EDITORIAL

ISSUE 05 OCTOBER 2021 Imaging Peripheries

Tobias Boos
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano
Faculty of Education
tobias.boos@unibz.it

Daniele Ietri
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano
Faculty of Education
daniele.ietri@unibz.it

Eleonora Mastropietro
Università degli Studi di Milano
Dipartimento di Beni Culturali e Ambientali
eleonora.mastropietro@unimi.it

In the text of the call for paper we proposed for the *Imaging Peripheries* issue of *IMG Journal*, we started pointing out that "Peripheral territories are commonly believed to be the losers in the competition for people, services and resources and at the same time are persistently underrepresented in academic research and political discussion". We also aimed at attracting submissions that would mainly focus on the theme of representing the peripheries, intended as those areas far from the major metropolitan areas that in the scientific literature and policymaking are generally qualified as 'marginal', 'internal', 'inner'.
The authors who submitted to the call, multiplied the perspectives on the concept of peripherality, denying the scarce interest of research on the topic.

The contributions create a pattern of tense lines that pass from one text to another in variable geometries. The cross-references between one text and another concern theoretical reflections, methodological approaches or research and representation and forms of experimentation and planning, etc. The resonance between the various texts, although in a very varied panorama, invites us to reflect on the importance of putting into a network experiences of research and territorial practice, beyond logics linked to disciplinary and/or territorial affiliations. The articles collected in this special issue volume illustrate how diverse the nature of 'peripheral territories' is, since the peripheral, the marginalized, the unrepresented can also emerge in unexpected contexts when highlighted and mapped by the attentive researcher... Despite of their obvious differences, the 13 contributions share some common aspects. We would like to underline here only a few, considering this issue as a whole seen from a distant rather simplistic point of view.

Firstly, from our point of view as geographers we see two typologies of territories/places represented in the authors' texts: urban peripheries (i.e. areas that for their physical or functional localization are not part of the city center) and non-urban peripheries (i.e. small towns, less dense areas, also marginal areas, far from the centers of urbanization). Both of these territorial typologies, in most of the articles, share the aspect that the representations of their territory and their inhabitant's ways of live are strongly opposed to the features of the urban core.

Another interesting common feature is that the authors describe the peripheral areas under research as highly dynamic social and cultural spaces. The contributions show

for instance how marginalized places can provide a space for the re-definition of local identities. Other articles show that in peripheral areas social and economic transformation takes place and that the local communities of some inner areas show a high readiness to political and social participation. Thirdly, the approaches of the authors are in fact transformative rather than descriptive. Our fellow authors are performing and promoting research 'and' action, and one is tempted to say they perform research in action. This aspect we liked the most in reading and re-reading the articles: the peripheries here are rarely depicted in their being marginal or declining state of being but they are described as places promoting social interaction and change, and places of possibilities and freedom.

We hope this is and will be the case in many other 'peripheries' that are not included in this issue and that we are not even aware about.

IMG Journal chooses to present the articles in the issue following the alphabetical order of the authors. This is a straightforward way to solve the problem of sorting the contributions and is an interesting, albeit random, way of suggesting the readers how to approach the issue. In this short introduction we would like to offer a map or an itinerary through the essays. We of course perform this exercise with much caution, hoping to be able to grasp a point of view on each essay that the authors share. In presenting the contributions, we use a simple way to sort the case studies in this issue: we can in fact travel from Mediterranean to Alpine Italy, with a relevant stop in the large metropolitan area of Milan; and then move to Germany and France, in this case from the very south to the very north

of the 'Exhagon'; and finally, with a last group of articles, we discover case studies that are also geographically localized in north and south America. In this way, the articles are given a felicitous geographical itinerary, because it is very enriching to approach a subject from a comparative point of view.

Let's start our journey. We begin in the Italian Mezzogiorno, where we are given two examples of non-urban 'peripheral' areas. Corradi and Santus take us to small villages and non-urban areas in Abruzzo. They address territories where peripherality is indeed not just a matter of being distant to a urban center, but rather means depopulation, loss of human capital, and the decline of the built environment and infrastructure. In Italy this complex of territorial conditions is defined and approached with the widely accepted concept of "aree interne" [internal areas]. This term itself is still controversial, of course, but it has become accepted in national and regional territorial planning because of its great political and pragmatical value. The term internal area is associated with a series of specific policy instruments aimed at providing a balanced distribution of basic service to the Italian population. These instruments are thus an important element in Italy's current regional cohesion policy (please refer to the paper by Vedoà in section 3, where the author presents this policy strategy that is being implemented in Italy). In fact, Corradi and Santus underline one of the main operational issues that researchers and practitioners face when working in peripheral territories: the lack of reliable data. Thus, collecting information, the data base, requires a large but necessary effort: an effort that, we must highlight this point, seems not to be common to every policy action we have been able to observe so far in the territories we study. This is not of course

the case for our fellow authors, who instead describe how they organized and 'represented the territorial data'. They rely on geo-data available at the regional level, but also they were open to work on the field, meet the local actors, and listen to their understanding of their territory.

Travelling along the Adriatic coast towards North, Prinetti and Cameli propose a case study in the Marches and introduced the word "borghi" [villages] that is currently among the keywords everybody uses in Italy, referring to a large financial effort (circa one billion of euros!) intended to provide funds for regenerating (in the intentions of the decision makers) 250 "borghi" in the country (see cultura.gov.it/pnrr-borghi for further information). Prinetti and Cameli underline the trap behind the 'imaginary of small peripheral towns exclusively as destinations for tourism' – and the correlated rhetoric of some 'authenticity'. They propose a different perspective to counterbalance this trend which is still a very relevant aspect of policies also considering the recurrence of the word 'tourism' in the results of the regeneration initiative we referred above. The authors examine the area of San Benedetto del Tronto where they give us great examples of both the tourism exploitation of many small towns and the consequent seasonality, which means in turn that the town is almost empty for most of the year, and the shrinking of the town tout court, as it is the case in territories where the population is constantly declining. They portray this decline by highlighting the high number of abandoned buildings, but they also pave the way for a political response through the involvement of educational institutions (the local university in particular), to foster "local, daily and stable dimensions of small towns and their territories".

Gigliotti and Bassoli share some bibliographical references with Prinetti and Cameli: they all refer, among other things, to a 2020 book by Rem Koolhaas and to a 2018 book by the Canadian Center for Architecture. This suggests that the topics raised in this issue of the *IMG Journal* area to some extent circulating in the debate of the disciplines related with architecture. Gigliotti and Bassoli examine in their article, the concept of 'exhibitory complex', i.e. the exhibitions of architecture, that are to some extent anticipations of the forthcoming innovation in the field. The authors bring good news to our research topic as they argue that innovations in the latest years "take place just outside what for decades was recognized as an undisputed center: the city". Prinetti and Cameli present a selection of Italian cases of architectural exhibitions: Belmonte Calabro which today is an almost abandoned "area interna" in Calabria, the residential 'periphery' of the medium sized Alpine city and the "post disaster rooftops" of Taranto a coastal city in Apulia. The Taranto case shows that the concept of peripherality is far wider that what we, as geographers, expected, and include the free spaces of rooftops where creativity and sociability can flourish in a city characterized by the central economic position of petrolchemical and heavy industry. All the exhibition activities carefully described by the authors have in common their temporary nature and the cases confirm one of the features of peripheries we identified before: they provide spaces for action, interaction and freedom, and they might thus represent territories for developing innovation. Among the technological innovations, as one could expect, the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is one of the topics at the center of the discussion on peripheral

areas. It is first and foremost a priority for policies, given the importance of bridging the digital divide that still affects many areas far from the metropolitan centers. It is quite a common experience for those of us living in the non-urban areas to have not the availability of broadband internet. Unfortunately, for the peripheral territories, this is an indispensable infrastructure in order to take part in the widely acclaimed smart-working or distance-working environment of present day. But the digital divide was a disadvantage that businesses, professionals and citizens had to cope with well before the pandemic shock and its consequences. ICTs are not only a relevant mean of private and working communication but also of 'boosting tourism attractiveness'. This aspect is discussed by Vedoà, contributing to the Italian cases of this issue presenting territories from the Western Alps. This part of Northern Italy show both areas where tourism is developed up to being the prevalent (or sole) local industry and areas that instead have been slowly depopulating and/or declining, especially during the second part of the last century when the larger metropolitan areas of Torino, Milano and Genova operated as development poles attracting the population from the remote, poorly developed areas and at the same time providing the demand for tourism by urban residents. In the Alpine regions, tourism development did not necessary result in the modernization and expansion of infrastructure and did not foster the development of decent services of general interest for the resident population, such as medical care centers and schools. As a result, many of these areas are now considered as "aree interne", fragile territories featuring socio-economic decline. This should be a warning sign to the 'development' projects that still nowadays focus on tourism attractiveness,

despite the many cases showing the disadvantages and weaknesses of a territorial development based almost exclusively on the development of the tourist industry. The Italian Alps have a close functional relationship with the metropolitan poles that developed in the plain, the Pianura Padana, or Po valley: its eastern part shows quite a polycentric urban geography, while the western part is dominated by Torino and of course Milano. Given the strength of the urbanization in the city network, it is no surprise that these territories show an articulated, semi-continuous metropolitan area, with many peripheries. In our opinion the representation of these peripheral territories are depicted in an outstanding clear and illuminating way in the project *Padania Classics* run by Filippo Minelli which can be visited online (www. filippominelli.com/project/padania-classics). This project is dedicated to peripheries in the non-central parts of urban areas. Two articles in the presented issue focus on such inner urban peripheries on the example of the metropolitan area of Milan. Casonato and Vedoà work on landscape education in the south of Milan. The authors describe an education project which involved a large number of students from schools and universities working in unban peripheral areas in the peculiar context of Southern Milan, where urbanization is juxtaposed with agricultural land use. From our point of view the presented project contributes, among other things, to 'build non stereotyped and complex imaginaries and representations' of the periphery, which is a relevant step towards enabling more participation by the residents. In the second contribution that focuses on the metropolitan area of Milan, Lucarno and Lucarno articulate the concept of peripheral territory associating it with the social and economic

marginalization of immigrant populations and the physical degradation of buildings and infrastructures, the lack of public spaces and the general impoverishment of social cohesion. The contribution deals with the case of Baranzate, a municipality in the north metropolitan area of Milan, quite known for being the municipality with the highest percentage of immigrants on the total resident population in Italy. Beyond the demographic data the article considers the social and physical fragmentation of the municipal territory and uses the analysis of the landscape as a tool to identify and understand the crisis points and the potentialities of the territory. Following the author, a landscape is characterized by historical stratification revealing the development of the area in its reconstruction. Lucarno and Lucarno show that Baranzate, indeed, developed from being a former agricultural territory into a belt municipality that grew thanks to internal migrations and industrial development. Today, instead, the area is distinguishes a process of general deindustrialization, impoverishment and growth of poor migrant communities. The contribution highlights how this fragmentation leads to an image of Baranzate, also spread by the media, as a suburban ghetto. This prevailing 'image', despite several projects in place, is today an 'obstacle to development and redevelopment'. The challenge for local actors is to be able to change this image in order to transform Baranzate into a real multi-ethnic community which can provide the bases to prosper.

The last contribution presenting an Italian case takes us to Perugia, a medium sized city in central Italy. It is well known that archeological remains are localized in many places of the country and one is inclined to say that archeological sites are omnipresent throughout the whole country. Our imaginary

is fueled by the ruins and artefacts of past civilizations in the center of Italian cities of today or which are exposed in protected archeological districts. But Belardi, Battistoni and Sorignani introduce the case of an Etruscan necropolis as a part of a chaotic peripheral complex that includes infrastructures, prefabricated sheds, decaying residential buildings, etc. In the presented case the problem to be assessed by a regeneration project is not primarily the preservation of the archeological relics but rather the need to re-organize a periphery that apparently was transformed by the growth of the city, without taking part in it. The authors include the 'representations' of the transformative approach in their 'architectural project'. They remember us that peripheries with negative connotation of 'unsolved places' are frequently present in the urban structure and host every day's life or many residents. Thus the need for the projects to address the vulnerabilities and promote regeneration and social integration in territories that are the daily palimpsest for many individuals is an important object for academic research.

It's now time to continue our trip to other European and American countries and regions. On our way we have the opportunity to read the sole theoretical article in this issue adopting a theoretical point of view on the term 'periphery'. Michele Valentino discusses the concept of periphery, with the aim to identify some breaking points in the classical analysis of the relationship between center and periphery, particularly in relation to the current configuration of urban space. His discussion is then related to the problem of 'cartographic representation'. The act of mapping he says put in correspondence "two systems – the real one and the cartographic one". The author observes, that in the

cartographic representation we can find a close proximity between the concept of periphery with the one of the boundary. However, the definition and representation of boundaries seems today to be no longer adequate in relation to processes that redefine the concept of center-periphery or the spatial distribution of processes. For this reason, Valentino recalls examples of ethnographic urban maps, as an incentive to reflect on the modalities of representation of spatial processes, as well as, on a scientific level, as a cue to propose overcoming 'boundaries' between disciplines in a trans-disciplinary perspective.

Garland presents a contribution on the so-called Calais Jungle, an informal migrant camp, located on the periphery of Calais, in the area of Les Dunes. This informal settlement reached the attention from mass media at a national and international level, particularly during the most acute phase of the Syrian refugee emergency in 2015-2016. The article proposes an intermediate reflection, on a research project still in progress. The periphery is here approached according to a perspective that we could define multiscalar. The jungle is in fact located in an urban periphery, but at the same time it is situated at a margin point on the European border. Besides being a geographic periphery, the informal settlement is also a 'visible representation' of a margin point of European identity and culture. It condenses signs that directly recall the crisis of the European economic model, in which there is a border between migrants and residents, between rich and poor, between members of different cultures and, indeed, even within the camp between migrants of different countries of origin. The contribution connects these dynamics observed through a critical reading of (post)

colonial processes in the European context. The research is presented through an autoethnographic narrative, which features the process of the approach and encounter of the author with the case study context.

The concept of periphery as space of possibilities and freedom, to which we referred at the beginning of this introduction, is theoretically approached in the article by Van Lessen. After discussing what the label of periphery entails, the authors conclude: "regions that are labeled as peripheral suggest [...] less regulation by the center and, therefore, more freedom". This situation of the peripheral areas is discussed in the study referring to the theoretical concept of play: the cases are selected in order to present peripheral regions that are used as playgrounds. The first example takes us in the south of France, where the Principauté de Aigues-Mortes stands as one of the many (400 to 600 according to the author) micronations around the world. Born as a sort of parody of the Principauté de Monaco, the presented micronation introduces itself as "l'improbable et rocambolesque micronation du sud de la France qui stimule la citoyenneté alternative et complémentaire". As a matter of fact, side by side with this playful image, the initiative is an association organizing events and fostering the economic development of the local territory: the project promotes the image of the city, also improving the quality of life and the feeling of self-efficacy of the residents. Van Lessen then take us to eastern Germany; the Uckermark Kreis (Uckermark district) of the Land Brandenburg (State of Brandenburg). This is a typical rural and 'shrinking' region, affected by demographic decline and the lack of services of general interest. Moreover, also the image of the territory

is associated with wordings such as "outlying region". Surprisingly, in the survey conducted by the authors, there is also an immigration trend into the Uckermark, mainly by people that previously lived in large cities such as the nearby Berlin. Most of this urban migrants moved into the countryside as a consequence of personal decisions which in many cases corresponded with the search for a 'good life'; a life they considered meaningful and in which they can develop their capacities freely. For example "a middle-aged interviewee [...] explains that he considered emptiness something he could fill". In both cases the concept of play is used to think outside normal academic ways and to view personal and social processes as dynamic and sometimes unpredictable for the researched and the researcher. However, the presented cases in this contribution differ on the level of the image and imaginary: the French case humorously refers to the 'state' and the monarchy, the German case refers to a romantic idea of rural life.

In this issue three of the included studies refer to territories from South and North America, and we conclude this survey presenting them: they include also the keynote article opening the issue and closing this itinerary, as we propose it to the reader as the last of our journey.

Among the many aspects of peripheries one should consider also the complex sub-urban areas in many metropolises of developing countries. Verniz studies the informal settlements of one of Rio de Janeiro's favelas: in a context in which the lack of housing results in self-construction and thus in an urban development without planning. The author examined the spontaneous process of growth in the informal settlement Santa Marta and that in fact the development of the

settlement is not as 'unplanned' as one might suppose. Indeed, Verniz is able to describe the local formal ways in the decision making process lying behind the selection of location as well as the orientation and the shape of buildings. The study, based on empirical data collected in the area, generates a grammar-based computational model, that is then validated generating a 'planned favela' adjacent to the existing one. The presented contribution shows how the general approach of research-intervention/action that runs across almost every article in this issue of *IMG Journal* has the possibility of being implemented at different geographical scales; from nations up to the single building. 'Representing territories, also small ones, on the map' remains crucial: as seen before, for example, to point out the situation of unused buildings, or in the Santa Marta case to collect the proper data and validate the computational model.

A single specific building —a former carriage factory built in 1909 in Des Moines, Iowa— is the object of investigation and intervention of Goché. The author works in the post-industrial landscape using methodologies that include 'exploratory drawing, photography and video'. These tools are used in the outlined survey of the building, in order to study history and context; the narratives developed are then used in order to design a possible project of regeneration. In the keynote essay, that opens the issue, is written by the economist Kresl who is a specialist in urban economy and policies, and has important experiences of fieldwork and comparative analysis. He opens his argumentation discussing the role of images and imaginaries in the relationship between urban centers and rural peripheries in the United States and how this relationship affects the

ability of conversation and communication in designing public policies. He evokes also the impact of the image of the city to the eyes of the visitor arriving from the countryside, both in the past or nowadays. The author uses examples and insights from the USA, also in relation to how policies were implemented while the leadership of the federal government was held by autocratic/populist forces. Indeed, we can find many comparable situations in other parts of the world, including Europe of course. Kresl identifies several areas of policy in which residents of both urban and rural territories, instead of being contraposed, have common interests: e.g. health care, schools, infrastructures, funding of small businesses, management of natural resources. The author calls for a pragmatic approach on policies, also by citizens of the peripheral regions and their representatives. In this context, the access to correct and balanced information seems crucial, also in order to interrupt the isolation in which many residents of the peripheries risk to live, as a consequence of the depopulation and more recently of the pandemic crisis.

From our point of view, also a balanced production of images and imaginary of marginalized areas and people beyond stereotypes is crucial, in order to recognize peripheries as complex and dynamic spaces that are more than the 'non-central'. Another essential issue for research in peripherical areas is to respect and support the ability of their residents to place themselves in the contemporary world. In our view the most relevant result of this issue is that all contributions propose representations of the peripheries as places of action and change, intended to be inhabited (designed, planned, etc.) and to take part of today's world in important ways.