THE IDENTITY SURVEY: SIDE NOTES ON A HOLISTIC MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF URBAN CONTEXTS

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GENIUS LOCI
URBAN SURVEY
IDENTITY SURVEY

If on the one hand the legibility of a place is a shared collective ability, on the other the sensorial domain is an inevitable individual prerogative that each person experiences daily in the close connection between the micro-environmental conditions (sounds, smells, the light and chromatic atmosphere etc.) that environment presents in so particular moment and the subjective image that we form of that place, often with an indelible memory.

The intent to read both these dimensions therefore implies that the urban Survey attempts to repertoire, alongside the disciplinarily shared level of 'objective' descriptions based on multiscalar images and the hyperrealistic representations of the visible elements, the second level of intangible micro-environmental conditions —the atmosphere of the place— placing the objective and the subjective side by side in a holistic understanding of the ontologies of the contexts.

The article summarizes an excursus on the methodology of the Identity Survey, developed since 2015, which was born to consciously bring out the 'genius loci' and represent its complexity in the integral, syncretic and multisensorial experience of the corporeal dimension.

> All'inizio, insomma, non c'è un gran che:
> il nulla, l'impalpabile, il praticamente immateriale:
> c'è la distesa, l'esterno, quello che ci è esterno,
> ciò in mezzo a cui ci spostiamo, l'ambiente,
> lo spazio tutt'intorno. (Perec, 1974/1989, p. 11)

> In the beginning, in short, there is not much:
> nothingness, the impalpable, the virtually immaterial;
> there is the expanse, the exterior, that which is external to us,
> that within which we move, the environment,
> the space all around.

INTRODUCTION, SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND OF IDENTITY SURVEY

The Anglo-Saxon school of Architectural Review must still be recognized today as having been among the first forums to have systematically introduced into the specialist discourse of the II post-war period the themes of the urban landscape as a scene to be artistically composed with elements all collaborating for its best vision (Cullen, 1961/1976). These themes are accompanied by the fundamental studies by Kevin Lynch on the perception of the urban scene articulated in a system of systems as a necessary paradigm of virtuous design practices, which will evolve into the innovative interdisciplinary contaminations of environmental psychology and cultural geography.To go deeply in how people organize spatial information in mental maps, bringing out the affinity of elements and common mental schemes in the perceptive process of urban space (Lynch, 1960/2001), in the same fruitful decade are added the anthropological insights that Edward T. Hall develops giving rise to proxemics as the "silent language of space" (Hall, 1966/1996).

In particular, Hall introduces the role of distance receptors (eyes, ears, nose) in the formation of the corresponding visual, auditory and olfactory spaces that prefigure a

very current semiology of architectural and urban space as a unicum. It is formed by a coagulation of the material components of buildings –the physical ones measured by the traditional urban and architectural Survey– and the immaterial dimensions –the sound, light, olfactory, tactile, kinaesthetic ones– that form the multisensory landscapes in which we are constantly immersed.

A few decades later, Norberg-Schulz (1979) focuses on his phenomenology of architecture that identifies the stratification of historical contexts producing "the perceived uniqueness of a place" as an unicum of values (Norberg-Schulz, 1979/1997). From this background emerges the specificity of each context, the genius loci, expressed by the link between tangible and intangible elements and signs and a combination of physical characteristics of the place, the activities that take place there, and the meanings that are attributed to that place by the inhabitants.

Although largely updated also by the most recent advances in neuroscience –which have largely confirmed and explained them– these holistic approaches to the analysis and reading of architecture and urban contexts can be said to have somehow constituted the major critical nuclei acting as a driving force behind the research that led to the formulation of the Identity Survey methodology.

MATERIALS, GENIUS LOCI AND IDENTITY SURVEY

If on the one hand the legibility of a place, that is the ability of communities to orient themselves and understand a well-designed urban space, is a shared collective ability, on the other hand the sensorial domain is an inevitable individual prerogative that each of us experiences daily in the close connection between the micro-environmental conditions (sounds, smells, the light and chromatic atmosphere etc.) that that environment presents in that particular moment and the subjective image that we form

of that place, often with indelible memory, as deepened by emotional Geography.

The intent to read both dimensions identified above therefore implies that the urban Survey attempts to compile, alongside the disciplinarily shared level of 'objective' descriptions based on multiscalar images and the hyperrealistic representation of the visible elements, the second level of intangible micro-environmental conditions -the atmosphere of the place- placing the objective and subjective side by side in a holistic understanding of the ontologies of the contexts.

In our opinion, in fact, an in-depth understanding of urban environments can only be communicated in its entirety using a more integrated representation capable of describing the inextricable factors of a place's identity (Puma, 2024, p. 133). Based on these premises, in 2015 the research group coordinated by the author began to conceive and work on a methodology designed to understand and represent the complexity of places in their integral and syncretic experience, aware of the multisensorial bodily dimension (Puma, 2015, 2020).

The progressive approximation to the conceptual formulation of the ID Survey therefore follows an almost topological meaning ("The study of the geometric properties of figures that do not depend on the notion of measure, but are linked to problems of deformation of the figures themselves", from Treccani, lemma Topologia) where the epistemological study of the properties of a place no longer depends on the notion of measure alone but is also linked to the deformation of the interpretative lens of the places and the figures that describe them, removing exclusivity from the visual representation and adding languages and figures specific to other disciplinary domains (soundscape, smellscape etc.).

METHODS, MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL HABITATS OF URBAN CONTEXTS AND IDENTITY SURVEY

Following this approach, the Identity Survey constitutes an attempt to recall in the disciplinary domain of the Urban

Survey to recompose ad unum the traditional graphic representations of the conventional representation of architecture (the material tangible habitat) with the descriptive ones corresponding to the multisensory nature of the contexts (the immaterial intangible habitat).

The environment under study is segmented for conceptual and operational purposes into two equal qualitative categories, completely devoid of priority attribution: on the one hand, category A comprising the material data (in their visible and tangible characteristics of size: shape, materials, colours, components of the townscape etc.), on the other, category B comprising the data on the immaterial characteristics of its genius loci. Category B includes the intangible characteristics that define the "character" of a place including the sensorial environment (Schafer, 1977/1993; Henshaw, 2013), its function, the chronological dimension that characterizes its rhythm of life during the day or in the seasons, the social typology of its visitors, etc.

"Considering that a true understanding of a city passes through a more holistic representation of its genius loci, the 'identity survey' methodology will overcome traditional representations that are based on graphical and visual language only. Applications of sensory output of smart devices can serve as a key to access a deeper level of knowledge for a given place, pursued as well as the traditional architectural survey even with the multisensory reproduction of the environment" (Puma &Trombadore, 2020, p. 211).

The workflow is therefore structured as follows:

1. Category A -material tangible habitat:
   Acquisition of information elements on the architectural and environmental heritage by Architectural Survey, remote sensing etc.;
   Definition of the specific numerical, graphic and textual material repertoires by 2D, 3D graphs, visual, animations, etc.;
2. Category B -immaterial intangible habitat:
   Production of documentary repertoires with basic and critical multi-scalar contents;

Interactive maps for the description of the sensory characteristics of the place by soundmaps, chronomaps, olfact maps.

RESULTS, EXAMPLES AND CASE STUDIES

The Identity survey methodology represented from the contexts survey to expliciting material and immaterial features of the places has been applied on three cases studies in Tuscany, Italy (Puma, 2024, pp. 135-137).

The results consist of the outline of the urban Identity Atlas's model containing the cases studies outputs. Based on these premises, some campaigns of Identity Survey have been conducted on sample cases, whose crucial phase is constituted by the interactive representation, interpreted as the convergence between data from the traditional urban survey and 3D representations to obtain advanced visualization models evolving to dynamic data creating in real-time identity maps.

The three case studies were selected to sample the settlement scales which are also exemplary of critical issues deriving from the imbalances of livability in:

1. The square of San Pier Maggiore in Florence, affected by "airification" phenomena and excessive anthropic load (Puma, 2018). Here the Survey, Representation and Communication project carried out is based on two axes:
   The knowledge axis: the data production and interpretation by data acquisition -traditional urban survey and identity survey- and data post processing;
   The communication axis: the data dissemination of results by 2D graphics, and 3D models, and interactive maps.
2. A depopulated Apennine village, Gombitelli. Here the village was mapped through the urban survey of 12 significant small sites -carried out with an integrated laser scanner and aerial and terrestrial SFM methodologies- and the visual information contents containing interactive descriptions by maps created as a result of the identity survey (Puma, 2021, 2022).

3. In Castelnuovo Garfagnana, a small touristic town that decided to start the transition towards a slow tourism and circular economic model, in order to work on the material and intangible heritage as a trigger for a sustainable tourist livability of the historic center, the urban surveys carried out were set up to produce the urban mapping conceived for the description of the identity potential of the place.

The traditional descriptive and critical 2D graphic representations are accompanied by 3D models of the main architectural townscape's nodes and landmarks as well as a first data visualization platform designed in virtual tour including the soundscape.

CONCLUSIONS, OUTLOOK ABOUT THE IDENTITY SURVEY

The Identity Survey is an evolving methodology that aims to direct future studies in two apparently opposite directions. On the one hand, research on the representation of multisensoriality (with further tests on olfactory landscapes) and on the representation of the impact of 'time' on the perception of urban spaces.

Here the term is multifaceted in its many meanings: from chronological time, which differentiates the urban exploration of the flaneur from that of the city user or the organized travel tourist, to meteorological time to the time of the past that colors the same spaces differently if traveled and experienced by the child, the adolescent, the elderly. On the other hand, research on the support that Identity Survey can give with respect to the paradigm of sustainability and urban resilience.

The importance of the urban scene and its good structure, adopting placemaking as a circular approach to its design, maintenance and care, is crucial as it represents the connective tissue of communities and promotes the development and maintenance of a sense of belonging to places.

Maintaining a good physical structure of urban space therefore also means being able to leverage the shared cultural and symbolic meanings that individuals in a community attribute to that place, as a resource to draw on in the most difficult processes of habitat transformation.

Using the Identity Survey procedure that attempts to read the townscape in its integrity and material and immaterial richness can therefore contribute to highlighting risks, bringing out the potential triggers, monitoring its "state of health" and the intervention measures to be adopted, acting on multiple levels of governance of urban environments:

1. Promoting the livability of public spaces and the ability to keep cities 'alive' through interactions between individuals and groups;
2. Preserving the cultural identity, especially in the symbolic components of the townscape, positively impact on socio-economic contexts.

"Keep the spirit of the place" is one of the the recommendations by ICOMOS 2021 that officially added symbolic dimension of intangible risk to the list of commonly defined hazards and expanded its meanings to the interdependencies between the intangible environment and built heritage (ICOMOS, 2021, p. 59).

Following the primary sector guidelines that broaden the value of the protection of built heritage to include its social value, the promotion of inclusive citizenship, and balanced economic development also incorporating the intangible elements of heritage (COE, 2005; UNESCO, 2011; SDGs 2015; ICOMOS 2021), we argue that an additional reading category, C, could be integrated into the workflow of the Identity Survey described above, namely "Assessment and marking of immaterial vulnerability and urban resilience". This category is intended to enhance critical awareness of the intangible characteristics of places, in order to reconcile the cultural sustainability of urban transformation processes with long-term urban resilience and socially responsive development strategies.

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