the notion of public space itself - if it still makes sense - needs to be reformulated together with that of social practice. It must be rethought in the present historical context of Western societies and treated carefully by planners" (p. 275, own translation).

[40] Paquot (2009) draws a distinction between the philosophical concept of "public space" and that, more spatial, of "public spaces". The geographical and territorial acceptation characterising the last expression is almost extraneous to the first one. However, both have in common the idea of sharing, of exchange. The relational character both "public space" and "public spaces" suggest and the impossibility to discern between Isaac Joseph's "circulation public space" and "communication public space" (Joseph, 1995) prove the existence of multiple interconnections between the two concepts.

[41] Original: ""Le soi éprouve l'autre. C'est dans *les espaces publics* que chacun perçoit dans l'étrangeté de l'autre la garantie de sa propre difference" (Paquot, 2009, p. 7).

In *Flesh and Stone, The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, Sennett (1994) tries to outline "a history of the city . . . through people's bodily experience" (p.15). According to him, the sense of alienation and indifference characterizing the modern understimulating public realm produces a retreat in the private sphere. What he focuses on is the current condition of sensory deprivation and bodily passiveness, lacking in physical contact, mainly due to the modern speed and spatial fragmentation of everyday life. Therefore, he stresses the *introspective* dimension of *social* contacts, introducing the notion of "diffused sociability" (Delbaere, 2010) we will find in the following chapter.

*Figure 9. Maritime Youth House, Copenhagen.*

## 2.2 The *In-Between* of Public Space

Public realm, plurality of social actors and collective end use evoke the political dimension of social space as the arena of "a global struggle for citizenship" (Merrifield, 2011, p. 471). When talking about the political in public space, we have to refer to the contribution two of the major interpreters of the XX century made to the subject, that is, Hannah Arendt and Jügen Habermas. Their coeval works, *The Human Condition* (1958) e *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), still represent two significant milestones to the current debate on publicness. Both Arendt and Habermas interpret the public sphere as the *sphere of politics.* Nevertheless,

while Arendt focuses on the *material space* as a common world, intermediary among people and generations, Habermas highlights the '*institutional'* function media plays within the public debate.

Arendt's idea of publicness is centred around three thematic cruxes, that is, the *public-private* dialectics, the *labour-work-action* conceptual triptych, and the *action-behaviour* binomial. Although these terms carry a precise meaning in the modern world, the German-born American political theorist makes them derive from the classical world (Baird, 2011). As a result, the public is characterised as antithetical to the private, pre-political, domestic space, as well as the word "privacy" refers to its etymological roots, the condition of being deprived - of the pleasure and the fullness of life public world promises.

*Labour*, *work* and *action* constitute a hierarchy roughly parallel to that *private* and *public* establish in Arendt's characterization. *Labour* refers to the domestic, everyday, pre-political sphere, unquestionably necessary to human existence but unable to create a sense of sharing. *Work*, on the contrary, contributes to the realisation of a world we live in together, therefore transcends the limitations of domestic life and represents the precondition of being in the world. Finally, the *action* characterises the activities of public life, talking of which Arendt (2012) outlines her major spatial metaphor:

> Action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the world, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly (pp. 198–199).

*Action* and *behaviour* represent two different forms of experience. More precisely, *action* is the practice qualifying the public world, whereas *behaviour* is typical of the private, domestic sphere. So, while we all share the experience of *behaviour*, only some of us can reach the level of experience distinguishing *action*. In this regard, Arendt ascribes the "rise of the social" to the advent of industrialisation and mass society. Due to these modern phenomena, the experience of behaviour is progressively characterising the social world, opposing and subordinating the social to the political, therefore undermining the full affirmation of the "public realm". As for the concept of "public realm" itself, in Arendt's (2012) argumentation it is closely related to

two notions: that of *appearance* - "everything that appears in public [that] can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity" (p. 50) - and that of an *in-between dimension* (interpersonal, intergenerational), the Heideggerian idea of 'Being-in-the-world' - "the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (p. 52). In both these acceptations, those of space of appearance and in-between space, Arendt lays the foundations for an understanding of public space as the arena of politics as well as the common space fostering human interaction. As Madanipour (2003) underlines, from a spatial perspective, Arendt's integrated analysis of public space is particularly remarkable for her focus on the interrelation between people and objects and the mediating role objects play in social relations. This emphasis on the human-non-human interaction is destined to get lost in Jügen Habermas' "institutional" reading of public sphere and taken to the extreme in Bruno Latour's Parliament of Things. According to the author,

> A key contribution of Arendt to political philosophy has been the emphasis on the public sphere as a central notion for the development of egalitarian and participatory democracy. Her concept of public space may seem, as Benhabib . . . argues, to be left 'institutionally unanchored, floating as if in a nostalgic chimera is the horizon of politics'. A key strength of this work for the analysis of public sphere, however, lies in its integration of social and physical, of material common world as a key part of the public realm (Madanipour, p. 172).

Habermas carries out an 'institutionalization' of Arendt's public space, outlining a 'multi-layered' society of public and private spheres,[42] "where some of these develop into others, without necessarily the first one

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[42] Since his thesis presented in 1961 under the title of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit,* Habermas defines the 'public sphere' as the intermediate sphere between individual private life and the monarchical state which originates in England and France between the XVIII and XIX century. That is to say, for the German philosopher the public sphere is the space where private opinions become public. In order to discuss the structural transformations of the public opinion, Habermas articulates his argumentation in seven chapters, respectively dealing with 1) the origin of the bourgeois public sphere, 2) the social structures of public sphere, 3) the political functions of public sphere, 4) public opinion and its manifestations in the public sphere, 5) the economic and political causes of the bourgeois public sphere decline, 6) the birth of a new public sphere based on a manipulative publicity, 7) again, public opinion. Even though incomplete and 'naïve' in some of its contents, this work represents the first stance on 'public opinion' as the paradigm through which the political public sphere is fulfilled in the Social State. Put another way, this book, published in 1962, lays the foundations for a study of the public sphere as the dimension through which citizens engaged in a democratic debate forge and participate in the political action (Paquot, 2009).

disappearing. With particular regard to the evolution of public sphere into the political public sphere, Habermas identifies two *condiciones sine quibus non*. They are the existence of a universal interest, "relativizing the structural conflicts of interests", and the "minimization of bureaucratic decisions" (Habermas, 1989 as cited in Madanipour, 2003, pp. 176–177).

However, as Madanipour (2003) acknowledges, both Arendt' and Habermas's point of view show a certain 'shortcoming'. They both lack in an elitism and nostalgic vision of public sphere. He states:

> Arendt and Habermas cannot come to terms with the rise of what was termed mass society, which puts them in a nostalgic rather than critical standpoint. They both seem to assume an elitist point of view when they come across the involvement of a large numbers of people and new forms of organization in social relationships. Habermas looks nostalgically to the eighteenth century. . . . Arendt's nostalgia is about a golden representation of the ancient Greece (Madanipour, p. 166; p. 178).

From this perspective, several scholars tried to develop further Arendt' and Habermas' position, Charles Taylor and Seyla Benhabib among others - the first defining public space as a nested metatopical arena giving voice to multiplicity and shaping common opinions, the second emphasizing the need for new institutions able to face the challenges of complex society diversity (Madanipour, 2003).

Particularly relevant to our argumentation is James Mensch's (2007) focus on Hannah Arendt's thought. Mensch defines public space as "the space where individuals see and are seen by others as they engage in public affairs" (p.31). Accordingly, public freedom, "both the result and the cause of individual freedom" (Mensch, p. 35), is given by the coexistence of multiple perspectives and projects. As a consequence, in public space "meanings are shared, but not entirely. The excess – the non-coincidence – is the other's freedom. It manifests the other's non-predictability and is the engine of newness in our encounter"(Mensch, p. 36). Therefore, public space consists of *plurality* and *difference*, that "undeniable . . . experience of the alterity of the other, of heterogeneity, of the singular, the not-same, the different, the dissymmetric, the heteronymous" (Mensch, p. 41), and its important *socio-political negotiation*. Within this process of mediation, individual freedom plays a crucial role. Extending Arendt's claim about the nature of public freedom - "the possibility we have to present to each other our distinct

perspectives on the whole" (Mensch, p. 42) - to freedom as such, the author remarks how, likewise public freedom, also individual freedom has to appear in order to be. In his view, "the closing down of public space affects not just public freedom, but also the individual freedom that may be called on to restore the public domain" (Mensch, p. 37).

Public and individual freedom are also central to Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge (Negt & Kluge, 1993 as cited in Paquot, 2009), who integrate the predominant reading of public space, the bourgeois one, with an "oppositional public space" consisting of the 'rebel' space of proletarian publicness. This 'dissident' character of the "oppositional public space" achieves autonomous forms of expression aiming at establishing a constructive societal dialectic in the multi-layered nature of public space.

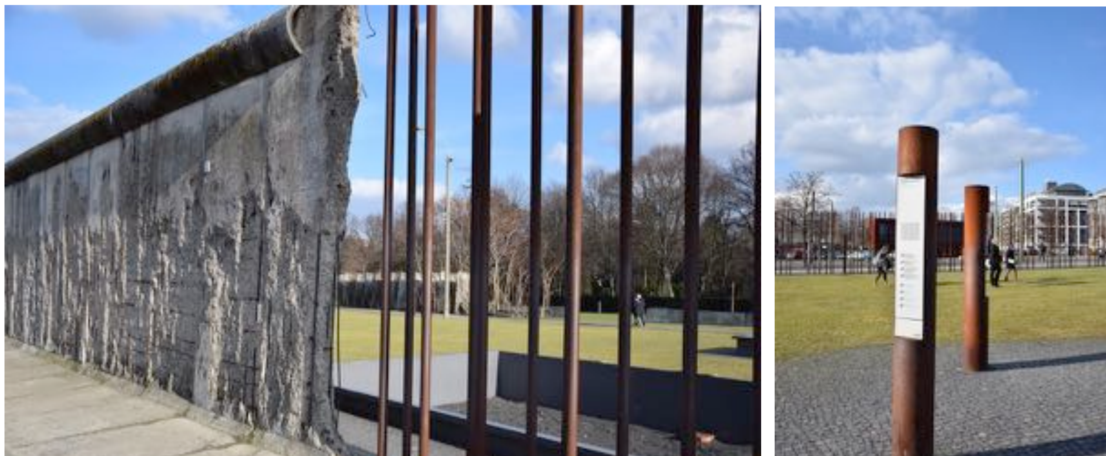

*Figure 9. Berlin Wall Memorial, Berlin.*

## 2.3 The Public as the Stage of "Throwntogetherness"

So far, *plurality* (and the consequent negotiation) seems to be the very central aspect in the definition of the public character of a place. Coexistence of purposes, stakeholders and so on, makes excess and its negotiation, therefore freedom, possible. In public space, "the stranger is neither friend nor foe, but constitutive" (Amin, 2012, p. viii). This assumption should justify

the widely accepted assumption regarding the close relationship between urban public space, civic culture and political formation, clearly derived from Habermas' and Arendt's works. Nevertheless, not all scholars agree on the straightforward equivalence among public, civic and political dimension.

Ash Amin (2008) questions the appeal to the quality of interpersonal relations as the main indicator of civil and political practice in public space. As he puts it, nowadays the sites of culture and politics are plural, both in number and in character, and scattered. Even if public spaces, such as squares, markets, streets, parks, certainly still play a significant role in modern public life, according to Amin their 'social' function "is not a sufficient condition for civic and political citizenship" (p. 7). Granted that "the character of public space and that of public life are closely connected", Amin questions "the assumption that the *sociology of public gathering* can be read as a *politics of the public realm*" (p. 7), as most of the theorists of urban modernity such as Benjamin, Simmel and Lefebvre affirm. Therefore, against a nostalgic view of public space and an expecting one, Amin shows how public space is still "full of collective promise", arguing that its potential does not lie in the inter-subjective relationships among strangers but rather in the relationship between people and "the material and visual culture of public space" (p. 8). In other words, he exhorts, in the wake of Bruno Latour (and Lefebvre himself), not to narrow the field survey to a purely human/inter-human dimension, but to consider all inputs of the in-between (such as space, nature, technological devices) as the "tacit dimension" of social interaction. Indeed, objects represent "the habits of negotiation of the familiar and the strange, the inside and the outside, the private and the collective" (Amin, 2012, p. 24).

For Amin (2008), "the sense of commons, shared assets, civic involvement" is the outcome, an unconscious reflex, of the human experience of *surplus*. However, this "reflex of trust in a situation" is not produced by all forms of placed surplus, but only by "open, crowded, diverse, incomplete, improvised and disorderly or lightly regulated" public spaces (p. 8). Sure enough, every public space has its own, variable, rhythms of use. However, these rhythms of "familiarization of the strange" (Amin, p. 10) cannot be reduced to interpersonal negotiation. On the contrary, they are

a form of positive social reaction to the global diversity of space, the so-called *throwntogetherness*, that is, a 'pre-cognitive', 'reflexive' response (rather than rational and conscious, as Baudelaire and Benjamin claim) to a non-hierarchical setting.

In Amin's view, this "situated multiplicity" produces at least five forms of resonances by shaping the nature of social and civic practice, that is:

a. the situated *surplus* itself, initially experienced by humans as a sense of loss leading to a tacit, sensory knowledge;
b. a process of *territorialisation*, deriving from daily rhythms of virtual spatial demarcation;
c. a form of *emplacement*, resulting from the domestication of timing rhythms (and its multiple – past, present and future - and changing temporalities);
d. a constant condition of *emergence*, deriving from their unpredictable character;
e. a form of *symbolic compliance*, a process of transference from the physical space to the human behaviour.

Emphasising the social and civic function of *throwntogetherness* of anonymous others does not mean to deny the significance of interpersonal relations developing there. Instead, "it is to argue that the social experience of multiplicity itself can be regarded as a form of inculcation alongside . . . habits of interpersonal association in public space" (Amin, 2008, p. 14).

*Figure 11. Superkilen Park, Copenhagen.*

## 2.4 From the Public Space *as* a Network to the Public Space *of* the Network

The experience of *surplus* resulting from the plurality of use and actors, that is, difference, seems to be the main feature defining the nature and perception of public space. 'Otherness', however, is not constrained to inter-subjective relations but extended to human/non-human interaction, often read in terms of network. Therefore, the challenge public spaces arise can also be read as an "orchestration des [trans-scalaire] flux" (Mongin, 2003, p. 5).

By recalling Choay's (2003) notion of "espace de branchement",[43] that is, a place connecting flows, Olivier Mongin underlines the 'nodal' character of public spaces. Seen in this light, "public space is not only a place, but also the nearly transcendental condition of making the connection among people" (Mongin, own translation) and things.[44] In a public space, all can be reduced to "how to knot and unknot, how to find the right rhythm capable of fostering a relationship neither too tight (crowd, fusion, confusion) nor too weak (separation, la escape, fear)" (Mongin, own translation).

The concept of 'node' is widely argued by Manuel Castells (2000), who describes a network as "a set of interconnected nodes" (p. 695) to clarify what he means for Network Society. For Castells, the socio-economic changes taking place since the last quarter of the XX century resulted in a new society, made up of networks. The latest Network Society is based on 1) 'a new technological paradigm', producing new forms of social organization and interaction 2) 'globalization', resulting in a worldly 'synergy' 3) the 'internet', allowing planetary hypertext sharing 4) 'the demise of the sovereign nation-state', "bypassed or rearranged in networks of shared sovereignty" (Castells, p. 294). As a consequence of the diffusion of new

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[43] In her volume *Espacements, Figure di spazi urbani nel tempo,* Choay (2003) defines the current space as a connection space where information and circulation coincide. This space, increasingly abstract and mediatised, consists of all the networks needed to make people, ideas and goods circulate.

[44] Original: "l'espace public n'est justement pas un lieu, mais la condition (un quasi-transcendental) de la mise en relation qui seule qualifie l'espace public" (Mongin, 2003); "comment nouer and dénouer, comment faire des nœuds, trouver le rhythme qui favorise une relation qui se noue pas trop (la foule, la fusion, la confusion) ou ne se dénoue pas trop (la separation, la fuite, la peur)?" (Mongin).

communication technologies, “territorial contiguity ceases to be a precondition for the simultaneity of interactive social practices” (Castells, p. 696). Clearly, this does not imply the sunset of the “space of places”, still being “physical proximity” and face relationships the most significant source of experience, but the surfacing of a new “space of flows”. As the author explains, “it is made of electronic circuits and information systems, but it is also made of territories, physical places, whose functional or symbolic meaning depends on their connection to a network, rather than on its specific characteristics as localities” (Castells, p. 969).

The Network Society becomes the setting for Michael Featherstone’s (1998) experiment aiming at adapting the Benjaminian 19th-century figure of the *flâneur* to the Postmodern city. Granted that the *flâneurie* is not only a ‘method of reading’, but also a ‘method of producing and constructing texts’ (Featherstone, p. 910), the passage from a “textual city” to the “data city” inevitably affects the *flâneur’*s experience of social life. Still being both a ‘waster’ and an alert observer of the world, at the same time involved and detached from the street, he goes through the changes contemporary public space undertakes. On the one hand, the rise of the traffic and new forms of mobility have restricted the practice of *flâneurie.* On the other hand, new forms of *flâneurie* have appeared (mobility of images, shopping etc.). Furthermore, *flâneurie* does not rhyme anymore with masculinity.

According to Featherstone (1998), the Internet, more and more substituting the role public square has traditionally played, has introduced a new dimension of *flâneurie,* “the increasing dissolution of the public time of the public time of viewing into privately controlled schedules” (p. 920). Nowadays, the virtual *flâneur* can outright access a chosen ‘street’ or skip to another one, “with everything potentially accessible, potentially visible” (p. 921). By and large, the main elements of contrast between the urban *flâneur* and the virtual one are the speed, mobility, scale and scope. Accordingly,

> the urban *flâneur* typically sauntered around, letting the impressions of the city soak into his subconscious. The electronic *flâneur* is capable of great mobility; his pace is not limited to the human body’s capacity for locomotion - rather, with the electronic media of a networked world, instantaneous connections are possible which render physical spatial differences irrelevant (Featherstone, 1998, p. 921).

Moreover, while the 19th-century Paris was restricted in size, the cyberspace of ‘data city’ or ‘city of bits’ is limitless, as well as unlimited are its usages. Cyberspace allows the visitor “move rapidly in and through the data” (Featherstone, 1998, p. 922), making him experience a “strong sense of immersion within a parallel world, where one could enjoy near full sensory involvement” (p. 22). This practice, likewise the non-virtual one, fulfils both aesthetical and fact-finding purposes. However, one aspect of the virtual experience, namely illegibility, seems to be a weakening factor. Information overload, already recurring in the Benjaminian *flâneurie,* becomes currently ‘chronic’ “as the boundaries of time and space become flexible and mutable as we move in and across virtual worlds” (Featherstone, p. 923).

*Figure 12. Lizzie's Plads, Copenhagen.*

## 2.5 New Rhythms of use of the Traditional Public Space

Thus far, we have roughed out some of the prominent landmarks affecting the current definition, and perception, of public space. However, the continuous effort scholars make in the reinterpretation of its nature proves the unrestful evolution, both in the use and perception, it constantly undergoes. As “an integral part of urban space and its transformation” (Degros et al., 2014, p. 1), public space represents the stage where climate and

demographic changes express themselves clearly and rowdy. As such, its rhythms can be read as the measure of the resilience to these radical transformations. The Network Society, with its cyberspace, can be considered just the tip of the iceberg of a more complex ongoing process of "despatialisation and re-spatialisation" (Madanipour, Cars, & Allen, 1998, p. 79). As Madanipour (2010) notes,

> public spaces mirror the complexities of urban societies: as historic social bond between individuals have become weakened or transformed, and cities have increasingly become agglomerations of atomized individuals, public open spaces have also changed from being embedded in the social fabric of the city to being a part of more impersonal and fragmented urban environments (p. 1).

After a post-Second World War public interest in urban development, resulting in great public sector schemes, the economic decline in the 1970s entailed a 'privatisation' of urban sector. Public goods, such as public spaces, even if representing a liability, didn't assure an immediate return of investment, neither in economic nor political terms for local authorities. Firstly, this resulted in a decrease of interest in public spaces from both public and private sectors, Madanipour (2010) resumes as follows:

> Social goods could not be delivered by the market, which had little interest in non-monetary forms of benefit. Social goods could not be delivered by the public sector either, as its financial ability to develop and maintain public spaces was undermined. There was a crisis about public goods in general, and about public space in particular (p. 4).

Later, it has gradually caused a privatisation of common spaces, more and more restricted and controlled. Clearly, within the global Neoliberal market paradigm, this process accelerated, and public goods had to face the new challenges launched by globalisation. As a consequence, over last decades public spaces, even though increased in number and dimensions, have fairly lost in significance. In Madanipour's (2010) words, "in the city of strangers, the meaning of public space becomes less personal, more transient, and at best merely functional and symbolic" (p. 5). In fact, while in the past public space was a catalyst of everyday encounters and a tool through which the social order was assured and eventually restored, in the modern world of anonymity and alienation – as Benjamin and Simmel prove – "non-converging networks" (Madanipour, p. 6) amass nameless individuals through transport, information and communication technologies, and public

spaces are absorbed by the service economy for their aesthetic value (as a key factor of urban regeneration). This transformation has resulted in a reshaped socio-spatial geography of territories, traced in the literature as the overtaking from "place" to "space".[45]

Sure enough, this shift exacerbates the contradictory socio-spatial phenomena of abstract space, such as social exclusion (Madanipour et al., 1998), which is "not necessarily equated with economic exclusion, although this form of exclusion is often the cause of a wider suffering and deprivation" (p. 76). Of course, the binomial exclusion/inclusion occurs as a fundamental factor of everyday life, through the distinction between public and private spheres. This traditional organizing principle, constantly conflicting – just think of the "tension between, on the one hand, the measurement and rules that consolidate the public infrastructure of time, and, on the other hand, the spontaneity of lived experience" (Madanipour, 2007, p. 180) -, becomes nowadays increasingly ephemeral due to the progressive process of privatisation of space and the impact of new technologies of communication.

Even though several forms of exclusion, whether institutionalised or individually improvised, are fundamental to social life, in order to assure a social balance, however, inclusion and exclusion, as well as appropriation and domination of space, must harmoniously coexist. "What is a negative state of affairs, therefore, is not exclusion in all its forms but an absence of inclusionary processes, a lack of a balance between exclusion and inclusion" (Madanipour et al., 1998, p. 77) in everyday practices**.** This imbalance occurs when groups suffering from economic, political or cultural (the three dimensions of social life, multidimensional experience *par excellence*)

[45] The difference between the two notions of "place" and "space", both basic components of our everyday life, is richly illustrated by Yi-Fu Tuan in his book *Space and Place* (Tuan, 1977). Here, he underlines how "human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom" (Tuan, p. 54), pause and action, respectively evoked by the concept of place and space. As a result, the two concepts are different but strongly interdependent. In order to provide a satisfactory elucidation of the matter, the Chinese-US geographer shows how knowledge as experience performs as a fundamental factor in the definition of a place. More precisely, experience, the knowledge gained from the external world, can be direct (senses) or indirect (symbols). Even if they all contribute to our perception of spatial qualities, the sensory organs and experiences that influence the spatial knowledge process the most are kinaesthesia, sight and touch. When we experience such an insight of the space to feel it familiar to us, it becomes a place (Tuan, p. 73).

exclusion are identifiable. Denial of the possibility of accessing to resources deriving from unemployment, exclusion from participating at the process of decision making and being politically represented, marginalisation from shared symbols and meanings (such as those languages, religion and nationality rely on). Briefly, social cohesion or exclusion are closely related to either the possibility or the denial of spatial access – translating itself the possibility or the refusal of access to resources, political processes and cultural codes. When social access is somehow impeded, cultural minorities, which often do not find a spatial dimension, sprout.[46]

At a global scale, exclusion is acted by national borders. In fact, "national borders are the largest means of socio-spatial exclusion", on a cultural level corresponding to exclusionary narratives - "which determine how 'we' are different from others, . . . often essential in blinding individuals together as a group" (Madanipour et al., 1998, p. 82). Conversely, at a local scale, the urban unit where these phenomena arise in all their complexity is that of the neighbourhood, where both land and property commodification and planning rationalization take place. Madanipour, Cars and Allen (1998) clarify:

> Space is a barrier and can act to exclude. It is also freedom from being included, from being subordinated. Space, therefore, can be utilised in both ways. What is needed is an urban form which allows freedom and security but not by segregation and exclusion (p. 85).

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[46] When talking about physical accessibility in public spaces, it is worthwhile to mention the emphasis John B. Jackson places onto roads, for him the protagonists of the contemporary landscape. He argues about the current validity of the traditional role played by architecture. For him, "much of our contemporary American landscape can no longer be seen as a composition of well-defined individual spaces – farms, counties, states, territories, and ecological regions – but as the zones of influence and control of roads, streets, highways: arteries which dominate and nourish and hold a landscape together and provide it with instant accessibility" (Jackson, 1994, p. VIII). This leads him to assert that "architecture in its oldest and most formal sense has ceased, at least in our newest landscapes, to symbolize hierarchy and permanence and sacredness and collective identity; and so far the road or highway has not taken over those roles" (Jackson, p. VIII). In the chapter consecrated to the *Accessible Landscape*, Jackson highlights how roads have always been considered a commercial vehicle instead of political means. In fact, the road is "a very powerful space" (Jackson, p. 6) capable of overturning or keeping the existing order, therefore making accessible a certain landscape. By facilitating accessibility, new roads have produced a "gradual but total destruction of the distinction between the life of the street and the life lived behind the facade" (Jackson, p. 9) – just think of drive-in. From this perspective, new "local" dimension cannot be completely based on the concept of territoriality. Accordingly, "what seems to bring us together in the new landscape is not the sharing of space in the traditional sense but a kind of sodality based on shared uses of the street or road, and on shared routines" (Jackson, p. 10), which attests the social character of these infrastructures.

In that regard, Madanipour (2003) alerts to the dichotomous character of neighbourhoods and their 'communities', at the same time "a means of differentiation" and "a framework for social integration" (pp. 153–161). While assuring a process of identification through the Lefebvrian right to be different (Lefebvre, 1991b) and representing the intermediate level for spatial organization (the social also responding to new environmental interest, property market demands etc.),[47] they could also fall victim of an excessive differentiation, "for individuals, to establish identity and social status, for developers, to distinguish their products from the rest, and for cities in their competition for resources in the global marketplace" (Madanipour, p. 161). In both the cases, public space performs as a collector and accelerator of these processes, in metropolitan as well as rural contexts.[48]

In conclusion, the increasing character of social exclusion requires rapid intervention strategies, consisting both in revising the (inevitable) processes of differentiation and, mostly, fostering inclusionary actions to promote

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[47] The practice of planning by neighbourhoods is increasingly widespread nowadays. The social aims of the programme run parallel to the growing attention to environmentally sustainable measures on the one hand, property market demands interests on the other.

[48] The topic is widely debated by Madanipour in *How relevant is 'Planning by Neighbourhoods' Today?* (2001). Here, the author discusses the relevance of the rising trend of 'micro-urbanism' or 'development by neighbourhoods' - also known as 'New Urbanism' in the US and 'liveable neighbourhoods' in Australia -, within the contemporary political, economic and cultural framework. This orientation to the design and development of small-scale neighbourhoods and liveable communities is not at all a new tendency in the urban planning debate. On the contrary, it has long been a recurring theme in the XIX-XX century urban discussion, particularly in reference to the utopian towns and industrial villages (e.g. Gibberd, Taylor, Mumford). The reason why this idea of planning by neighbourhoods mostly remained on paper is imputable to the excessive focus on the physical rather than the social environment. In fact, the belief that physical proximity between people was enough to create a sense of sharing was rejected as physical determinism. Nevertheless, it still represents a subject matter for discussion on the agenda of both professionals and scholars. The re-emergence of stress on neighbourhood scale is certainly connected to the concomitant 'rise of environmental awareness'. The small-scale unity is often seen as a sustainable form of urban development, especially if combined with a multi-use program and efficient system of public transport. By no means the sole environmentally friendly solution ('the linear development alongside transport corridors' and the 'compact cities' could act as alternative patterns), it performs more as a tool for growth management than for urban development. This function could be effective if supported by a 'joined-up' working between public and private sectors, promoting a new focus on the 'place' itself and social participation in the decision-making process. "Rather than a means of mobilising democratic forces in relation to a particular area, the neighbourhood becomes a means of management from outside" (Madanipour, p. 179). On an economic point of view, neighbourhoods also act as "a vehicle of market operation" (Madanipour, p.180). The increasing process of commodification of space, resulting from the growing conflict between exchange value and use value (see the chapter on Lefebvre) and producing a privatisation of space, leads land and propriety markets to institutionalise socio-spatial differences through the promotion of large-scale operations. Sure enough, these broader actions assure lower costs of production and a safer flow of return on investment.

accessibility at all levels – resulting, on a planning level, in spatial freedom. What is needed is new forms of governance, involving citizens in the decision-making, a "'joined up' working, crossing the barriers between various government agencies and between the public and private sectors" (Madanipour, 2003, p. 147). With explicit reference to Lefebvre, Madanipour et al. (1998) assert:

> How do we analyse space? There are many gaps and dilemmas associated with understanding space. From the centuries-old philosophical divide between absolute and relational space, to the gap between mental and real space, between physical and social space, to the gap between abstract and differential space, to the relationship between space and mass, space and time, and the variety of perspectives from which space can be studied, all bear the possibility of confusion and collision. It is possible to show, however, that to avoid the gasps and dilemmas associated with understanding space, we need to concentrate on the processes that produce the built environment. By analysing the intersection between space production and everyday life practices, we will be able to arrive at a dynamic understanding of space (p. 80).

Thierry Paquot (2009) also refers to social participation as the only solution for the use reduction and the loss of sense of belonging affecting public spaces, mainly due to the process of privatisation, reducing accessibility, and information control. Planning trends such as "New Urbanism", and social practices such as "shared space", "tactical urbanism" and so on, represent, both for Madanipour and Paquot, extraordinary efforts aiming at social participation. According to Paquot (2009),

> when public space (*versus* public debate) et public spaces (*versus* shared open spaces, even though often controlled and monitored) intertwine with active citizenship, they avoid generating tension and violence and slaloming between compromises and strategies (p. 102, own translation).[49]

Conversely, fostering the distance between people and public space means nourishing its frightful character. For Jordi Borja (1998), 'urban agoraphobia' represents the obvious consequence of contemporary non-integrating and protective public spaces, often over-fragmented by infrastructures. As they perform as the places suffering the most "the crisis . . . of the *urban* state" (Borja), they set the stage for the new planning challenges, such as the dialectic of mobilities-centralities. Most of all, they

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[49] Original: "Espace public (*versus* débat public) et espaces publics (*versus* lieux partagés et ouverts, bien que réglementés et parfois surveillés) s'entremêlent en une citadinité active, qui évite les écueils des tensions et des violences et slalome entre compromis et strategies" (Paquot, 2009, p. 102).

promote citizenship and social belonging, taking an active part in the complex dialectic between urban condition and political status. Clearly, "full citizenship is not acquired from the fact of living in a city. Neither is it sufficient to have a legal document that accredits this condition" (Borja). Hence, public spaces perform as political places, allowing the exercise of civic rights both to 'recognized' citizens and social minorities. As illegal or a-legal areas, frequently segmented, they often become the stage of urban violence acting as a claim to citizenship (Lefebvre, 1968). Reclaiming public space (Bodnar, 2015) means endorsing dynamics of social inclusion, civic responsibility, public interchange. In Lefebvre's (1970) words,

> we should use these places for self-management, more than participation and animation, two concepts about which I have some reservations. We should entrust the management of some of these spaces to groups of young blood in self-management, so that they shape their space, as well as citizens of big cities, do, that is, they appropriate space (p. 206, own translation).[50]

*Figure 11. Parc de Aguas, Lisbon.*

[50] Original: "Il faudrait au moins tenter de mettre une partie de ces espaces en autogestion plus que selon une participation ou animation, concepts sur lequels je formulerai quelques réserves. Il faudrait qu'une partie au moins de ces espaces soit confiée aux groupes de jeunesse en autogestion, de manière qu'ils y fassent quelque chose, ce qu'ils en fassent leur espace, qu'ils en fassent leur œuvre comme autrefois les citadins d'une grande cité façonnaient peu à peu les espaces, en faisaient leur bien: leur appropriation" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 206).

## 2.6 Possible Scenarios of Future Development

As an ongoing and never-ending changing entity, the future development of public space covers a broad spectrum of possible scenarios.

François Tomas (2001) contributes to this heated debate, suggesting a dual tendency. For him, on the one hand, the city public space is considerably decreasing. On the other hand, new forms of spatial publicness are emerging, especially in the outskirts (or even in Gilles Clement's *Third Landscape*) and in the countryside.

He dates the birth of contemporary public space in the years 1960-1970 as a result of the urban crisis produced by functional urbanism. Then, the development of a new urban culture due to the circulation of cars and the decline of traditional public space, running parallel to the socio-political, economic and technological revolution underway, has gone through a twofold process:

> While the city is carrying out renovations of public spaces, a remarkable expansion of previously unknown ones is taking place in the suburbs, in the countryside or even outside the *oekoumène*. . . The privatisation of the city denounced by Mike Davis, private malls and leisure centres run parallel to a 'publicisation' of extended lands usually used only by rural people (Tomas, p. 83, own translation).[51]

According to Tomas (2001), contemporary lifestyles, the growing social consciousness of environmental and heritage issues, and the democratisation of public transport have resulted, therefore, in a relocation of public spaces from the city to the countryside. Clearly, this phenomenon does not lead to the death of well-established expressions of public spaces. On the contrary, it provides for further settings of "socialisation and dreams" (p. 84). In his view,

> suburban parks, woods, *promenades*, waterfronts, regional and national reserves etc. both publicise rural areas and diversify public spaces within a more and more mobile society. Squares, streets and roads still perform their role of stage of collective identity

[51] Original: "Alors même que les espaces publics se renouvellent à l'intérieur des villes, ils connaissent en périphérie, voire en pleine campagne et au-delà même de l'*oekoumène*, un développement exceptionnel sous la pression de citadins en quête de nature, d'exercice physique ou d'enrichissement culturel. A la privatisation de la ville dénoncée par Mike Davis et aux centres privés, commerciaux ou de loisirs, répond en quelque sorte une ouverture au public urbain, une "publicisation" de vastes territoires naguère fermés ou utilisés par les seuls ruraux" (Tomas, 2001, p. 83).

> and individual *flânerie*. However, these new public spaces contribute to socialisation and dreaming (Tomas, p. 84, own translation).[52]

The imaginative dimension of 'natural' public space revokes Lefebvrian debate about the u-topian spaces new urban civilisation needs that he identifies in parks. Lefebvre (1970) emphasises that

> the creation of parks risks being hazardous if it is not addressed to social imaginary and, in particular, to that social category living in the imaginary, that is, youth. If parks do not give back to users both nature and work, if they do not add a dimension of freedom, they will result in something which does not correspond to what we expect (p. 206, own translation).[53]

By generalising the above, can we consider parks or, more precisely, rural areas as the contemporary alternatives to the traditional forms of public space as possible guarantors of the social imaginary? That is the issue debated in the next chapter.

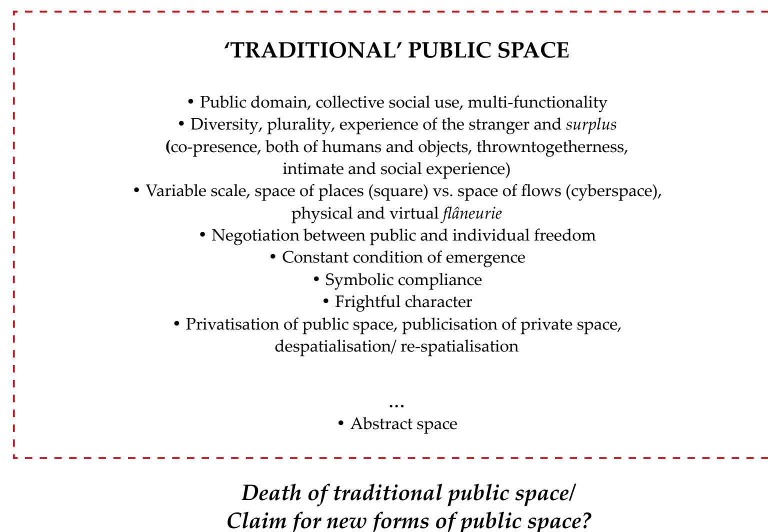


*Figure 10. Recapitulatory graph of the main themes discussed.*

[52] Original: "Les grands parcs suburbains, les forêts aménagées pour la promenade, les sentiers à thèmes, les chemins de grande randonnée, les littoraux, les champs de neige, les parcs naturels régionaux et nationaux, etc., "publicisent" les milieux ruraux et diversifient les espaces publics d'une société de plus en plus mobile. Tout autant que les places, les rues et les avenues, qui restent des lieux privilégiés d'identité collective tout comme de flânerie individuelle, ces nouveaux espaces publics du large contribuent à la socialisation et au rêve" (Tomas, 2001, p. 84).

[53] Original: "La création de parcs prend beaucoup de risques si on ne s'adresse pas à l'imaginaire social et surtout à une catégorie qui vit pour une part dans l'imaginaire, donc pas selon le réalisme, et qui s'appelle la jeunesse. Si on ne restitue pas simultanément – c'est une véritable paradoxe – la nature et œuvre, si le fait de sauver les ravages de l'industrie certains secteurs établit seulement un ensemble de contraintes et non pas une dimension de la liberté ou une restitution de la liberté, on aboutira à quelque chose qui ne sera certainement pas ce qui l'on veut" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 206).

# 3. THE COUNTRY SIDE OF PUBLIC SPACE

*I think we have finally come to realize that we no longer know how to use the traditional public space as an effective political instrument, and that we need a wide choice of very different kinds of public space.*

John B. Jackson

*We are better than we suppose; our landscape has an undreamed of potential for public spaces of infinite variety.*

John B. Jackson

Chapter 2 provides a brief account on the debate on public space as traditionally meant. The analysis of fundamentals conducts the investigation into the evolution of public life and, therefore, the insurgence of new dynamics in social spaces. That leads to the affirmation of the centrality of the role public spaces still play - against the accusations of their supposed decline (Fischer, 1981) or even end (Mitchell, 1995; Sennett, 1974; Sorkin, 1992) - and to the evaluation of 'new' forms of spatial publicness. That is to say, "the relationship of public space to public life is dynamic and reciprocal. New forms of public life require new public spaces" (Carr et al., 1992, p. 343) as well as the reinterpretation of existing open spaces. From this perspective, if cities are unquestionably sites of complex social interaction and cultural complexity *par excellence*, it does not necessary mean that their public space can be elected as representative of all public spaces. In fact, within this heated discussion on the dialectics between deep-rooted tradition of publicness and new modes of sociality, the rural context becomes emblematic of this contradiction.

Surprisingly enough, there has been hardly any professional and academic in-depth debate on what public spaces are in rural areas and how to deal with them. That is to say, the general issue of rural contexts has little been discussed in a wider theoretical perspective. Lefebvre (1970) himself,

more than fifty years ago, emphasises this imbalance, underlining that "we cannot avoid underlining the scarcity of documents and literary texts consecrated to the agricultural life, which markedly contrasts with the vast importance agriculture still has" (p. 23, own translation).[54] This shortage seems to be even more acute if we consider the relevance the rural dimension takes on the European scale. According to the *Report 2013* on the *Rural Development in the European Union* delivered by the European Commission, the 23% of the population of European Member States lives in predominantly rural areas, which represent the 52% of the EU territory (European Commission, 2013).[55] As for Italy, on average, rural areas have some of the highest GDP per capita among the OECD countries as well as the highest diversified economic base (European Commission, 2013). Even though agriculture has largely lost its preponderant economic role, rural employment and country areas are still very significant for the service industry. This evidence added up to the multi-functional character of these regions, simultaneously hosting economic and production, recreational, residential and preservation (of biodiversity, cultural heritage and so on) activities, confirms both the complexity and the relevance they bear as "breeding grounds for tensions and conflicts" (Mora, 2009, p. 31).

In the light of the above, the purpose of this chapter is to spark this debate, by staking out an alternative vision of public space centred around local country pace and geared towards facing global challenges through local peculiarities.

[54] Original: "Remarquons tout de suite la rareté des documents, des textes littéraires, nous renseignant sur la vie paysanne, et cela précisément dans les époques où l'agriculture prédominait encore largement. Ce fait, plein de sens, montre quels énormes fragments de réalités disparaissent dans les expressions idéologiques!" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 23).

[55] It is worth clarifying that the Union classifies the EU territory in three regions (predominantly rural, intermediate and predominantly urban areas) on the basis of the population grid. In particular, predominantly rural regions are those areas where more than the half the population lives in rural grid cells (European Commission, 2013), while intermediate ones are those where between 20% and 50% of populations lives in rural grid cells. Finally, predominantly urban areas are those with less than 20% population living in rural cells.

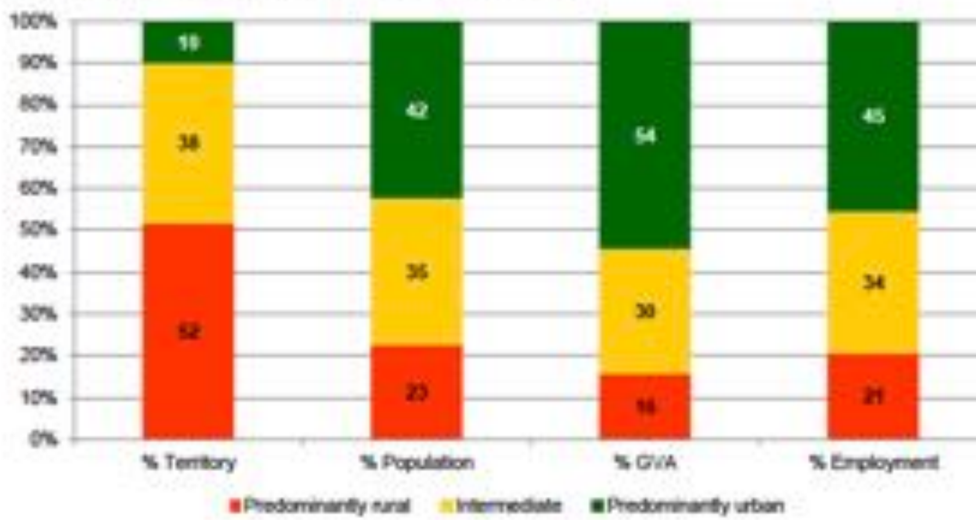


*Figure 11. Importance of EU rural areas (Source: European Commission, 2013, p. 52).*

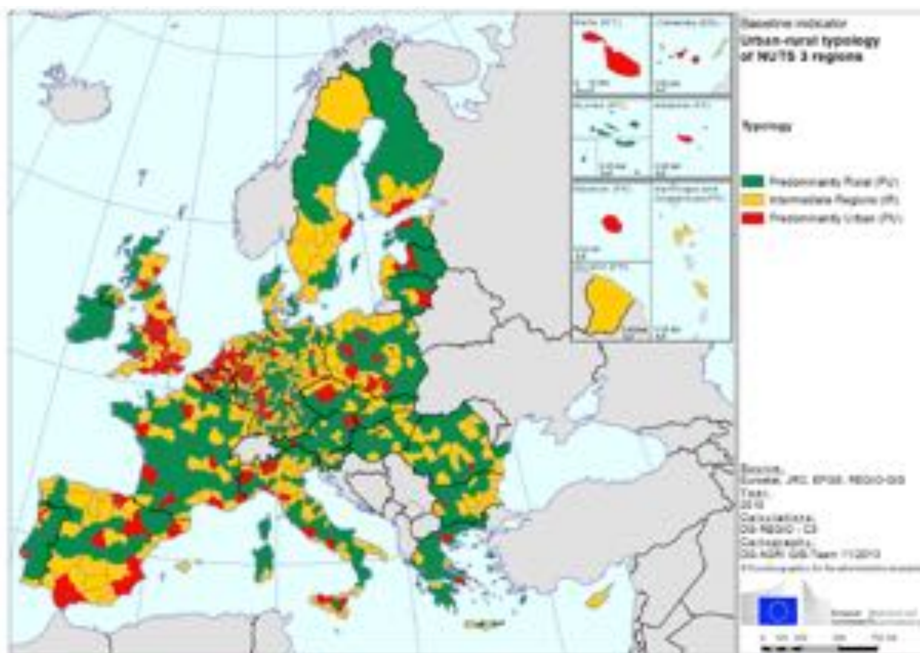


*Figure 12. Distribution of rural areas among the European Member States (Source: European Commission, 2013, p. 50).*

## 3.1 An Apparent Oxymoron, between "Nature" and "Culture"

In the previous chapter we have clarified that "while the city is the characteristic locus of urbanism, the urban mode of life is not confined to cities" (Wirth, 1938, p. 1). As Wirth observes, the urban is not commensurate with the number of inhabitants of the cities, since the impact cities exert upon social life is much more significant than urban population would suggest:

> We may infer that rural life will bear the imprint of urbanism in the measure that through contact and communication it comes under the influence of cities. . . . While the locus of urbanism as a mode of life is, of course, to be found characteristically in places which fulfil the requirements we shall set up as a definition of the city, urbanism is not confined to such localities but is manifest in varying degrees wherever the influences of the city reach (p. 7).

It goes without saying that this sphere of influence significantly extends in the places of flows of the Network Society, shaped by "interconnected nodes and individuals" (*Monu #16 Non-urbanism*, 2012, p. 65). However, going beyond the division between city and countryside and 'negotiating a pact' between the two parts means to recognise strength to the city as well as the rural (Magnaghi, 2014; Magnaghi & Fanfani, 2010). Lefebvre (1996) himself excludes the possibility of a "reciprocal neutralization" of the two poles:

> Will the urban fabric, with its greater or lesser meshes, catch in its nets all the territory of industrialized countries? Is this how the old opposition between town and country is overcome? One can assume it, but not without some critical reservations. If a generalized confusion is thus perceived, the countryside losing itself into the heart of the city, and the city absorbing the countryside and losing itself in it, this confusion can be theoretically challenged. Theory can refute all strategies testing on this conception of the urban fabric. Geographers have coined to name this confusion an ugly but meaningful neologism: the *rurban*. Within this hypothesis, the expansion of the city and urbanization would cause the urban (the urban life) to disappear. This seems inadmissible. In other words, the overcoming of opposition cannot be conceived as a reciprocal neutralization. There is no theoretical reason to accept the disappearance of centrality in the course of the fusion of urban society with the countryside. The 'urbanity-rurality' opposition is accentuated rather than dissipated, while the town and country opposition is lessened (p. 120).

Countryside and city, therefore, could be considered in a *continuum* where what happens *within* is as important as what happens *between* (*Monu #16 Non-urbanism*, 2012). Changes in the modes of everyday city life strongly influence rural areas, as well as rural transformations have always been

considerably impacting city rhythms. However, both realities do have their own specificity.

In *Perspective de la Sociologie Rurale,* Lefebvre (1970), who has cultivated his interest in the relationship between city and country throughout his life (Coleman, 2015), already convincingly argues about the above-mentioned specific and varied character rural contexts show:

> It is possible to talk about a peasant «world». Clearly, this does not mean that peasant reality represents an isolated «world». Conversely, it refers to its extraordinary variety and its own characters. [Yet] this reality has long been unheeded, especially when quantitatively and qualitatively dominating social life (p. 63, own translation). [56]

Peasant world has long been a neglected area of research, especially with reference to how social life deploys in country regions. This gap appears to be even more significant if we consider the effects the Urban Revolution has produced on the relationship between man and nature. Lefebvre's (1970) depiction of the process underway is illustrative:

> The notion of nature changes. It evolves. There is no contact with nature anymore. Ideologies claiming the existence of this contact are wrong. Nature becomes symbolic for the citizen. A Parisian having a farmhouse in the countryside does not go to the countryside. He conveys the city with him. Coming to his farmhouse, he destroys the countryside. He makes it disappear as well as tourists visiting ancient cities do. . . Picturesque and nature are two completely different concepts (p. 205, own translation).[57]

Nature escapes the process of transformation of the countryside, the enjoyment of which is increasingly connected to its picturesque character. More precisely, while the countryside, simultaneously production and *oeuvre,* is subject to the overall process of commodification of space, [58] nature remains outside market dynamics. In Lefebvre's (1996) words:

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[56] Original: "On peut parler d'un «monde» paysan, non pas en ce sens que la réalité paysanne constituerait un «monde» *isolé*, mais à cause de sa variété extraordinaire et de ses caractères propres. [Néanmoins] cette réalité a été longtemps ignorée, et particulièrement losqu'elle dominait quantitativement et qualitativement la vie sociale" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 63).

[57] Original: "La notion de nature se transforme; elle évolue; il n'y a plus de contact avec la nature; les idéologies attachées à ce contact s'estompent aussi. La nature devient symbolique pour le citoyen de la ville. Le Parisien qui a une maison de campagne ne va pas à la campagne. Il véhicule avec lui la ville; il l'emporte; il détruit la campagne en venant dans sa maison de campagne; il la fait disparaître à peu près comme le touriste fait disparaître ce qu'il cherche d'authenticité dans la ville ancienne. . . Le pittoresque et la nature, ces sont deux choses passablement différentes, deux concepts profondément différents" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 205).

[58] In the wake of Lefebvre, John Brinckerhoff Jackson (1994) extends this statement to public spaces in general. He assumes that "what we now see is the proliferation of ad hoc public spaces were the

> Nature as such escapes the hold of rationally pursued action, as well as from domination and appropriation. More precisely, it remains outside of these influences: it 'is' what flees: it is reached by the imaginary; one pursues it and it flees into the cosmos, or in the underground depths of the world. The countryside is the place of production and *oeuvres*. Agricultural production gives birth to products: the landscape is an *oeuvre.* This *oeuvre* emerges from the earth slowly moulded, linked originally to the groups which occupy it by a reciprocal consecration, later to be desecrated by the city and urban life (which capture this consecration, condense it, then dissolve it over through the ages by absorbing it into rationality) (p. 118).

This unresolved tension between nature and culture seems to be at the heart of the origins of public parks as well as of the claim for new peripheral public spaces.

Jackson (1984) acknowledges that when public parks spread out around Europe and America in the wake of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century English 'picturesque landscape park', they assumed the existence of other places of recreation. These "much livelier", "less formal" and "less structured" (Jackson, p. 128) environments, such as beaches and waterfronts, remained untouched by the architectural creative or regulatory intervention, were places where to enjoy as well as participate in community life. These natural areas, the persistence of which was generally ensured by history as well as tradition, acted as playgrounds where common people, especially adolescents, used to play sports and games more "based on notions of territoriality and community status" than "with the design of the terrain in question or with 'contact with nature'" (Jackson, p. 128). Nor were such 'improvised' playground only located in the village. On the contrary, they often rose up along the banks of a river or, more generally, in the so-called *terrains vagues*, virgin lands often placed outside the walls.

The loss, over time, of these unstructured extemporary playgrounds which fostered creativity, "self-awareness as members of society and awareness of our private relationship to the natural environment" (Jackson, p. 130), in favour of a "professionally designed park" (Jackson, p. 130), has

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interaction and confrontation of the marketplace prevails: the flea market, the competitive sports event, the commercial street . . ., the parking lot" (Jackson, p. 116). As he sees it, the park now acts as "one space out of many, now serving an invaluable function primarily for children, older people, and the dedicated student of nature, while the more mobile, more gregarious elements seek recreation in shopping malls, in the street, on the open road" (Jackson, p. 116).

resulted in the lack of multipurpose, open-air, spontaneous, often unbeautiful, public spaces.

The need for natural, unplanned outlying forms for social gatherings is also registered by Carr, Francis, Rivlin and Stone (1992), who reflect on the transformations of public spaces in the period of knowledge-based and service-related industries. Public welfare, aesthetic and psychological reasons, economic development, global warming, political reasons (e.g. empowerment of citizens), and so on, have resulted in the demand for different forms of public space as well as the claim for use of former industrial waterfronts and "urban wilds", "open to walkers and wildlife" (Carr et al., p. 8). From this perspective, new forms of public space increasingly mean "not only to protect the environment but to enhance it by working with natural processes" (Carr et al., p. 354). As a result, "the typical urban open spaces to be found in most cities will include large-scale linear systems, located principally along paths of movement and waterways" (Carr et al., p. 357). After all,

> water bodies and waterways, once thought of as obstacles to be overcome or as resources to be exploited for industrial use, are now seen as recreational opportunities and strongly active settings for new urban development. . . Sometimes these waterfronts will offer opportunities to preserve natural areas, but more often they will be sites for major new open spaces with citywide appeal, comparable to building the great central parks of the nineteenth century. Strong public pressure will mandate continuous public access to the water's edge. Typically, there will be an esplanade or trail/ along the edge or near it for strolling, jogging and resting. Cycling and even horseback riding will usually require a separate path. There will be one or more public parks of the pastoral sort with "meadows" for relaxation and informal play, wooded areas, and special gardens. There will also be piers for getting out in the water and for fishing, and marinas for pleasure boating. There may be active urban plazas, especially at the ends of important streets. The reuse of these waterfronts will be celebrated in annual festivals (Carr et al., p. 348-349).

Increasingly, the drama of communal life moves outside the city walls towards more natural, large-scale and undesigned settings. Blue and green infrastructures, initially perceived as boundaries among communities, now represent the opportunity to create social contacts and shared spatial

strategies. When meeting farming areas, they can make strong connections among the individual household, the rhythm of place and global flows.[59]

*Figure 13. Arnaldo Caprai farm, Montefalco, Perugia.*

## 3.2 Rural Public Space. A Renewed Form of Public Space

No doubt, rural areas have all the features to host the new patterns of 'large-scale' social gatherings. The reduction in the physical space of the network of interpersonal relationships, the 'résidentialisation' and panoptical control (both in terms of surveillance and use anticipation) of social space, its fragmentation in "functional colors", the 'publicisation' of private space and so on we observe in the traditional metropolitan settings seem here to be relatively neutralised by its nature. The changes in the rhythms of use and perception we observe in city public spaces occur here quite naturally because of the intrinsic character of the areas themselves.

According to Delbaere (2010), rural public spaces share some common features:

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[59] In *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces,* W. H. Whyte (1980) highlights the importance water assumes in open space design. Even though relevant to all senses, it is mainly connected to touch and hearing. As a result, touching it through different access points and hearing its soothing sound through fountains, waterfalls, etc. represent the best ways to experience it.

> On the one hand, they share some morphological traits, that is, they are extended, often immense, they are open and faintly, even though firmly, furnished. . . . On the other hand, their social legitimacy comes from the fact that they authorise and provide a common frame with the diffused sociability. . . . They detect the exact dimension (p. 70, own translation).[60]

Firstly, intersubjective relations develop here on a larger scale. As Delbaere (2010) suggests, the traditional “contact based sociability” (“sociabilité de contact”) taking place in the public square is now replaced by the “diffused sociability” (“sociabilité diffuse”) of the park, since "the social now lies and lives nearby, not inside public space" (Delbaere, p. 77, own translation).[61] As a consequence, these 'new' public spaces (rural parks, regional natural parks, “rurban” areas etc.) are no more accidentally crossed, but their fruition the result of a deliberated choice.

Secondly, in 'poorly designed' rural areas, activities are plural and uses spontaneous. Here, public space simultaneously acts as the setting of sport activities, occasional promenades, fishing, sporadic cultural events, public open-air museums, and the physical mediator between visitors and farmers (promoting a direct trade of their products, for example). Being the density of inhabitants very low, its landscape, more than social interactions, preserves local identity.

Thirdly, more than in metropolitan settings, private and privatising action becomes an integral part of rural publicness, even orientating public planning. Even though always acting as ‘guarantor’ of general interest and ‘arbitrator’ of possible use conflict, the State is no more the only responsible of public spaces. Delbaere (2010) explains:

> Considering the private citizen an actor of public space instead of a simple user or a destroyer means acknowledging that the form of space is not a project, but what already exists as produced by private action, that is, landscape (p. 105, own translation).[62]

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[60] Original: "D’une part, ils partagent certains traits morphologiques: ils sont grands, immense même, il sont ouverts and ils sont faiblement (mais fermament) aménagés. . . . D’autre part, leur légitimité sociale provient de ce qu’ils autorisent et fournissent un cadre social admissible à la sociabilité diffuse de l’entre-soi. . . . Ils relèvent désormais de l’evénementialité" (Delbaere, 2010, p. 70).

[61] Original: " Ici et désormais, le social gît et vit à côté, et non plus à l’intérieur de l’espace public” (Delbaere, 2010, p. 77).

[62] Original: "Penser le privé comme acteur à part entière, et non plus seulement comme utilisateur, voire comme altérateur de l’espace public, c’est admettre que la forme de l’espace n’est pas ce que le projet porté par la collectivité doit fair advenir au coeur du maquis des actions intéressées des acteurs,

On this subject, Delbaere insists that this 'unconventional' approach where design practices are guided by private traces is also significant for facing the environmental and social challenges the contemporary city poses. That is, these 'new-generation' public spaces provide support for the agri-forestry and water management on a wider scale. Their vast scale and polyvalent nature result in landscape continuity capable of overpassing urban tissue discontinuity.

The role private actors play in the process of 'recomposition' of the social contract between the agricultural world and civil society has long been debated by Vincent Banos and Jacqueline Candau (2006, 2008). They focus on the increasing demand for 'opening' rural areas to new uses connected to the cultural heritage and aesthetic character of these regions and their public value. In particular, they examine three constitutive aspects of public spaces also recognisable in farm areas: the material, the political and the semantic dimension. Accessibility, collective will and practices of sense construction perform as the main indicators of the level of publicness of rural areas. When talking about accessibility, the authors underline the two levels composing it - that we have already met in the previous chapter. On the one hand, physical accessibility ratifies the 'juridical' status of a public space. On the other hand, "implicit accessibility" labels a space as a public one.

Generally speaking, public spaces perform as freely walkable and crossable areas. Nevertheless, the radicalisation of this concept produced by a carefully planned layout can result in an "organised segregation", sharpened by the complex hybrid relationship between public and private areas. When talking about rural spaces, their polyvalent and flexible nature, together with the absence of visible barriers, confer them an implicit open character. This formal openness, even if not necessarily implying co-presence, results in random encounters, being rural space firstly the "space of nature". As for the political dimension of public spaces as meant by Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, rural spaces can be read as the institutional stage where the environmental debate takes place. In that regard, the tension between the autonomy of public space and the

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mais au contraire ce qui est déjà là, l'existant, produit spontanément par l'action privée et pragmatique des individus et des groupes, c'est-à-dire, . . . le paysage " (Delbaere, 2010, p. 105).

institutional layout, practices of appropriation and domination, inevitably manifests in power balances among users. The opening up of agricultural areas to new activities requires a direct renegotiation, at present still behind-the-scenes, on their role among local actors and random users. This 'transitional' character of rural spaces leads the authors to state that, in the countryside, "public space has to be considered as a semantic composition resulting in ephemeral forms and scattered places" (Banos & Candau, 2008, p. 190, own translation).[63]

In order to provide a definition of what social relations are in rural public spaces, Banos and Candau (Banos & Candau, 2006) define a threefold degree of interaction corresponding to three 'progressive' dimensions of space, 'espace ouvert', 'lieu' and 'espace public', and their respective social relations. At first glance, an 'espace ouvert' is the place where the other is entirely absent. Here, the experience of socio-spatiality occurs through intimate individual norms making its enjoyment narcissistic and hedonistic (e.g. the landscape for a visitor). Later on, the encounter with the other takes place in the 'lieu', stage of the deployment of intersubjectivity through the experience of coexistence (e.g. simultaneous presence of a farmer and a visitor). However, the place where this coexistence is built, by means of public debate and social interaction, is public space. When talking about countryside, it both deals with everyday practices and institutional actions:

> This fluidity and complexity confer two meanings to the notion of "rural space publicization". According to Hervieu and Viard, it implies the opening of these spaces to different practices, therefore the end of the exclusivity of the agricultural one. For Micoud, it refers to the countryside as a topic of public debate. Countryside, more than rural space, would be of public interest both for a sense of belonging and the protection of nature (Banos & Candau, 2006, p. 109, own translation). [64]

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[63] Original: "Il nous faut peut-être considérer l'espace public en milieu rural comme étant une composition sémantique qui se manifeste concrètement en des formes éphémères et des lieux disperses" (Banos & Candau, 2008, p. 190).

[64] Original: "Cette fluidité et cette complexité donnent deux sens au terme «publicisation de l'espace rural». Sous la plume de Hervieu et Viard (1996) il faut entendre l'ouverture de ces espaces à des pratiques plus diverses, et la fin de la (relative) exclusivité agricole. Sous la plume de Micoud (2001) il s'agit de la campagne comme objet d'intérêt et de débat public. La campagne – plus que l'espace rural - serait l'objet d'un intérêt public, à double titre: en tant qu'ancrage local et en tant qu'espace de protection des ressources naturelles" (Banos & Candau, 2006, p. 109).

*Figure 14. Implicit accessibility of the rural public space. Angeli di Rosora, Ancona.*

## 3.3 The Rural Historical Landscape and its 'Proactivity'

Open space, place and public space represent three progressive moments of the socio-spatial experience of landscape. The amplified rhythms of use of rural areas make its action more decisive than before. An interesting focus on the importance of farming in the interscalar planning strategies is provided by Pierre Donadieu. More than his notion of *campagnes urbaines* (Donadieu, 2012, 2013a), however, what concerns the present study is the concept of a renovated relationship connecting people to the rural landscape.

Donadieu (1999) points out that nowadays the countryside is mainly perceived as a reserve of landscape amenities. The progressive ‘urbanisation’ of rural areas on the one hand, the increasing socio-economic and cultural global complexity on the other hand, imply that farmers are no more the only legitimate users shaping rural landscape (the “landscape gardeners”). “The countryside, in both its reality and its representation, is culturally divided into its origins, related to food production, and its future role, that of receiving and entertaining in accordance with socio-aesthetic categories that are in continual evolution” (Donadieu, 1999, p. 68), therefore subject to a plurality of actors (public institutions, professionals, local community etc.). Moreover, the hybrid character of current ‘urbanised countryside’ requires the interchange – the same Lefebvre longs for - of theories and practices once

far away one each other, that is, architecture, urbanism, landscape architecture, geography, sociology, philosophy (Donadieu, 2006).

Donadieu underlines the polysemous character country areas traditionally take on as the expression of a collective appropriation of rural space (simultaneously by inhabitants, tourists, farmers). The preservation of this multiplicity, both guaranteed by a 'bottom up' approach to design and the promotion of 'territorial narratives' (Donadieu, 2013b), is essential to hold the social value of farmlands. Within the new market of tangible and intangible goods, farmers are, in his view, the key figure of the ongoing social and economic transformation, "as playing an essential role in the formation of landscape" (Donadieu, 1999, p. 71).

Alberto Magnaghi (2014) underlines the significant role historical rural landscapes play in the process of "striking a balance among settlement, productive activities and *milieu*" (p. 33) since they act as 'knowledge holders' against the new diseconomies of scale and climate change challenges. They represent 'heritage clusters' on which those processes, Magnaghi refer to as 'retro-innovation' (p. 34), are based. In particular, autonomy and ecological complexity of production, therefore local-based economies, hydrogeological safeguard, local dimension of environmental cycles (e.g. of waters, waste) and energy production, cultural identity and quality of landscape represent, in his view, the most notable aspects of farming tradition. This cultural baggage accounts for a great asset to face the challenges Urban Society and its public space impose.

Daniela Poli (Gisotti, 2015; Magnaghi, 2014) focuses on the potential of agricultural land to be read on a territorial scale as an agro-urban public space. The scenario painted by Poli envisages a polyvalent ecological network capable of offering ecosystem services to the local community, hence producing territorial economies of proximity. Private farms fostering multifunctional agriculture become part of this public network providing leisure, commerce, didactic and tourist activities (the landscape tourism mentioned above). This reticulated character makes infrastructures, especially those related to 'sweet mobility', crucial for the fruition and promotion of these areas and their connection to cities. In particular, "cycling lanes and crosswalks materially link the city with the countryside,

intercepting the focal points of public space" (Magnaghi, 2014, p. 59, own translation)[65] and preserving the human scale despite the radical transformation of spatial rhythms. On a social point of view, the network structure also results, as observed by Delbaere, in a scattered multi-scalar sociability, which represents what differentiates the urban from the rural spatial publicness the most. Both cultural ecosystem services, also provided by broad-spectrum agricultural activities, and multiscalar social interactions, largely depending on the economies of proximity, give rural areas their multi-layered character of public spaces. Simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal, continuous even if netlike, multi-functional and multi-scalar (Magnaghi, 2014), rural public spaces promote and are promoted by the landscape, acting as "the personal and tribal history made visible" (Tuan, 1977, p. 157), its historical heritage and identity.

*Figure 15. An example of rural historical landscape. Inish Mor, Aran Islands, Ireland.*

To sum up, rural historical landscapes now act a much more complex role than the assumed minor intermediary one. Real "heritage clusters",

[65] Original: "Dei percorsi di attraversamento pedonali e ciclabili dovranno collegare materialmente la città e la campagna, intercettando dei punti focali dello spazio pubblico in ogni settore della città" (Magnaghi, 2014, p. 59). To that regard, it is worth highlighting, again, the importance John Brinckerhoff Jackson attaches to the roads. He declares them to be the most versatile element of the contemporary landscape (Jackson, 1994, p. 191). According to the American writer, roads, streets, alleys cannot be seen anymore as simple transport infrastructures. Conversely, they more and more perform as "scene of work and leisure and social intercourse and excitement" (Jackson, p. 198). In other words, "roads no longer merely lead to places; they are places" (Jackson, p. 190), since they promote (and attracts) growth and development as well as dispersion. As such, he considers them "the first and most basic public space" (Jackson, p. 198).

simultaneously knowledge holders, socio-aesthetic category, eco-system service and economic assets, they play a proactive function in the collective sensemaking process of the social experience of rural public space. Certainly supported by technological devices, which both sustain ordinary everyday actions and contribute to the narrative of the sense of place (and time), rural landscapes express "the different temporalities of modernity, tradition, memory and transformation" (Amin, 2008, p. 12). Moreover, when meeting rivers, historically the real "artery" (Schama, 2004) of a place and still intersection of the different systems composing a territory - namely the environmental, the dwelling, the productive and the infrastructural (Pavia, 1998, 2002) -, they shape an emblematic urban "void" (Lefebvre, 2003b).

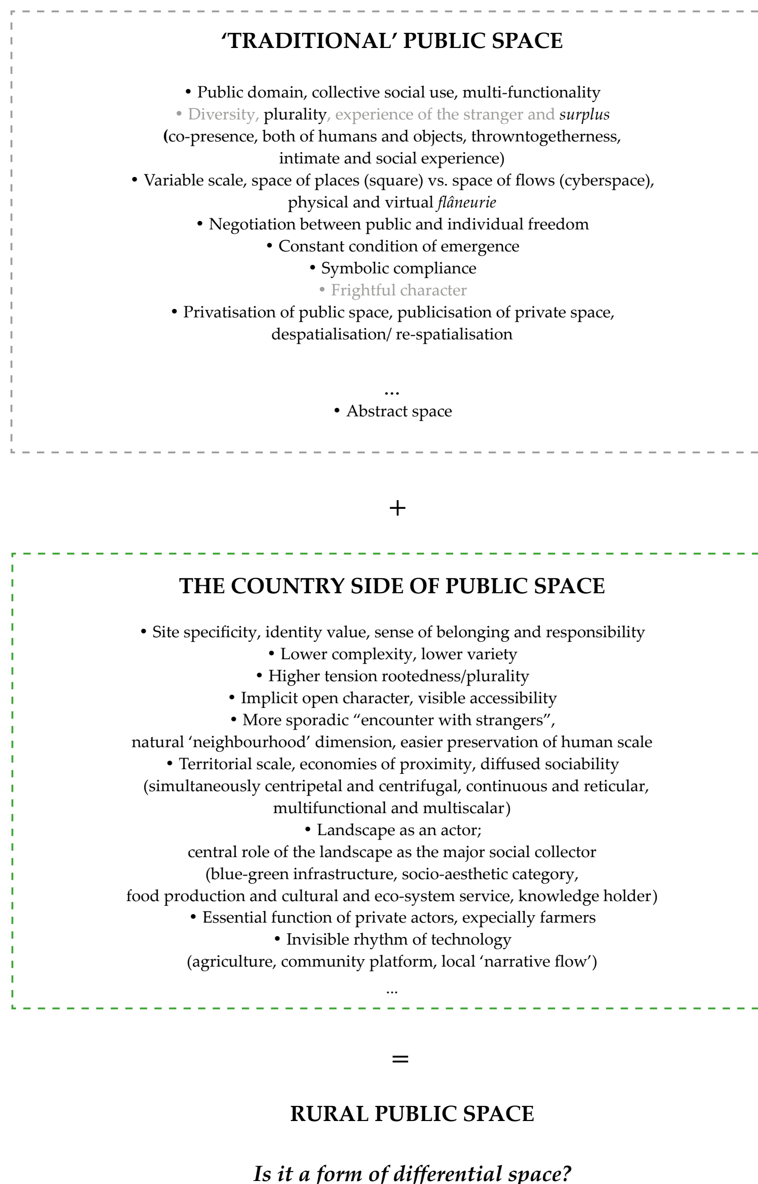


*Figure 15. Traditional public space and rural public space. A comparison.*

# 4. LEFEBVRE 'APPLIED'

## WORKING IN THE 'FIELD': THE ESINO VALLEY

*Où se trouve la philosophie? Dans les livres, superbes, célèbres. La non-philosophie? Dans les écrits, aussi, chez les poètes, chez les tragiques. La vie quotidienne, où se trouve-t-elle? Partout. Ailleurs. Non écrite, mal décrite. Il faut aller voir sur place.*

Henri Lefebvre

*Parmi ce qui - citadins, intellectuels, voire historiens ou sociologues – traversent un des nos village, découvrent son visage original ou incertain, s'étonnent de sa torpeur ou admirent son «pittoresque», combien savent que ce village ne se réduit pas à un pêle-mêle accidentel d'homme, de bêtes, et de choses, que son examen révèle une organisation complexe, une «structure»?*

Henri Lefebvre

In the previous chapters, I have tried to apply Lefebvre's argumentation to the heated debate on public space. The formulated hypothesis concerning the supposed shift towards different forms of public space needs to be proved and supported by further evidence. Hence, this chapter seeks to collect information from the field, that is, the Esino River Valley, particularly the region surrounding the *Flumen* project area involving the four municipalities of Rosora, Maiolati Spontini, Castelplanio and Cupramontana. The aim of the following study is to try to reach an understanding of how sociality of this particular rural area has evolved over the last decades, through the investigation of its daily existence and rhythms. Provided that "the relations between everyday life and rhythms" represent "the concrete modalities of social time" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 73), as a fieldworker grounded in the Esino valley I have attempted to identify myself with

> the portrait of an enigmatic individual who strolls with his thoughts and his emotions, his impressions and his wonder, through the streets of large Mediterranean towns, and whom we shall call the 'rhythmanalist'. More sensitive to times than to spaces, to moods than to images, to the atmosphere than to particular events, he is strictly speaking neither psychologist, nor sociologist, nor anthropologist, nor economist;

> however, he borders on each of these fields in turn and is able to draw on the instruments that the specialists use. He therefore adopts a transdisciplinary approach in relation to these different sciences. He is always 'listening out', but he does not only hear words, discourses, noises and sounds; he is capable of listening to a house, a street, a town as listens to a symphony, an opera. Of course, he seeks to know how this music is composed, who plays it and for whom. He will avoid characterising a town by a simple subjective trait . . . He does not only observe human activities, he also hears [*entend*] (in the double sense of the word: noticing and understanding) the temporalities in which these activities unfold (Lefebvre, 2004, pp. 87–88).

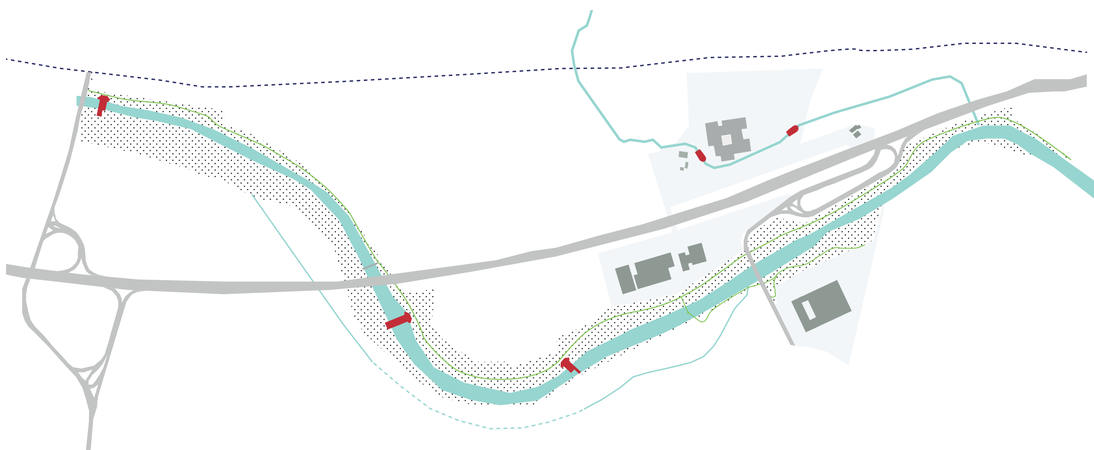

*Figure 16. Trait of the Esino River involved in the Flumen project.*

The field chosen is pertinent and challenging at the same time. On the one hand, it recalls Lefebvre's interest in rural areas. On the other hand, it extends the boundaries of his analytical experiment, which performs both as a fact-finding and a designing tool, to include inner country areas, trying a

more practical application of this work. With regard to the latter point, that concerning the 'risky' but original aspect of the study, it must be said that even though conceived by the author himself as practice-oriented, Lefebvre's works have long been considered as 'purely theoretical' (Stanek et al., 2014, p. 5) and the efforts to expand them to empirical analysis has not been untroubled. As extensively discussed before,

> while his theory has gradually found better understanding in recent years, and many of his concepts have been debated and clarified, the question of empirical application has long remained opaque. Lefebvre did not really offer clarification here, as his books remain elusive when it comes to this question, and the examples he gives are often more illustrative in character than exact in presenting detailed results of concrete field research (Schmid, 2015, p. 35).

In particular, the example of the integration of everyday life and rhythms showed in *Attempt at the Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities* (Lefebvre, 2004) does not completely achieve this goal.

As for the first point, suffice it to say that the Aquitanian philosopher longs for "a science of social space, as space both urban and rural, but predominantly rural" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 367). More specifically, there are at least three reasons supporting the 'affiliation' of the fieldwork to Lefebvre's theory. First and foremost, Lefebvre's early works focus on the complex character of rural sociology, country material balances [*équilibres matériels*] and conflicts, and "a consciousness, which is difficult to choose and even more to define, that is, a mix of caution, venture, mistrust, credulity, routine: the peasant wisdom" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 21, own translation).[66] The initial empirical research which significantly influenced Lefebvre's thought on the "agricultural communities" [*communautés paysannes*] was in the Campan valley, in the Pyrenees, commissioned in 1943 and resulted in *La Vallée de Campan: étude de sociologie rurale* in 1963. Even though originating in the Occitania region, his study soon extended to international cases, such as the transformation of the agrarian structure in socialist states like Hungary, and the Central European and Mediterranean rural communities. That led him to a comprehensive definition of farming community. In Lefebvre's (1970) words, a peasant or rural community is

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[66] Original: "Une conscience, difficile à saisir et plus encore à définir, curieux mélange de prudence, d'initiative, de méfiance, de crédulité, de routine: la sagesse paysanne" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 21).

> a form of social grouping, . . . a set of families connected to the ground. These elementary groups owns, on the one hand, collective or individual goods, on the other hand, «private» goods, on the basis of variable but historically determined relationships. They are joined by designated collective disciplines aiming at achieving this goal of general interest (p. 34, own translation).[67]

Sure enough, this elucidation can be considered somehow dated. Lefebvre (1970) himself, later on, writes, "rural life is not autonomous anymore [in the urban era]. It cannot evolve anymore according to absolute rules. It is directly connected to general economy, national life, urban life, modern technology" (p. 40, own translation).[68] However, the original essence of peasant community can still be considered influential in the current character of agricultural areas, while the notion related to the coexistence of different forms of goods is definitely crucial.

Secondly, the French scholar refers to Central Italy and its sharecropping system to illustrate what he means for "agrarian structure". This interest acted as the driving force which made him travel to Tuscany (in that respect, he complained about the lack of economic resources for further empirical research), the study of which led to his *Traité de sociologie rurale* - then stolen and never reconstructed (Stanek, 2011). What he admired was the connection the region had with its deeply rooted agricultural past through the preservation, even in the layout of its principal cities, of the original Medieval agrarian structure.[69] This bond, also traceable in the Marche region, shows how favourable was the *métayage* system:

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[67] Original: "Une forme de groupement social, organisant selon des modalités historiquement déterminées, un ensemble de familles fixées au sol. Ces group élémentaires possèdent d'une part des biens collectifs ou indivis, d'autre part des biens «privés», selon des rapports variables, mais toujours historiquement déterminés. Ils sont liés par des disciplines collectives et désignent – tant que la communauté garde une vie propre – des responsables mandatés pour diriger l'accomplissement des ces tâche d'*intérêt général*" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 34).

[68] Original: "La vie paysanne n'a plus rien aujourd'hui d'autonome [dans l'ère urbaine]. Elle ne peut plus évoluer selon des lois distinctes; elle se relie de multiples façons à l'économie générale, à la vie nationale, à la vie urbaine, à la technologie moderne" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 40).

[69] The sharecropping system is also central in Turri's (2008) treatise on landscape. He sets the example of Tuscan *métayage* to emphasise the influence aesthetical incidences, which are inversely proportional to practical needs, exercise on the image of landscape. He explains: "It is not by chance that Tuscan landscape is so well constructed. It comes from sharecropping arrangements, where the money for rustic funds improvement belonged to the master, that is, the rich urban bourgeois. The small landowner, distressed by tough economic problems, could never have afforded, for example, to plant cypress trees as a decoration of his little farm" (p. 160-161, own translation).

> In the sharecropping system, the peasant, who was the real dealer and heir of the land exploitation, became free. Therefore, it was in his own interest to increase his work and to raise productivity. The landowner himself, however, collects a considerable proportion of the produce, that is, the half. Hence, he took advantage of the rise in production (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 42, own translation).[70]

Thirdly, Lefebvre (2004) was extremely intrigued by the Mediterranean area, according to him the area where "urban, which is to say public, space becomes the site of a vast staging where all these relations with their rhythms show and unfurl themselves. Rites, codes and relations make themselves visible there" (p. 96). In that respect, there is a notable exception to this overall pattern. Contrary to Lefebvre's writing, the daily rhythms I analyse are not those of cities. In fact, they are the 'once' slow-paced rhythms of a country river area, now re-evoked by the polyrhythmia resulting from "the simultaneity of past, present and future [which] merges time with space" (Lefebvre, 2002b, p. 8). In effect, the Esino Valley clearly shows the signs of recent socio-spatial transformations without, however, deleting the traces of its past. Its cultural landscape attests to the different quotidian routines, perspectives and dreams of its inhabitants and 'users'.

In the following, I will try to pursue Lefebvre's (2003a) *progressive-regressive* method to describe the above-mentioned "simultaneity" which, as we shall see later, someway qualifies this place as a potential *differential place*, that is, a place accentuating differences and peculiarities.[71] Therefore, the

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[70] Original: "Dans le métayage, le paysan devenait libre, concessionnaire perpétuel et héréditaire de l'exploitation; il y avait donc intérêt à intensifier son travail et à en accroitre la productivité; mais, d'autre part, le propriétaire prélevait une redevance proportionnelle à la production, et très élevée: la moitié des produits fondamentaux. Il bénéficiât donc de tout accroissement de productivité" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 42). This is what Lefebvre describes as "appropriation". He explains: "Appropriation does not correspond to property. It is an entirely different process by which an individual or a group appropriates, transforms something external so that we can talk about a time or urban space appropriated by the group which has shaped the city" (Lefebvre, p. 198, own translation).

[71] In Lefebvre's (2003a) words, "we therefore suggest a very simple method, using ancillary techniques, and consisting of several monuments:

a) *Descriptive.* Observation, but with an eye informed by experience and by a general theory. In the foreground: participant observation in the field. Careful use of survey techniques (interviews, questionnaires, statistics).
b) *Analytico-regressive.* Analysis of reality as described. Attempt to give it a precise *date* (so as not to be limited to an account turning on undated 'archaisms' that are not compared one with another).
c) *Historico-genetic.* Studies of changes in this or that previously *dated* structure, by further (internal or external) development and by its subordination to overall structures. Attempt to reach a genetic classification of formations and structures, in the framework of the overall

chapter will develop through three moments: a *descriptive* moment, portraying the present phenomenological cultural landscape; an *analytico-regressive*, aiming at better analysing the reality in the light of its historical determiners; and the *historico-genetical* moment, elucidating the present as the result of socio-spatial transformations the area has undergone due to the evolution of the modes of production. The lines that follow must fulfil a twofold task, through both a perceptual recognition and a theoretical-historical understanding of the Esino Valley "spacetime". On the one hand, they aim at describing the socio-spatial dynamics taking place there to show the complexity of the area, which qualifies it as "abstract". On the other hand, they intend to study the social function the river has historically played and its evolution in time. After all, in order to define the existing social relationships an analysis of spatial features must be conducted:

> What exactly is the mode of existence of social relationships? Are they substantial? natural? or formally abstract? The study of space offers an answer according to which the social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself. Failing this, these relations would remain in the realm of 'pure' abstraction— that is to say, in the realm of representations and hence of ideology: the realm of verbalism, verbiage and empty words. (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 129)

As Mels (2004, as cited in Edensor & Holloway, 2008) remarks, the analysis of rhythms would be capable of simultaneously stressing on the dynamic and processual of "individual and collective, the subjective and the intersubjective; nature and society; body and world; and the spaces of experience, memory, symbol and action" (p. 484).

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structure. Thus an attempt to return to the contemporary as previously described, in order to rediscover the present, but as elucidated, understood: *explained"* (pp. 116-117).

Lefebvre's progressive-regressive method is later further developed by Jean-Paul Sartre. In his *Search for a Method* (1957), he applies this sequence to his understanding of history. He articulates the process into three stages: a first "phenomenological description", the following reconstruction of causes and explanations producing the phenomena, and a final progressive moment moving forward from these events (Solomon & Sherman, 2003, p. 179).

*Figure 17. Views of the Esino Valley. The close connection between settlement system and agricultural land is clear.*

## 4.1 The Descriptive Moment. Setting the Stage: the Rhythms of the Esino River

The Esino River Valley is located in the Italian province of Ancona, at the slopes of Marche's Appennini mountains. The area, still preserving both the signs and the collective memory of its recent sharecropping past, could now be defined, according to the European Commission's parameters, as "intermediate" rural (European Commission, 2013), because of the socio-economic transformations undertaken over the last fifty years. Sure enough, the research field still reveals an overwhelmingly rural character, reflected in the percentage of local people employed in agroforestry activities, here higher than the regional and national average - that is, up to 13% vs. 5.56%/5.6% (ISTAT, 2011). Moreover, the presence of different rural quality districts in the Region, here represented by the Colli Esini S. Vicino quality district (aiming at the conservation and promotion of local food products and landscapes as well as the development of agricultural activities, service delivery and economic diversification), attests the lasting doubtful value of the agricultural character of the area.

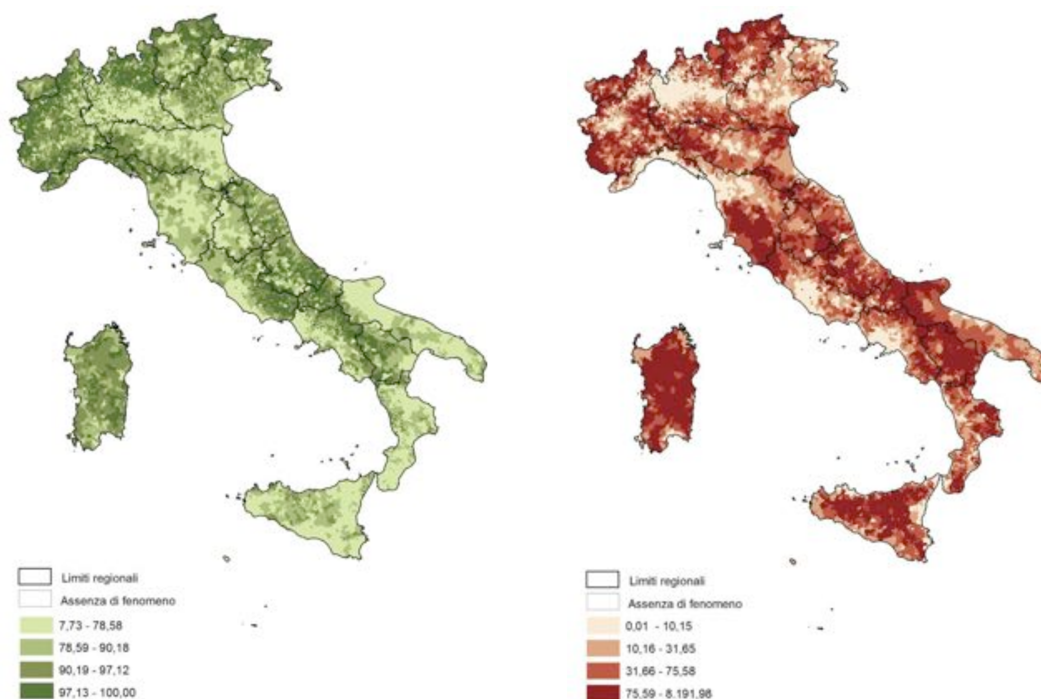


*Figure 18. The maps show the incidence of 1) people carrying out agricultural activities per municipality - persons per one thousand inhabitants (image 4.4, p. 85) and 2) used agricultural area (SAU) per municipality - hectares per 100 inhabitants (image 2.2, p. 27). Source: ISTAT, VI General Census about agriculture, Atlas of Italian agriculture. Retrieved from [http://www.istat.it/it/files/2014/03/Atlante-dellagricoltura-italiana.-6%C2%B0-Censimento-generale-dellagricoltura.pdf.](http://www.istat.it/it/files/2014/03/Atlante-dellagricoltura-italiana.-6%C2%B0-Censimento-generale-dellagricoltura.pdf)*

| | Inhabitants | Density | Commuting (both for work and study) | % commuting people | Agriculture, forestry, fishing | Total employees | % aff employees |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Italy | 60.457.909 | 196,75 | 28.871.447 | 47,75 | 1.276.894 | 23.017.840 | 5,55 |
| Province of Ancona | 496.149 | 241,37 | 242.608 | 48,90 | 7.991 | 200.844 | 3,98 |
| Jesi | 42.845 | 370,08 | 20.256 | 47,28 | 968 | 16.719 | 5,79 |
| Rosora | 2.046 | 211,35 | 1.032 | 50,44 | 81 | 856 | 9,46 |
| Maiolati Spontini | 6.370 | 287,31 | 3.190 | 50,08 | 179 | 2.631 | 6,80 |
| Cupramontana | 4.864 | 176,55 | 2.343 | 48,17 | 210 | 1.996 | 10,52 |
| Castelplanio | 4.242 | 227,31 | 1.798 | 42,39 | 187 | 1.438 | 13,00 |

*Figure 19. The table shows the incidence of agriculture in the area. The reported values refer to the four municipalities involved in the project, the biggest city nearby (Jesi), the Province of Ancona, and the national backdrop. In particular, the four municipalities concerned employ a higher percentage of persons than the national average. Moreover, the influence of fishing on the reported value is insignificant for the research field. Retrieved from: [http://dati-censimentopopolazione.istat.it/Index.aspx.](http://dati-censimentopopolazione.istat.it/Index.aspx)* The table also shows the population distribution and commuting, both for work and study reasons. Local mobility is not at all negligible, as it affects the half of the population (in a Region where the number of over 65 years old people exceeds 23%). Retrieved from http://www.inrca.it/inrca/home.asp;http://www.servizisociali.marche.it/Home/AREETEMATICHE/Anzianienonautosufficienti/tabid/63/Default.aspx.

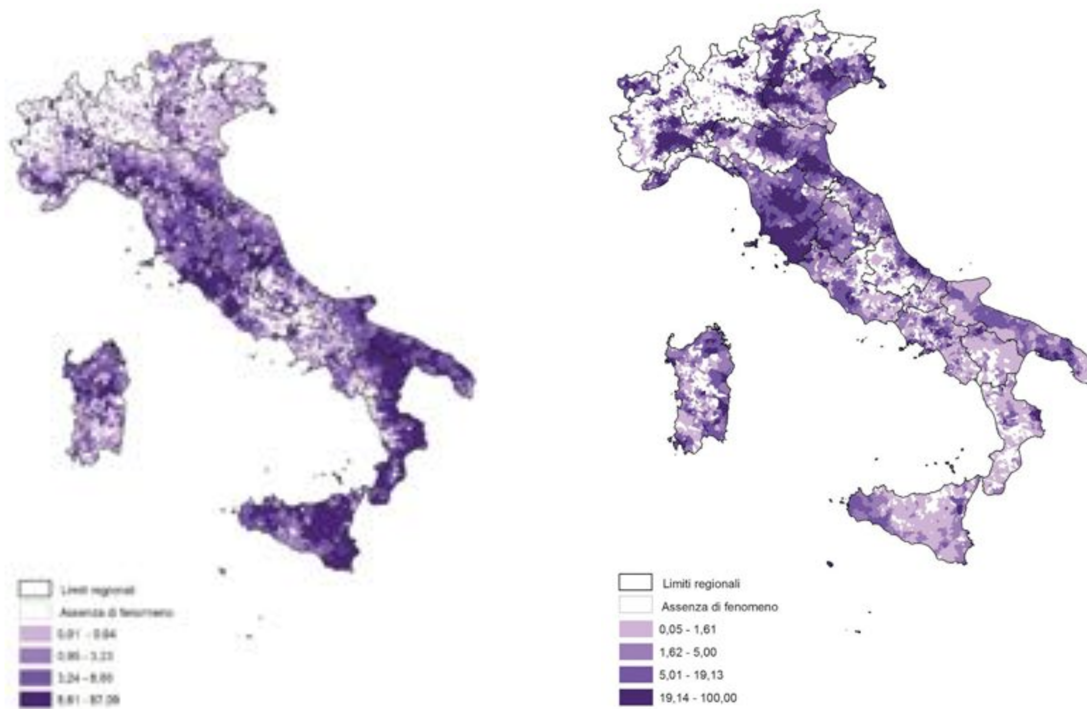


*Figure 20. Maps showing the incidence of 1) Agricultural land per municipality employed for organic farming; 2) Farms cultivating PDO and/or PGI products per municipality (percentage of the agricultural land). Source: ISTAT, VI General Census about agriculture, Atlas of Italian agriculture, pp. 134-135, retrieved from: [http://www.istat.it/it/files/2014/03/Atlante-dellagricoltura-italiana.-6%C2%B0-Censimento-generale-dellagricoltura.pdf](http://www.istat.it/it/files/2014/03/Atlante-dellagricoltura-italiana.-6%C2%B0-Censimento-generale-dellagricoltura.pdf). As illustrated by the map, the research field houses many products classified as PDO and PGI. In particular, the indication 'Protected Designation of Origin' refers to agricultural products and foodstuffs 'produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognized know-how'. The more general label 'Protected Geographical Indication', on the contrary, pertains to products 'closely linked to the geographical area'. In this case, 'at least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation takes place in the area'. Retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/schemes/index_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/schemes/index_en.htm))*

*Figure 21. The map shows the 30 municipalities related to the Colli Esini – S. Vicino district. Castelplanio, Rosora, Maiolati Spontini and Cupramontana are those involved in the study. Retrieved from* [http://www.colliesini.it/territorio](http://www.colliesini.it/territorio).

In effect, travelling southwest from Ancona, it is easy to register the passage from the town to the rural countryside. The smooth transition from a more fast-paced setting to the slower country beats (in a region where the population density is below the national average) seems to be more abrupt when related to the dynamic mutual exchange between past and present you can find in the countryside. Leaving the street view and adopting an aerial viewpoint, the decrease in residential density from the city to the countryside inversely reflects the distribution between lower and upper village on the terraced hillside (Goonewardena et al., 2009). However, contrary to the traditional expectations about the rural, both conceived and required to be slow-paced (Edensor & Holloway, 2008), the Esino waterfront is not at all motionlessness. People of all ages love to gather along the river, where several individual leisure activities alternate with common innovative business practices every day. The syncopated rhythms of retired elderly people, strollers, farmers, fishermen, and craftsmen, for whom "the texture of landscape erupt[s] in involuntary memories" (Edensor & Holloway, 2008, p. 498), inevitably diverge with the energetic distractive step of sportsmen, mainly runners and cyclists, and the rush hours of white collars and commuters. The relationship people establish with the context could be defined as arrhythmic in the first case, isorhythmic in the second one. Needless to say, the daily influx of 'visitors' varies as the season changes, following the circadian rhythm. Moreover, that polyrhythmic balance can easily be dramatically altered (just think about floods).

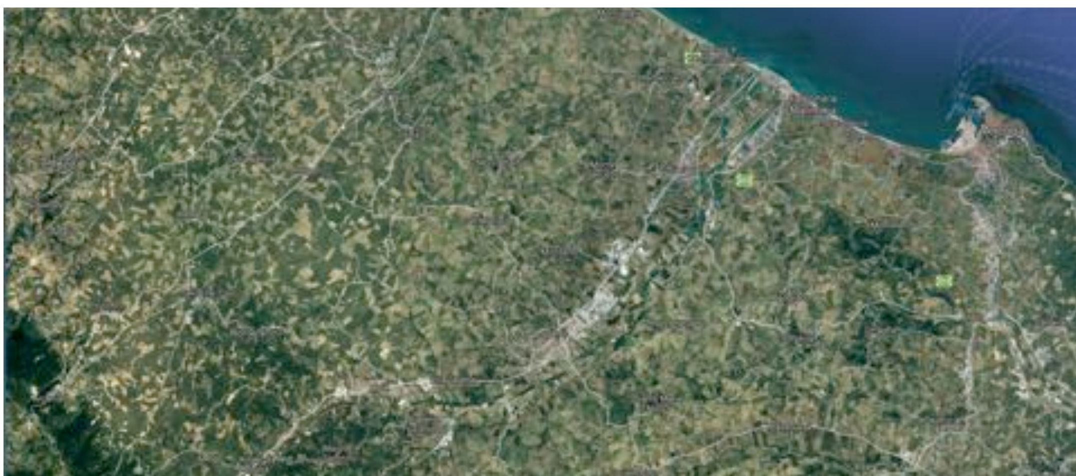

*Figure 22. Aerial view of the Esino Valley.*

The observer searching for traces of the medieval past of the valley will very simply find evidence of the Benedictine precepts. The surrounding San Clemente Valley, rich in hermitages, abbeys, monasteries and rural churches deep in the silence of nature, seems to preserve the moral strength of the religious antiquity. After all, its sacred tradition, the agricultural landscapes and food and wine tours, together with the expanding local businesses, represent the main attractors for tourists. Generally speaking, in the Esino Valley we can distinguish two different tourist ways of experiencing space, each producing a distinctive rhythmic pattern, that is, that of the 'guided' visitors and that of the 'autonomous' ones – reflecting the difference between "purposive walking" and "discursive walking" (Wunderlich, 2016, p. 6). On the one hand, the timetabled, often business trip reproduces traditional, almost 'mythical' visuals, soundscapes, scenes and smells, creating a theme park enhancing the romantic image of Marche's cultural landscape, rich in picturesque views, historical itineraries, folklore and narratives, and specialty foods. On the other hand, the slower, introspective, spontaneous tour generally improvises the stopovers, mixing rurality, nature, art or tradition. Moreover, the first one is much more dependent on technological devices than second ones, conversely longing for silence, genuineness.

Sure enough, the synthesis of local rhythms, both concerning variable seasonal flows and mixed usage, is provided by the Esino River.[72] Even if its average annual flow is about 18 mc/s and the summer flow rate of about 5 mc/s, in autumn floods, sometimes ruinous and violent, are recurring.

Similarly, the watercourse summarises the multiplicity of activities taking place there. It is simultaneously a source of water, raw material and hydropower, a natural swimming pool, a place where to go fishing. As such, it provides water to local industrious peasants, sandstone to conservative "selcini" or stonebreakers, and hydroelectric energy to the businesses around. Last but not least, the river provides a stunning backdrop to events taking place there, such as picnics improvised by locals or tourists or happenings related to firms, such as the Loccioni Group.

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[72] The Esino River has its rise on the Cafaggio Mountain, in the Province of Macerata, at about 1000 m above the sea level. It then passes through the Province of Ancona, enlarging its bed and slowing down its motion near Serra San Quirico. It finally flows into the Adriatic Sea near Falconara Marittima with an estuary, after an itinerary about 90 km long.

All the mobilities that course it are silently registered by the invisible rhythm of technology. Both measuring ordinary everyday life and preventing extra-ordinary occurrences, sensors, automation systems and engineering devices support farming activities, control the river flow, facilitate social interactions. Above all, acting as a community platform, they echo the narrativity of the river, "which suggest a sense of time as not only somewhat *intersubjective* but also *sense-specific*" (Wunderlich, 2016, p. 45).

After a promenade along the cycle lane, a multitude of mental pictures occurs. Ordinary scenes of family life and private domestic spaces intertwine with laborious workplace tasks. *Constrained* and *obliged* time, no doubt predominant all around, clash with fewer *free time* activities, which prevail in the riparian zone.[73] Even the plants seem to echo the human pace. The luxuriant spontaneous vegetation growing along the riverbanks (white and black poplar, white willow, black alder, pedunculated oak, hazel tree, hoary willow, red willow, tamarisk, butterfly bush etc.) gradually makes way for cultivated fields. In addition to the most 'usual' vegetables, a number of plants under protection, such as different varieties of olive trees, apple, vine, barley, just to name a few, explode in a symphony of colours and smells (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 31).[74]

[73] In *Besoins profonds, besoins nouveaux de la civilisation urbaine* Lefebvre (1970) draws the distinction among “temps libre”, “temps obligé” and “temps contraint”, respectively that consecrated to transport, bureaucracy etc., work and leisure.

[74] More precisely, the main species under protection, since betrayed of genetic erosion and in danger extinction, are the olive varieties *coroncina, mignola, orbetana, raggia, rosciola,* fruit trees as *mela del Papa,mela rosa, mela rosa gentile, mela rosa in pietra, brigoncella plum, visciola, Verdicchio dei Colli Esini vine variety*, and, again, *Jesino artichoke, monk bean, ottofile mais, naked barley, da serbo tomato* (Source: ASSAM – Marche Region’s Agency for food farming services http://www.assam.marche.it/progetti1/biodiversita-agraria-delle-marche).

*Figure 23. Snapshots of everyday life along the Esino river.*

## 4.2 The Analytico-Regressive Moment. Sailing the Past

As made evident by the riverside promenade, the distinctive character of the research field is the picturesque rural nature, partially converted in an industrialized district in the last fifty years. This is what Eugenio Turri (1979) calls the "Second Italy", "intermediate" – therefore "second"- between the Northern and the Southern ones, "among all last thirty year changing Italies the one suffering less, to the least extend renouncing to its own traditions, its culture, its peculiarities and better protecting environment and quality of

life" (p. 226, own translation).[75] Lefebvre (1970) himself, some years before, had positioned Central Italy in the middle between the "modernized" North and "semi-medieval" South.[76] This basic, even though reductive, reading of Central Italy as 'transitional' is still relevant today. Its landscape still preserves the signs of the old sharecropping organization, "sometimes with a parochial pride having a remote root in its Medieval communes" (Turri, 1979, p. 227).[77] The geometries of its colourful fields enhance the ancient churches and austere monuments, gift of its illustrious past under the direct sovereign rule of the Pope. Turri (1979) continues:

> However, the most characteristic feature of this "Second Italy", which the extension and intensification of the residential areas around or near small and large urban centres and the development of a new landscape is connected to, concerns the birth of the small industry, especially spread along the major valleys, in the basins crossed by major peninsular roads, railways, roads, highways (p. 233, own translation).[78]

Therefore, the birth of small factories along the major valleys has produced the main physical traits of the socio-spatial transformations occurring there in the last decades.

Sure enough, the Esino Valley does not refute Turri's argument. Mainly devoted to agriculture and traditional crafts (leather, footwear, stone, iron, copper, accordion, pottery, furniture, paper, embroidery, etc.) up to the 1980s, in the last fifty years, the area has strongly transformed its economy, without however denying its historical roots. As a consequence, several small-modernized businesses were born by absorbing the ancient handicraft, and new engineering companies (Loccioni Group among them, physically settled there in 1984) were established, all resulting in 'specialised' industrial

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[75] Original: "Tra tutte le Italie che si sono mosse negli ultimi trent'anni è quella che meno ha sofferto, che meno ha sconfessato le proprie tradizioni, la propria cultura, le proprie caratteristiche, e che ha meglio salvaguardato certe qualità dell'ambiente e certe qualità della vita" (Turri, 1979, p. 226).

[76] In Lefebvre's words, "la Toscane [et l'Italie Centrale] représente la transition entre le Nord de l'Italie («modernisé» par l'économie marchande et industrielle, par le capitalisme et la burgeoisie) et le Sud resté semi-médiéval" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 45). Sure enough, it is essential to contextualise these statements in the years of lead Italy. However, this character of authenticity and well-being is undeniable and still preserved in the "Second Italy".

[77] Original: "Talora con orgoglio campanilistico di remota radice comunale" (Turri, 1979, p. 227).

[78] Original: "Ma il fenomeno più caratteristico di questa «seconda Italia», cui si connette l'estensione e l'intensificazione delle aree residenziali attorno o vicino ai centri urbani piccoli e grandi e la formazione di un nuovo paesaggio, riguarda la nascita della piccola industria, soprattutto diffusa lungo i grandi assi vallivi, nelle conche solcate dalle grandi vie di comunicazione peninsulari, le ferrovie, le strade, le autostrade" (Turri, p. 233).

areas. Sure enough, such a process has left an indelible mark on, at the time, almost unspoiled landscape, registered by Turri (1979) as follows:

> Among the new signs now part of the Italian landscape and currently recalling key functions (at least for part of Italy) the industrial building is the most important one. It is a repetitive element, various in size and prominent in space. Its distribution does not follow any rule except that of being generally placed outside of the old settlements, in the middle of new residential quarters bordering with the fields. In the "Italy of the middle", that is, in areas where small industry overlapped agriculture, the factory juxtaposes the village, the old rural settlement, constituting, semiologically speaking, a productive structure combining itself with the original one, represented by the cultivated *Umland* (p. 24, own translation).[79]

Industrial activities have soon become part of everyday life, overlapping to what represented, up to the 1980s, the main economic practice in the backcountry of Marche, that is, agriculture. At the time, Marche was the most important tenant farming region among all the Italian ones. The great significance of this assumption lies un the fact that its cultural landscape, "auditory and olfactory" included (Turri, 1979),[80] is still shaped by its farming tradition. After all, it is well known that "the field, beyond its relationship

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[79] Original: "Tra i segni nuovi che si sono inseriti nel paesaggio e che nel paesaggio dell'Italia d'oggi richiamano funzioni fondamentali (almeno per una parte dell'Italia), la fabbrica, il capannone industriale, è tra le più importanti. E' l'elemento ripetitivo, vario di dimensioni e di spicco nello spazio. La sua distribuzione non segue una regola, se non quella di porsi generalmente al di fuori dei vecchi nuclei abitati, al centro di aree costituenti i quartieri nuovi, le recenti espansioni di case e blocchi residenziali ai margini dei campi. Nell'«Italia di mezzo», cioè nelle aree dove la piccola industria si è sovrapposta all'agricoltura, la fabbrica si affianca al paese, al vecchio insediamento rurale, costituendo, semiologicamente parlando, una struttura produttiva che integra quella originaria rappresentata dall'*Umland* coltivato" (Turri, p. 24).

[80] Turri (1979) accurately describes the auditory and olfactory landscape of rural Italy, resulting from natural and human actions. He writes, "In the rural Italy of the past sounds were limited and rarely loud. They were linked to the agricultural activities and to the countryside life. Intimately bonded to the natural rhythms, they had their daily and seasonal cycles. Promptly they returned, and they were important references for living. . . . That can be repeated in the same way for odors. . . . The olfactory landscape, was once one of the campaigns. It was connected to the agricultural work, the summer haymaking, the autumn and spring manuring, to harvesting, threshing, to slush-and-burn, bonfires in the woods, fires in homes, the smells of the food as well as cooked vegetables. They are all odors, if not disappeared, now deprived of that rhythmicity depending on these activities. Moreover, Italians have now been living in the homes, in factories and offices" (pp. 70; 77, own translation). Original: "Nell'Italia rurale del passato i rumori erano limitati e raramente fragorosi: si collegavano alle attività campestri e al genere di vita delle nostre campagne. Intimamente legati ai ritmi naturali, avevano una loro ciclicità giornaliera e stagionale. Puntualmente ritornavano, ed erano riferimenti importanti per il vivere" (Turri, 1979, p. 70); "Ciò che si è detto per i rumori lo si può ripetere allo stesso modo per gli odori. . . . Il paesaggio olfattivo, un tempo, era quello delle campagne. Si collegava al lavoro agricolo, alle fienagioni estive, alle letamazioni autunnali e primaverili, alle attività di raccolta, alla vendemmia, alla trebbiatura, ai debbi, ai falò nei boschi, ai fuochi nelle case, agli odori del mangiare che rendeva l'odore delle verdure" (Turri, p. 77).

with natural conditions, is a cultural event" (Turri, 2008, p. 243, own translation).[81]

Already available under Roman law, the extensive application of the *métayage* system in Central Italy dates back to its feudal past. Consisting of an agrarian contract of association according to which a landlord and a farmer shared the profits of a homestead, the sharecropping implied an inseparable system of bonds between the contracting parties made of strong connections, both in economic-legislative terms of rights and obligations and socio-relational terms of spaces and times (farm, family farm, rural house, landed property). As Turri (1979) remarks when talking about the progressive loss of *topophilie* Italy is experiencing in behalf of a sense of eradication, in Central sharecropping Italy people have always developed a peculiar relationship of identification with space. In summary, while the cities and villages of the rest of the peninsula establish a profound garrulous neighbourly and sociability relationship, in the rural backcountry of the "Second Italy" "isolation, moreover not so deep, induced such a heartfelt neighbourly relation with other families to cancel the distance between houses, tame and socialize space enriching it with landmarks" (p. 53).[82] Farming activities themselves, therefore, used to become the occasion for sharing and conviviality, especially in troubled times:

> At the time of great hardships, nearby farmers swapped the activity, working now in a field, then on another one. These are the moments of harvesting, threshing and corn shelling, grape and olive harvest, row pruning. These are also the moments of interfamilial relationships, opportunities to meet, stealthy contacts among young people, especially in convivial minutes spent among the hay barns or under the shade of the mulberries and other plants surrounding the farmhouse (Orsetti, 2002, p. 23, own translation).[83]

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[81] Original: "Il campo, al di là del suo rapporto con le condizioni naturali, è dunque un fatto di cultura. Esprime l'uomo, il suo lavoro, le sue esigenze, le sue condizioni sociali ed economiche, le leggi stesse della società in cui opera" (Turri, 2008, p. 243).

[82] Original: "L'isolamento, peraltro non profondo, determinava rapporti di vicinato molto sentiti con le altre famiglie, che annullavano la distanza tra una casa e l'altra, addomesticavano lo spazio, lo socializzavano, lo caricavano di riferimenti" (Turri, 1979, p. 53).

[83] Original: "Al tempo delle grandi fatiche i contadini di terreni vicini si scambiano l'opera, cioè si assistono a vicenda, lavorando tutti ora su un campo, ora sull'altro. Sono i momenti della zappatura e mondatura (aprile-giugno, che occupa soprattutto le donne), mietitura (fine giugno), trebbiatura (luglio- inizi di agosto), raccolta e sgranatura del mais (settembre), vendemmia (ottobre), raccolta delle barbabietole da zucchero (agosto-ottobre), dei pomodori (luglio-agosto), delle olive (novembre), potatura dei filari (gennaio-febbraio). Questi sono anche i momenti delle relazioni interfamiliari, delle

The 'perseverance' of the sharecropping system in the backcountry of the Marche ensures that all these aspects are still somehow preserved and perceivable. Both on a concrete and abstract level, the cultural landscape of the Esino Valley still reinterprets some tenant farming values to this day, such as tenacity, parsimony, stubbornness, family bond, diffused sociability, and displays tangible signs - the oak among others, the fulcrum of relational everyday life acting mediating between man and landscape.

*Figure 24. Snapshots of everyday life.*

Despite these invariables, the socio-economic development of the Esino Valley has inevitably modified the relationship between the *inside* and the *outside*, especially when referring to productive activities. In other words, while in the agricultural society living outside, in contact with the land, played a vital role in everyday life, in the urban society (Lefebvre, 2003b) life moves inside. This new condition, however, does not imply that the outside has become meaningless. Conversely, its enjoyment has now become even more significant. “This new ‘outside’, no longer tied to the necessities of the farming organisation, can not be solved individually in a public ‘outside’. Its layout depends now on social, collective, public wills” (Turri, 1979, p. 84).[84] The Esino River seems fully representative of this "new outside".

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occasioni di incontro, dei furtivi contatti tra i giovani, specialmente nelle fasi conviviali tra i pagliai e all’ombra dei grandi gelsi e delle altre piante attorno alla casa colonica”(Orsetti, 2002, p. 23).

[84] Original: “Ma questo «fuori», non più legato come un tempo alle necessità dell’organizzazione agricola, non può più essere risolto individualmente: è un «fuori» pubblico, la cui sistemazione dipende dalle volontà sociali, collettive, dell’amministrazione pubblica” (Turri, 1979, p. 84).

As the name itself suggests,[85] the Esino River Valley owes its prosperity to the presence of its sacred watercourse, historically playing a significant environmental, socio-economic and relational role.[86] It was both part of the ordinary daily life and the extraordinary *moments* of social existence, therefore substantially contributing to the *sense of place* of the local community (Jackson, 1994).[87]

Since 50 years ago, many were the ordinary activities depending on the presence of the Esino River. Apart from fishing, washing clothes and swimming, relational and leisure activities at the same time - in fact the river was supposed to be extremely clean and teeming with fish and shrimps (M. Ceccarelli, 2009, p. 21) and it still keeps is function as a sport fishing area -, the river has always been perceived by locals as an important source of energy and raw material. The exploitation of the river hydropower, now resulting in several hydroelectric power plants, is surely not such a recent 'intuition' in the Esino Valley. On the contrary, the first documented news about mills in middle Esino Valley dates back to 1186.[88] Even if mainly

[85] The name 'Esino' reveals the holy character the river held in ancient times. Under some studies, it seems to derive whether from the Celtic bull god Eso or the legendary king of Pelasgians Esio; according to other hypotheses, on the contrary, the name would originate from the Roman city it skimmed through, Aesis (Jesi). Independently from the exact origin of its toponym, what is now important to point out is the relevance always played by this watercourse - ever since ancient times - both as a strong identity, social, symbolic sign and a political-economic landmark.

[86]Much can be said about rivers. Generally definable an 'archetype', the 'primordial image' of 'collective unconscious', 'a tendency to form such representations of a motif – representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern' (Jung, 1968), a river traditionally acts as the 'artery' (Schama, 2004) of a place. Environmental and infrastructural network at the same time (Pavia, 1998, 2002), carrier of water, energy and information, it represents a flow of knowledge, communication and development, rich as it is in individual and collective stories, myths, traditions and rituals. "Nowadays, the different systems composing a territory - the environmental, the dwelling, the productive and the infrastructural – meet and cross along it" (Pavia, 1998, 2002).

[87]According to John B. Jackson (1994), the *sense of place* is the "awkward and ambiguous" (p. 158) modern translation of the Latin expression of *genius loci*, "something that we ourselves create in course of time", "the result of habit and custom" (p.151). Against the extensively accepted definition according to which the *sense of place* refers to intrinsic features of the place, Jackson declares it is related to the events unfolding there. For him, "the event becomes more significant than the place itself" (Jackson, p.160) since it performs as a useful indicator of the community peculiar traits. In particular, the event also provides information about the *sense of time*, according to Jackson even more important than the *sense of place*. He argues that "we attach too much importance to art and architecture in producing an awareness of our belonging to a city or a country, when what we actually share is a sense of time" (Jackson, p.162).

[88] In 1186 Emperor Henry IV, Federico II's father, allowed the Camaldolese monks of San Michele hermitage to build mills on Esino River's banks. A seal of Pope Innocenzo III dated 1199 mentions mills belonging to Sant' Elena Abbey in the trait of Esinante River, a tributary of the Esino. One century after in 1295 there seemed to be operative seven mills over a distance of seven kilometres, from

connected to productive activities, mills also played a social role in Marche's rural countryside. Evidence from historical documents points to the relevance of the mill as "an important place of socialisation for the sharecroppers who lived isolated in their farms" where "man used to learn drunkenness and women to train in immodesty" (Paci, 1980, p. 47, own translation).[89]

*Figure 25. Plan of the Rosora mill and photo of Della Torre mill, later transformed in power plant, strongly damaged by the German soldiers in 1944 . Source: Ceccarelli, 2004.*

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Scisciano to Moie (M. Ceccarelli, 2009). As a result, the activity peculiar to Castelplanio was the fabrication of millstones, the raw material of which, made of a very hard sedimentary rock, was extracted manually with iron sticks. This activity was already carried on in the ancient Middle Ages, as to give origin to the place name, Macine di Castelplanio, in full action at the beginning of the sixteenth century (R. Ceccarelli, 2004).

[89] Original: "Il mulino, per i mezzadri che vivono isolati nel podere, era un importante luogo di socializzazione – e un proprietario marchigiano della fine del secolo XVIII, il filottranese Girolamo Spada, sosteneva appunto che in esso gli uomini imparavano l'ubriachezza e le donne l'immodestia" (Paci, 1980, p. 47).

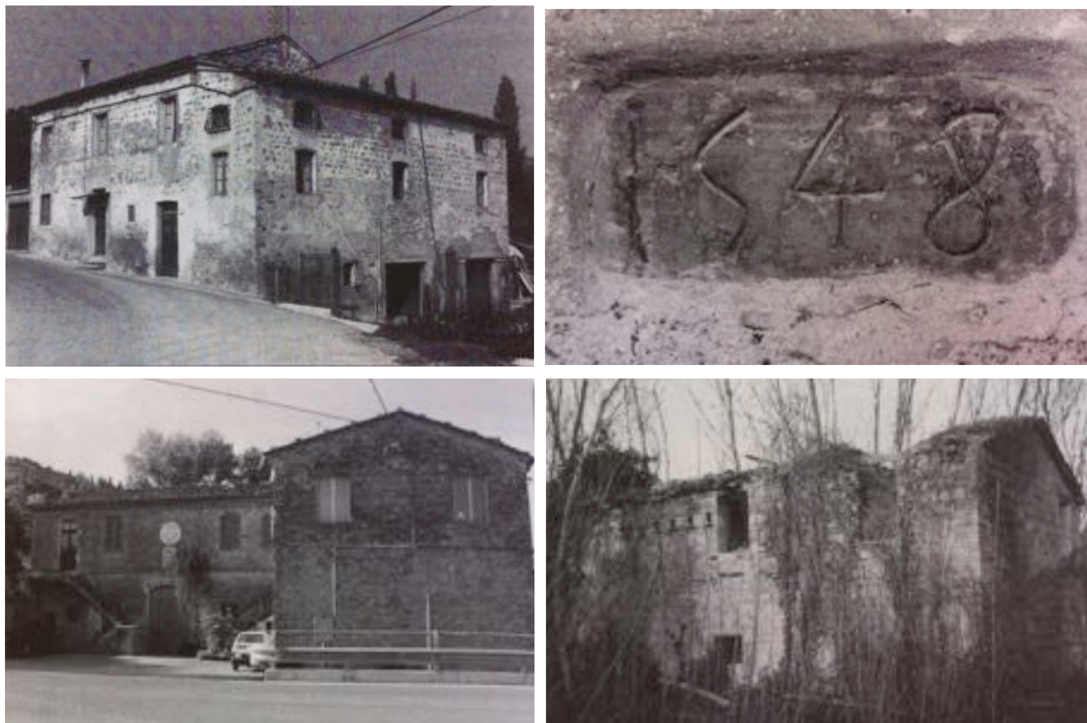

*Figure 26. In order of occurrence, 1) The 'Mulinetto', Macine di Castelplanio, working until 1920-25 and demolished in 1990; 2) Brick reporting the inscription '1548' referring to the date of construction or renovation of the mill; 3) Former 'Marcelletti Mill', Scisciano di Maiolati Spontini, early XX century; 4) Ruins of the former 'Mulino della cesola', San Paolo di Jesi, working until early XX century. Source: Ceccarelli, 2004.*

Another traditional labour, rich in social significance, recalling the connection between man and river was that of the above-mentioned "selcini" or stonebreakers, artisans carving the sandstone taken from the riverbed for construction purposes. Both environmental infrastructure (Pavia, 2002) and social collector (Verdolini, 1988), therefore, the riverbanks traditionally took part in the ordinary actions of everyday life.

Until recently, however, the watercourse has also performed as the idyllic setting of 'traditional' extra-ordinary *moments*, "specific occasion of limited duration latent in the everyday [which] disrupts its continuousness by introducing otherness and the possibility of radical transformation into it" (Coleman, 2015, p. 94).[90] As such, festivals and excursions to the Esino River acted as moments which "contrasted violently with everyday life, but they were not separate from it" (Lefebvre, 2014a, p. 468). In effect, "they were like

[90] In the attempt to define his *Theory of Moments*, Lefebvre (2002a) points out that "the moment is an individual and freely celebrated festival, a tragic festival, and therefore a genuine festival. The aim is not to let festivals die out or disappear beneath all that is prosaic in the world. It is to unite Festival with everyday life" (p. 348).

everyday life, but more intense; and then the moments of that life – the practical community, food, the relation with nature – in other words, work – were reunited, amplified, magnified in the festival" (Lefebvre, p. 468).

*Figure 27. In order of occurrence, bathers at the Esino river in 1927; silk factory workwomen during an excursion to the river, in the '30s; bather (Elisa Merli) on a wood gangblank built after the destruction of the Scisciano bridge by the retrating German soldiers (1944-45); bathers at the Esino river, 1959-60. Sources: Verdolini, 1998; Orsetti, 2002.*

As for the traditional festivals, not necessarily taking place along the river but connected to it, they unveiled both a farming and religious character. Thanks to their cyclic nature, these rites traditionally allowed peasants and their family both to get out of their usual daily isolation of the country work and re-experience solidarity and sociality. As well as in other rural communities, here

> peasant celebrations tightened social links and at the same time gave rein to all the desires which had been pent up by collective discipline and the necessities of everyday work. In celebrating, each member of the community went beyond himself, so to speak, and in one fell swoop drew all that was energetic, pleasurable and possible from nature, food, social life and its own body and mind (Lefebvre, 2014a, p. 458).

Therefore, festivals were both part of everyday life and other from it, as they differed from quotidian routines "in the explosion of forces" (Lefebvre, 2014a, p. 459), in the joyful atmosphere also characterised by a sense of foreboding.

Since the very beginning, festivals held a strong mystic and symbolic character, mainly connected to their Mephistophelean value. They acted as a tribute to nature and an expression of human reliance on nature, therefore depending on the seasons. That is what Lefebvre (2014) describes as "very soon, if not from the start, peasant festivals became eminently important; they represented not only joy, communion, participation in Dionysiac life, but also a cooperation with the natural order" (p. 461). However, they also held a very strong 'holy' dimension, which imposed people a complete abstention from work at any time - with the exception of the planting season. To that regard, Lefebvre (2014) talks about a moment when "the developing social mystery . . . was destined to become a religious mystery; and religion now superimposed itself upon magic, but without destroying it" (p. 418).[91] In the Esino Valley, the peasant worship was mainly addressed to the Virgin Mary, the emblem of human pain. As a consequence, most of the votive niches raised through the fields were consecrated to her – even though S. Biagio, S. Antonio and S. Rocco were also venerated as supposed to protect prayers from illness and safeguard agricultural activities. Apart from the iconographic apparatus, these ceremonies showed a remarkable aesthetic understanding. "Baskets, flowers, colours, folk costumes, golden grain, food, dances and sounds" (Gherardi, 2001, p. 158, own translation) gave the festivals a dramatic tone.[92] The means designated to the *mise-en-scene* was the ‘biroccio’, a traditional rural cart generally used to carry land products and goods. More precisely, it was usually consecrated "to the transfer of grain and olives to the mill as well as the hemp to be worked near to the river"

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[91] Lefebvre (2014) recognises the role the Church plays as a social collector as well as a collective memory keeper. On a physical level, the aggregating function is revealed by the settlement layout, consisting of "scattered farms and then, aground the church and the graveyard, a few houses grouped together, the village" (p. 475). As for the more intangible level, he describes "processions intended to confirm the regularity of the season and the fertility of the fields", "pious hand still hang[ing] garlands on sacred trees" (p. 478). However, he also attributes an alienating "reactionary, destructive critique" (p. 507) of life to the Church, since it "accumulates all man's helplessness".

[92] Original: “Cesti, fiori, colori, costume tradizionali, grano color oro, cibi, canti, danze, suoni, danno alle feste un tono spettacolare” (Gherardi, 2001, p. 158).

(Anselmi, 1980, p. 50, own translation). However, it was also employed to connect the riverbanks "with the city centre and villages where festivals and local fairs took place" (Anselmi, p. 50, own translation).[93]

As for the other rituals, those connected to excursions to the river, they could be considered a traditional form of 'eco-tourism', in Lefebvre's (2004) view the expression of a paradox: "tourism is added to the traditional and customary use of space and time, of monumentality and rhythms 'of the other' without making it disappear" (Lefebvre, pp. 97–98). The journey to the Esino was historically perceived as a liberating social experience. "Trees, reeds, the orderly countryside around, the stones of the riverbed, the limpid water and its whirlpools, the coolness of the air, all that was incomparably charming" (Verdolini, 1988, p. 61, own translation) and rewarding.[94] Groups of people, mostly women and children, used to gather along the riverbanks, swimming and eating together, sharing food and drinks, singing folk songs. No doubt, going down to the river was a unique form of escapism from everyday life.

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[93] Original: "Col biroccio si portavano il grano al mulino e le olive al frantoio, e, in estate, i *troscelli* di canapa da imbiancare con acqua e sole al fiume. Ma esso era soprattutto il mezzo di collegamento con il centro urbano sia in occasione di festività religiose o di fiere, sia quando si portavano i prodotti alla casa padronale" (Anselmi, 1980, p. 50).

[94] Original: "Gli alberi, i canneti, la campagna ordinata attorno, poi i sassi candidi del greto, l'acqua del fiume che scorreva limpida, creando gorghi e raggi, e quella frescura avevano per loro un fascino" (Verdolini, 1988, p. 61).

*Figure 28. Traditional festivals of the valley. The photos show the religious and farming character of the rites. Sources: Gherardi, 2001; Orsetti, 2002.*

To sum up, the Esino River has always performed as a natural setting for social life. Over the centuries, cultural practices of appropriation of the natural environment "transform[ing] it into human property", which is "the goal, the direction, the purpose of social life" (Lefebvre, 2003a, p. 130), have assured a constant use of the area as a public space. Once, the riverbed management was conducted by peasants, who used to carry out naturalistic engineering works to defend their fields from the floods. Later on, the decrease of agricultural activities, running parallel to the increase in human 'dominating' activities (Lefebvre, p. 130), have shaped the waterfront, affected its layout and modified its accessibility. As a result, a twofold phenomenon has occurred. On the one hand, the greater awareness of the 'dangerous' character of the river has caused a progressive estrangement from it. Even though the 'rebel' nature of the Esino has always been known over the centuries and its flooding nature proved by extensive evidence,[95] the

[95] As proved by several historical documents, therefore, various flooding events have affected the Esino Valley over the centuries. In 1702 the Community of Jesi revolted against Cardinal Negroni, commendatory abbot of the Abbey of Sant'Elena, asking him a new piece of land where to grind, having the Esino River changed its course (Vico, 1994). In 1765 an overflowing of the Esino caused terrible damn to the crops and the valley floor houses. In 1841 the Farmland Society of Jesi questioned

measure of damages connected to latest flooding events, also due to a progressive anthropization of the area, has increased the sense of distrust of the river. On the other hand, the evolution of modern forms of sociability has resulted in a far-reaching change both in number and nature of the events taking place there. At first glance, provided that events, through Lefebvre's lens, are the measure of both spatial and temporal rhythms of everyday life, it can be said that the pace of the waterfront has slackened. Conversely, the current polyrhythmia, even though hidden by an illusory homogeneity, reveals the complex character of this social space and its great potential. In other words, the river still shields all the features of a public space and is still perceived as such by the local community.

Latest reclamation projects acting as joint ventures between public and private sectors head toward the promotion of the area. For example, the *Flumen* Project, a restoration project of a tract of the Esino River involving the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, the Province of Ancona and the four municipalities Rosora, Maiolati Spontini, Castelplanio and Cupramontana, among others, and endorsed by Loccioni Group, fosters strategies of flood risk mitigation and functional enhancement of the area, information sharing and diffusion of 'water culture'. Launched in 2012 and still underway, it has succeeded in its purpose of improving the accessibility and consequently increasing the environmental and tourist usage of the riverbanks. From Lefebvre's perspective, these practices have resulted in a daily "consumption" of the watercourse for extra-ordinary activities of everyday life. As for folk festivals, the "religious" rites have been now replaced by fewer "general" ceremonies (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 94), less cyclical than the traditional ones, while the tourist enjoyment has significantly increased. Hence, no longer acting as the daily setting of ordinary existence, the Esino River now mainly hosts extra-ordinary occurrences and its fruition is the result of a deliberated individual choice, more than a basic requirement.

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the landowners about the possibility of reinforcing the riverbanks. – documents attest seasonal floods (M. Ceccarelli, 2009). Among the latest ones, the event of December 1990 can be mentioned as one of the most devastating in the recent history of the river.

*Figure 29. Hydraulic industrial archeology*

## 4.3 The Historico-Genetic Moment. Back to the Present, Peeking at the Future

The brief summary reconstruction of the unfolding of events leading to the current social use of the riverbanks supports the wider argumentation of the previous chapters on public space. Along the Esino Valley, the once ordinary rhythms of users' everyday life (those of people living there, working there, both living and working there) and 'extra-ordinary' ones (mainly represented by tourism and festivals), as traditionally meant, now mix up, overlapping. This evolution, still underway, is even more tangible if considered inclusive of all "the non-human, technological and material" (Edensor & Holloway, 2008, p. 486), which amplify the scale and the echo of the transformations underway.[96] Lefebvre himself mentions them when referring to the multi-layered and interlocking temporalities unfolding in social space. "The fluid interplay between old and new, between recurrences and innovations" (Conlon, 2010) represents the *leitmotif* of the new socio-spatial balance of this section of the valley. "The proximity between a certain archaism attached to history and the exhibited supra-modernity" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 34) is extremely close here and by no means the local peculiarity of

[96] Long before the actor-network theory became part of the urban research, Lefebvre "explicitly integrated the materiality of the urban and of space into his theory and had opened it up to applications in the field of political ecology" (Schmid, 2015).

this social space. In the Esino Valley, more than elsewhere in Marche region, "individuals' everyday life is embedded in contemporary but diverse temporalities, as well as in contiguous but distinguished spaces: pre-modern, modern and postmodern at once; village, industrializing city and urbanized 'megacity' at one and the same time" (Bertuzzo, 2014, p. 50). On the one hand, the plurality of issues (public-private dialectics, quality-quantity contradiction, integration and differentiation, climate changes effects, etc.), which this simultaneity raises, places the fieldwork in the grid of contradictions of *abstract* space. On the other hand, its 'differential' condition, resulting from the simultaneous presence of rural, industrial and urban (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 32), produces various, sometimes contrasting, social relationships which turn out to be strengthened, in the long term, by collective memory, sense of sharing, common narratives.

At first glance, dominant rhythms of everyday life observed and experienced along the Esino might suggest that the social practice of the riverbanks has radically changed over the last decades. The loss of traditional activities connected to peasant life, the oblivion of day-to-day maintenance actions, the sunset of recreational and religious moments on the one hand, the speedup of contemporary rhythms of life and workplace, new forms of governance of outdoor spaces leading to a reversal of private and public boundaries etc. on the other hand, easily persuade the observer of a reversal of the trend. Conversely, a closer inspection reveals that the average rhythm of the valley has roughly remained unvaried. The river is still perceived as a metaphor of the rhythm of life, both "an aspect of movement and a becoming" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 230):

> Time – the time of the narrative, flowing, uninterrupted, slow, full of surprises and sights, strife and silence, rich, monotonous and varied, tedious and fascinating – is the Heraclitean flux, engulfing and uniting the cosmic (objective) and the subjective in its continuity. The history of a single day includes the history of the world and civilization; time, its source unrevealed, is symbolized over and over again in womanhood and in the river (Lefebvre, 2002b, p. 4).

As such, the Esino performs as a 'threshold' area between the rhythm of the 'self' and the rhythm of the 'other'. Stage of productive activities, crafts and trade, as well as hermitages, abbeys, monasteries and country churches, it acts as the bearer of a shared vision of work and a sense of spirituality.

Environmental and infrastructural network at the same time (Pavia, 1998, 2002), carrier of water, energy and information, it represents a flow of knowledge, communication and development, rich as it is in individual and collective stories, myths, traditions and rituals. Both union and separation, dynamic and variable along its course, it alternates a plurality of souls: it both gives relief to the arid mounds of dirt of the surrounding farmlands and floods violently, it echoes the silence to the nature which the chisel of stonebreakers interrupts, as well as the sound of the water running through the cochlea of the hydroelectric plants. Similarly, the wise slow pace of ancient crafts and fishermen, the insatiable curiosity of the tourist and the powerful presence of ancient monuments "perpetuate themselves by renewing themselves" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 33). Now, they all serve other purposes than original ones. For artisans, stone shaping and carving is by now an avocation rather than a real job. They make use of traditional tools, a stick and a hammer, just implemented by an additional support in widia. Fishermen enjoy now the area as a catch and release fishing zone and a fishing contest setting classified as part of the category B section (mixed population intermediate waters). Visitors experiencing the landscape stand beside locals coaching on the cycle lane and businessmen progressing with their work. In the background, the historical-artistic heritage plays a crucial role in fostering collective social life (Lefebvre, 2003a).[97] Despite the "repressive" character they originally show as "seat of an institution (the church, the state, the university)", their transfunctional and transcultural nature they acquire when becoming an object of pure contemplation allows them to inscribe an 'elsewhere' into the space of everyday life, that is to say,

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[97] Traditionally, abbey complexes used to stand up in the surrounding of a water flow. Sant'Elena, Sant'Urbano and San Romualdo were the three chief Benedictine abbeys along the Esino River. Furthermore, the *Regula Monachorum* (Holy Rule) itself was not formulated that far from here, in a tiny village, Norcia, on the Sibillini Mountains, in the Early Middle Ages. To that respect, when outlining the cultural forces shaping landscapes, Turri (2008) refers to religious activities, aesthetical incidences, and socio-economic and political reasons. In particular, many signs in the landscape are ascribable to religious beliefs. Traditionally, the sacred building has both a symbolic and consecratory meaning (Turri, p. 153). In contrast with Ancient Egyptian religion, where the pyramids had to represent the grandeur of the Pharaoh (therefore the god), early Christianity tended to choose hidden but scenic places in the landscape. In effect, the places consecrated to religious buildings usually have outstanding natural features, such as springs, majestic mountains, dark abysses. "They are places reserved for the forces of nature, its secret expressions" (Turri, p. 157, own translation).

their u-topic dimension makes them carriers of "duty, power, knowledge, joy, hope" (Lefebvre, p. 22).

The resulting variety of rhythms, some of them in harmony, some dissonant, confirms the public character of the waterfront. Open nature and visual accessibility, private management and control show the ambivalence of the area, complex but attractive. Here, the "decline of time for empathy" (Nowotny, 1994 as cited in Amin et al., 2000, p. 46) does not impact on the social cohesion deriving from the sense of belonging which the river as a collective memory produces. The consequent polyrhythmia, as such "always result[ing] from a contradiction, but also from resistance to this contradiction – resistance to a relation of force and an eventual conflict" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 99) -, arises from the conflict between *homogenization* and *diversity* (e.g. measured time vs. a more endogenous time, public-private partnership etc.).

This conflict can be solved by fostering widespread practices of informal planning at the service of formal urban design. The engagement of "network-shaped social actors" joining public bodies, private actors, citizen associations, aiming for place-based solutions would promote activities of re-appropriation of social space (Certomà, 2015). The integration of formal and informal planning, that is, practises of domination and appropriation, would put public interests before those private needs that urban informality would instead favour (Certomà). Therefore, re-appropriation instead of domination and commodification of space (Shields, 1999), in order to return to (rural) public spaces their chief function of "vessels . . . [of] positive communal meanings" (Carr et al., 1992, p. 344).

*Figure 30. The Esino riverbanks.*

# CONCLUSION

> *Within a given genus or species of plant, 'nature' induces differences; no two trees, nor even two leaves of a single tree, are completely identical . . . Yet nature, at another level, also produces differences: different species; different vegetable or animal forms; trees with a different texture, a different stance, or a different type of leaf. . . Why should spaces created by virtue of human understanding be any less varied, as works or products, than those produced by nature, than landscapes or living beings?"*
>
> Henri Lefebvre

Throughout this dissertation, I have provided sketches of different aspects of public spaces. Against the assumed death of traditional forms of spatial publicness, the claim for further places for communitarian social life shows the relevance of the topic and the need for further thematic analysis.

The obsolescence of the distinction between *urban* and *non-urban* areas deriving from the explosion of this binary opposition and leading to the urbanization of the entire society – in terms of "varying density, thickness and activity" (Lefebvre, 2003b, p. 4) more than a special kind of settlement (Brenner & Katsikis, 2014) – shows that *public space can happen everywhere*. Once considered peculiar to cities, its inquiry urgently requires a conceptual shift from metropolitan settings to outer fringes and rural sites.

So far, scarcely has the diverse variable nature of public space been positioned in the countryside. Latest professional and academic studies concerning the current process of transformation of its identity (Amin, 2008; Baird, 2011; Carr et al., 1992; Madanipour, 2007, 2010; Whyte, 1980) usually refer to cities as the social arena *par excellence*. With particular reference to the daily rhythms unfolding in the Esino Valley, this research aimed at going through the potential rural public spaces can show in the process of transformation of the *definition*, *use* and *perception* of spatial publicness

underway. To this end, Lefebvre's understanding of space as a social product made of objects, both natural and social, and their interrelationships (pathways and networks allowing the exchange of material things and information), represents the bare bone of the entire study.

In public space, social product *par excellence,* spatial and social interactions develop the force field of everyday life, both expression of the contemporary rhythms and locus of their potential re-invention (Lefebvre, 2002). The evolution of social relations of production and their quotidian practices has not spared public space from the process of progressive abstraction of space. Conversely, its conflicting character, someway an intrinsic factor in its nature, has produced specific contradictions while occulting them. These antinomies have resulted in a reformulation of the concept of public space, both in the purpose it serves and the way users experience it.

Even though there is no agreed definition of the notion of public space, simultaneously referring to the juridical state of the space and its effective use, historically it has been associated with public sphere. Nevertheless, the civic and political sense it evokes is increasingly called into question by those claiming a substantial divergence between public space and public sphere. Commercialization, privatization, information control and virtualization of public space on the one hand, 'publicization', accessibility, adaptability of private space on the other hand, have resulted in a "a kind of exteriorization of the inside as well as internalization of the outside: the urban *unfolds* into the countryside just as the countryside *folds* back into the city" (Merrifield, 2011, p. 469). The consequent reversal of the traditional relations between private and public realms, quantity and quality, city and countryside and so on confers a new centrality to rural areas, as significant as metropolitan settings in the "global struggle for citizenship" (Merrifield, 2011, p. 471). From this perspective, rural areas can be seen as a representative cross-section of current socio-spatial transformations as well as contemporary alternatives to traditional public space. Even though noticeably slower and less resounding, rhythms developing in rural public spaces reverberate global beat – just think about climate changes, private-public partnerships etc. Because of their structural complexity, they act both as social encounter

producers and potential vectors in conflicts. However, the identity values they hold, mainly ascribable to the collective memory they evoke, assert their potential to "restore unity to what abstract space breaks up – to the functions, elements and moments of social practice" and "by contrast, . . . distinguish what abstract space tends to identify" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 52).

The socio-economic transformation having characterised many rural areas over the last decades, the Esino Valley among them, has inevitably modified the relationship between the inside and the outside, especially when referred to productive activities. While in the agricultural society living outside traditionally played a vital role in everyday life, Urban (and industrial) Revolution has moved working life inside. Moreover, new information technology widespread entails that physical space does not perform anymore as the core framework of exchange.

This spatial redefinition, however, does not imply that the outside has become meaningless. Conversely, its enjoyment becomes now even more significant. No longer driven by necessity, the experience of rural public space is mainly the result of a discretional choice. Even though still crucial for local communities' everyday life, it now acts as the setting of extra-ordinary *moments* of social life and, mostly, individual activities. Contrary to what may be assumed, this does not result in a decrease in the use of the outdoors, but in a change of pace, both in purposes and 'economies of scale'. No more tied to a cyclical cadence, linear rhythms of quotidian practices unfold in a wider socio-spatial scale. In the era of the virtual *flanêur*, co-presence is replaced by random encounters of diffused sociability while squares assume a territorial operational dimension. The infrastructural nature of rural gathering places elicits an immediate and spontaneous response to Urban Society needs, that is, "broader operational landscapes" (Brenner & Katsikis, 2014, p. 434):

> *Extended urbanization* denotes the consolidation and continued reorganization of broader operational landscapes – including infrastructures for transportation and communication, food, water and energy production, resource extraction, waste disposal and environmental management – that at once facilitate and result from the dynamics of urban agglomeration (Brenner & Katsikis, p. 434).

Like all kind of social spaces, historical rural landscapes state the *individual* and *public* identity of the 'subject' and mediate the relation between

*bodies* and *object*. Their socialising role, however, is really fulfilled when the aesthetic dimension of the *picturesque* meets the socio-cultural value of memory. No longer constrained to fertility *stricto sensu*, rural landscape now simultaneously represents a mediator between man and nature, a knowledge holder and a 'service' for both locals and tourists. More than a mere object of contemplation, rural landscape shows its own rhythm, both biological-physical and social, and the first one, often neglected in metropolitan settings, is as influent as the second one in spatial experience. It penetrates rhythms and is penetrated by rhythms. Much more than a simple *actant*, it performs as a *macro-actor* (Latour, 2005) in the narrative of rural social space.

These observations do not imply that rural public space solves all contractions of abstract space, far from it. Relations of exclusion/inclusion, propriety/ appropriation, homogeneity/fragmentation etc. still fractionate social space. However, here more than elsewhere, "everyone [performs as] a creator and contributor to the production . . . of space, and a stakeholder, an inheritor of a patrimony, a 'right to the city'" (Shields, 2013, p. 27). Tourism, when 'responsible', is much more than a destroying factor as it revitalises local rhythms. Farmers, artisans and local companies act a crucial role in preserving the slow-paced narratives that new technologies hand down outright. The engagement of multiple users in everyday practices and, even more, in planning actions protects public space from the 'danger' of a theme park, fosters its multi-use character, enhances its quality and fruition. The simultaneity of past, present and future, the interaction of collective memory and innovation strengthen "the perception of positive individual and collective meanings - [which] produces strong connections to and within public spaces" (Carr et al., 1992, p. 434). As such, rural areas seem to recall the Lefebvrian concept of u-topia, inasmuch as they make room for "l'imaginaire social" in their attempt to forge specific *(en)counter-spaces*.

Sure enough, much work on rural public space remains to be done. For example, that might be interesting to further analyse the issue of rural public space by means of the above-mentioned Actor-Network Theory in order to readdress the asymmetry between humans and non-humans and leave enough space to technology. Moreover, this research might be found incomplete in some respects. It could be seen by some as not philosophical

enough, by others as not architectural enough. To a certain extent, this is the inevitable consequence of its preconditions and intended goals, that is, to try to move on from the strengthened division between the two disciplines and attempt a practical application of the Lefebvrian theory of space – and not necessarily to provide an exhaustive investigation of the issue of public space. However, it could be considered a starting point for potential future developments. Once again, I grasp to Lefebvre's (1970) thought to drop anchor:

> Among these social needs, we have detected the following passages: the need for security, the need for unexpected, information and surprise, the need for fun, the need for 'private' privacy within increasing contacts and social relations. Among these requirements, the study can detect contradictions and conflicts that constantly arise new problems. Outside the utopian imaginary, this domain has to grasp to, realism can and must start from this study and these problems (p. 195, own translation).[98]

*Figure 31. View of the Esino Valley. The contents and the graphic design of the information boards along the cycle lane are the result of the present Ph.D. research. As clearly shown in the first picture, they have become part of the general masterplan of the area designed by the German architect Thomas Herzog (Source: Thomas Herzog Architekten).*

[98] Original: “Parmi ces besoins sociaux, nous avons détecté au passage: le besoin de sécurité, le besoin d’imprévu, d’information et de surprise, le besoin ludique, le besoin d’intimité « privée » dans la multiplication des contacts et rapports sociaux. Entre ces besoins, l’étude peut déceler des contractions et des conflicts, ce qui posera sans cesse de nouveaux problèmes. En dehors de l’imaginaire utopiques, dont le domaine doit se réserver, le réalisme peut et doit partir de cette étude et de ces problèmes” (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 195).

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