

Towards City Museum as Praxis:
Outlining a Critical Mediation Strategy &
Analyzing City Museums and Exhibitions

Master Thesis by

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Introduction

The contemporary metropolis appears as a chaotic agglomeration of urban environments and flows. If Simmel's big city was already a real ordeal for the senses and a difficult place to live in, today's metropolises seem to have evolved to a paroxysmal accentuation and disarticulation of conflicting and overlapping urban rhythms.¹

The contemporary city often feels like a difficult environment to live in, and elements of isolation and powerlessness are all around. Its conflicting side seems to constantly grow at the expense of that of support and mutual care, while individualism and profit logic appear as the hallmarks of our times. Discriminating ideologies are on the rise and hate crimes constantly generate fear, while people and populations are always on the move, searching for better living conditions. Housing prices keep getting higher while our relationship with nature gets more and more distant. Direct or indirect surveillance and control often become suffocating, while private interest finds ways to appropriate and seize any type of public space, turning the shared space of the city into a mere passage. Digital technologies have monopolized our lives, bombarding us with fake news and selective representations that blur our perception. Environmental degradation affects our daily activities and our survival in fundamental ways, leaving us seemingly helpless, while often neither social justice is anywhere to be found.

Where should one turn to seek answers to the whys and hows of the contemporary city? Which are the reasons and the methods that lead to these conditions? How one possibly tries to change elements of their environment, whether social or physical, that appear hostile or oppressive? Are they supposed to do it alone or together with others? Is there a more hopeful future or will the incomprehensive power structures that usually define the urban condition continue to do so in

¹ S. Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*, Zed Books, London, 2016, p.13.

seemingly unpredictable ways? The academic context inside which this thesis is taking place, the meaningful moments of connection and the creative responses that collective cultural practices can offer, as well as various dialogical and critical approaches that many museums adopt in our days, lead us to search for possible answers in the field of museums, as a type of cultural institution that both reflects and shapes society. More specifically, we will focus on the City Museum, a specific kind of museum that is *in* and *about* the city and which can offer valuable connections between urban life and city planning, urban history and personal or collective memories, past, present and possible futures.

Beginning by approaching museums in general, during the last decades, their social potential and their various transformations, in order to be relevant in contemporary society, have been widely discussed.² Some of the changes that we notice in museums, especially from the turn of the century, are related to the themes and topics that they include, to the ways in which they are presenting those themes, and to the role they consider taking while doing that³. The widening of the presented topics concerns some that have been historically excluded or misrepresented, as well as contemporary issues that emerge and are of high interest. Dealing with such themes is often difficult, but museums can develop new modes of practice to investigate them, fostering debate and discussion. Through a content/message-oriented approach, rather than the traditional object-focused one, museums can become information and reflection centers, and civic forums for exchange. Even more importantly, they can transform into *enablers*, “providing audiences with the tools

² See, as example, the idea of the *post-museum* in E. Hooper Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, Routledge, London, 2007, as well as R. Sandell (ed.), *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Routledge, London, 2002, and especially the chapter of D. Fleming, *Positioning the museum for social inclusion*, p.213-224.

³ F. Lanz and E. Montanari, *A Reflection on Innovative Experiences in 21st Century European Museums*, in F. Lanz and E. Montanari (eds.), *Advancing Museum Practices*, Umberto Allemandi & C., Turin, 2014, pp.10-23.

required to deal with issues that affect them personally or the communities in which they live, offering pathways of engagement with complex subjects.”⁴

Another topic that emerges, while considering museums as social institutions, is their supposed *neutrality*, which has recently been debunked, turning the aforementioned *potential* into an *obligation*⁵. Taking into account the “immorality of inaction”, if museums are not acknowledging themes of social injustice, and are not addressing their causes and consequences, then they bear a share of responsibility for the perpetuation of such phenomena⁶. Instead, they ought to confront these topics, providing cultural frameworks to identify and challenge them. In cases where society is manipulated or deceived, they need to critically question and reimagine the status quo, and to act as public advocates by taking a stance, stressing the accountability of the private sector and governments⁷. Moreover, *Museum Activism* is also related to imagining and inventing new and desirable futures, based on the active participation of citizens and communities, whom the museums need to empower and give agency to, capitalizing “their singular combination of historical consciousness, sense of place, and public accessibility”⁸. While in the work of R. Janes and R. Sandell, *Museum Activism*, there are no direct references to or contributions from City Museums⁹, the connection of the above concepts to the recent developments in their practices is paramount, and it will be further analyzed. Based on this, the thesis will attempt to outline a critical framework that emphasizes the museum’s capacity as a dialogical source of agency and empowerment over a more decisive relationship with the city. To do that, both theoretical resources and

⁴ Ibid., p. 15

⁵ R. Janes and R. Sandell (eds.), *Museum Activism*, Routledge, NY, 2019.

⁶ R. Janes and R. Sandell, *Posterity has arrived: The necessary emergence of museum activism*, in R. Janes and R. Sandell (eds.), *Museum Activism*, cit., pp.1-21.

⁷ R. Janes and R. Sandell, *Posterity has arrived: The necessary emergence of museum activism*, in R. Janes and R. Sandell (eds.), *Museum Activism*, cit., pp.1-21

⁸ Ibid., p.17

⁹ T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, Ajuntament de Barcelona, Institut de Cultura, Museu d’Història de Barcelona (MUHBA), Barcelona, 2023, pp. 64.

museum practices will be analyzed and combined, to propose a possible extension of practice informed by theory.

In the first part of the thesis, a critical mediation strategy will be proposed for the City Museum, informed by both its history and the discourse related to its practices, as well as by theories about the city and urban life. In the first chapter, an overview of the evolution of this *type of museum without definition*¹⁰ will be made, based on the relevant literature and focusing mainly on the European paradigm, to contextualize the proposed mediation strategy. In chapter 2, the theoretical and methodological framework of this strategy will be developed based on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy model. In the next chapter, the work of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey will offer insightful readings of the urban condition, to be connected with Freire's ideas and be proposed as possible themes and approaches. Among those concepts, one that gets center stage, and which both Lefebvre and Harvey theorize, is *the right to the city*, which has been widely used in the last years in many fields, including that of City Museums. In chapter 4, the various interpretations that the right to the city acquired inside the museal context will be studied and will inform the proposed strategy as well, this time in a practice-based way. In chapter 5, the last chapter of this part, further theoretical resources about the city and urban life will be analyzed, emphasizing and bringing forward a critical *spatial* perspective that is believed to be relatively missing from the existing museum practices. Among this chapter's concepts are Edward Soja's *spatial justice* and Stavros Stavrides' *common space*, which emerge as ideas that can connect reflection with action and move towards Freire's conception of *praxis*. The critical methodological framework that will be outlined in this part of the thesis is conceived to act as a response to Francesca Lanz's

¹⁰ See F. Lanz, "City Museums: Reflections on a missing definition", *CAMOC Museums Of Cities Review*, 02 / 2019, pp. 4-7. And F. Lanz, "Mapping Contemporary City Museums: From a Definition to Manifestoes", *CAMOC Museums Of Cities Review*, Spring – Special issue for Taipei workshop, 2023, pp. 5-6.

invitation "to start seeking forward-looking manifestoes of the city museums of tomorrow"¹¹.

In the second part of the thesis, the proposed methodological framework will be applied as an analytical one, to examine in detail different existing cultural mediation approaches of museums and exhibitions *in* and *about* the city, and the degree that they might work towards empowering and liberating people. The analysis will include their own self-presentation, the author's observations based on research visits, bibliographical resources relevant to the case under study, if they exist, and the application of the proposed methodological/analytical framework of the previous part. In certain cases, thematic extensions or more critical mediating tactics will be suggested, based on the proposed framework. Each chapter of this part (chapters 6-9) will focus on one museum, or exhibition, with the four study cases being the *Museum of the City of Athens*, the *Museum of the History of Bologna* in Palazzo Pepoli, the temporary photography exhibition *Bologna Fotografata. Persone, luoghi, fotografi*, and the *FXHB Museum* in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district, in Berlin. All the selected examples are from cities that are familiar to the author, to variable degrees, comprehensible and translatable. This decision was made to offer opportunities for deeper insights and reflections, granting at the same time the needed amount of entitlement. For the same reasons, certain of the main concepts, such as *the right to the city* and *commoning*, have been mainly studied through their more European approaches. However, we do believe that a more encompassing approach could offer more insights, in both material and theoretical terms, and we would support it; maybe through a future collective attempt that manages to bridge and translate barriers in both language and lived experience.

¹¹ Ibid., p.6

Part A - Methodological Framework: Outlining a Critical Mediation Strategy

In this part of the thesis, a methodological framework for the cultural mediation strategy of a City Museum will be outlined, with the general aim being to emphasize the museum's potentiality to act as a dialogical space and platform that offers agency and empowerment to people striving for a more active and emancipated relationship with the city. Once we have contextualized our inquiry into the contemporary developments of City Museums, we will visit the work of Paulo Freire, in order to analyze a pedagogical approach that centers critical consciousness-raising practices, and which will act as the basis for our mediation proposal.

In the rest of the chapters of this part, we will focus on the writings of insightful scholars that offer critical interpretations of and theories on the urban condition, including both the analysis of alienating, oppressive and unjust realities, and of hopeful conceptions towards appropriation, liberation and justice. At first, these include Henri Lefebvre, with his conception of the city as an oeuvre and the very influential idea of the right to the city, and David Harvey, who offers a sharp analysis of capitalist urbanization processes and an introduction to the idea of urban commons. Meanwhile, we will also visit instances where the right to the city has been the central theme of City Museum discussions and practices, to locate various thematic or methodological tools that come from that context and relate to our theorization, to further inform our proposal. Afterwards, amidst a spatial turn, we will further visit the insights of Edward Soja, who supports the cultivation of a critical spatial conscience through ideas of socio-spatial dialectics and spatial justice, and of Stavros Stavrides, who offers a reading of the city through enclosures and common spaces, offering various tools towards creating more collective worlds based on shared belonging and participation.

Chapter 1: City Museum as a Dialogical Space

For many scholars, the beginning of City Museums in Europe, in the form of museums about the history of the city, is located at the second half of the 19th century, when the *Musée Carnavalet* was proposed in Paris during a period of huge urban transformations by Georges-Eugène Haussmann¹², to preserve the parts of the city's history that were getting lost. At the same time though, in many cities of the Germanic zone, similar institutions, focusing on their history, had already starting to appear earlier in the century¹³. The similarity among all these museums, in this first phase of their evolution, lies in their connection to the city and its history. During this period, cities that were going under substantial changes attempted to narrate, and thus preserve, their past through such historical museums located in important central buildings, while "their collections were meant to represent the city, tell its story and celebrate its glorious past"¹⁴.

A notable case, related to our further analysis at the second part of this thesis, is that of Italy, where the 19th century was marked by the events of the Unification and, in many cities, several *civic museums* were created. These museums do not necessarily align to the type of city history museum appearing in the rest of the continent, but nevertheless relates to it, since their main goal was "to strengthen the link with their local traditions and proudly affirm their specific identities, which were going to be absorbed into the new nation-state"¹⁵.

¹² See J-L. Postula, *Le musée de ville: Histoire et actualités*, La Documentation française, Paris, 2016. and F. Lanz, *City Museums in Transition: A European Overview*, in L. Basso Peressut, F. Lanz and G. Postiglione (eds.), *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework (Vol. 2)*, Politecnico di Milano, Milan, 2013, pp. 411-439.

¹³ T. Marshall, *City history museums and city museums in Europe: a survey*, in T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, cit., pp. 25-60.

¹⁴ F. Lanz, *City Museums in Transition: A European Overview*, in L. Basso Peressut, F. Lanz and G. Postiglione (eds.), *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework (Vol. 2)*, cit., p. 414.

¹⁵ F. Lanz, "Placing" the City within its Museum, in C. Whitehead, R. Mason, S. Eckersley and K. Lloyd (eds.), "Placing" Europe in the Museum, Politecnico di Milano, Milan, 2013, pp. 98.

Moving forward in time, the evolution of the City Museum during the 20th century has an interestingly diverse interpretation by different scholars. For Lanz it is a period of decline and neglect, as “by the early second half of the twentieth century the city museum was already a mostly outdated and disused museum type”¹⁶. Postula’s stance is more diplomatic, stating that while they benefited by new museographic techniques of the time, they uncritically followed the historical model of the previous century¹⁷. He is noting though a specific moment, during the inter-war period, when City Museums, along with many other types of cultural institutions, were used as potential tools of propaganda to support nationalist discourses¹⁸. On a different wavelength, even though not many new city museums opened during this century in Europe, Marshall sees this period as one of *development* and “of flowering of investment in existing museums in a good number of countries”¹⁹, focusing more on the post-war re-building phase of European cities.

Nevertheless, they all agree that the ending of the century, and more specifically the 1990s, marks a turning point in this evolution. City Museums are now leaving behind their more traditional role, to have “a more active social involvement within the contemporary city and its communities”²⁰. They often seek to redefine the role of simply preserving the city’s past, by interpreting its present, and even imagining and debating the future, sometimes appearing as “cultural tools capable of influencing and driving” urban changes²¹. This more direct connection between the past and the present can put a diachronic filter to certain difficult contemporary issues and help to

¹⁶ F. Lanz, *City Museums in Transition: A European Overview*, in L. Basso Peressut, F. Lanz and G. Postiglione (eds.), *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework (Vol. 2)*, cit., p. 414.

¹⁷ J-L. Postula, *Le musée de ville: Histoire et actualités*, La Documentation française, Paris, 2016, p. 96

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 112

¹⁹ T. Marshall, *City history museums and city museums in Europe: a survey*, in T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, cit., pp. 36.

²⁰ F. Lanz, *City museum in a transcultural Europe*, in L. Gourievidis (Ed.), *Museums and migration: History, memory and politics*, Routledge, London, 2014, pp. 29.

²¹ Ibidem

address them more easily²². At the same time, this marking point, of making the relationship between the museum and the city more direct, not necessarily mediated by history – or mediated by social history instead of urban history, is the one that makes the museum more relevant to the citizens²³ and distinguishes this generation of City Museums from the City History Museums of the past.

Some characteristics of this transformation, the “city museumness” as Marshall calls it, are a more interactive and participatory relationship with the visitors of the museum, the narrative focus on the present, the engagement with city futures, as well as new collecting practices²⁴. The narratives are now more open in mixing chronological and thematic approaches, in being more open-ended, and in including relatively controversial themes. The collections continue to be very heterogeneous, but the provenance of the objects, and the stories they carry, are thoroughly considered, to include previously unheard voices of the city. These changes, the narrative and the collecting ones, can already be interpreted as steps towards the City Museum being a dialogical space; in the sense that the citizens’ voices start appearing in an environment that was so far monopolized by expert knowledge, more often than not guided by – local or not – traditional power relations. However, up until this point, this is an analysis of a more dialogical *museum*, in the sense that the noted altered areas are the ones more traditionally related to this type of institution.

What makes this type of museum distinctive is its unique position in the cultural landscape; its objective being the city itself, where people live and interact. One of the possibilities of the City Museum is that through its content-oriented approach, it can foster a sense of belonging to the inhabitants of a city, where an inclusive idea

²² F. Lanz, *City Museums in Transition: A European Overview*, in L. Basso Peressut, F. Lanz and G. Postiglione (eds.), *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework (Vol. 2)*, cit., p. 436

²³ F. Lanz, “*Placing*” the City within its Museum, in C. Whitehead, R. Mason, S. Eckersley and K. Lloyd (eds.), “*Placing*” Europe in the Museum, cit., p. 97.

²⁴ T. Marshall, *City history museums and city museums in Europe: a survey*, in T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, cit., pp. 60-61.

of “citizenship” can be based, despite different origins, cultures, and religions. During these encounters, frictions might occur, but they are considered necessary into a dialogical process of reconfiguring a sense of belonging that is multifaceted, as are our cities today.²⁵ Moreover, the strong relationship of the museum with the physical and material city and its intention to “explain” it, as a first step towards appropriating it, is what will give these “citizens” the necessary agency to acquire their *right to the city*. To find their bearings through the “the mastery of the topographic map, of the physical city, but also to the knowledge of the social map.”²⁶

Interestingly enough, many similar ideas, no matter how contemporary they may sound in the museological discourse, have appeared as plans towards the development of civic consciousness, civic conscience, and active citizenship in a speech of Patrick Geddes about a “Civic Museum” in 1906²⁷, even though one cannot say that they had been applied. In that speech, he sets as a prerequisite, for the full conception of the city, the studying of the “drama of the City, as forming a Trilogy – that of its Past, its Present, its Future”²⁸. Furthermore, he urges us to study the city from many different points of view, while stressing the importance of scaled reading of a place, from the local to the global. He invites for a vivid presentation that mixes “at once artistic and scientific,” as well as to investigate how problems similar to “our present everyday ones [...] have been solved at various stages throughout the great civic past”²⁹. More surprisingly, he envisions the educational aspect of this museum not in the instructional sense, but rather as a laboratory³⁰. Finding these ideas

²⁵ F. Lanz, *City Museums in Transition: A European Overview*, in L. Basso Peressut, F. Lanz and G. Postiglione (eds.), *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework (Vol. 2)*, cit., pp. 428, 435.

²⁶ J. Roca i Albert, *European city museums in the making*, in T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, cit., p. 141.

²⁷ P. Geddes, *A suggested Plan for a Civic Museum (or Civic Exhibition) and its associated studies*, Research Meeting of the Sociological Society, at the School of Economics and Political Science (University of London), March 1906.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 200

²⁹ Ibid., p. 214

³⁰ Ibid., p. 224

stated with such clarity more than a century ago reveals to us their diachronic value and importance.

Another point worth focusing on is that all the transformations that have been mentioned would not have been achieved if the field of City Museums was not itself a dialogical space during the last three decades. European and International meetings of practitioners and researchers have made this evolution a collective process, embracing from the beginning the social potential of museums and building on their lived experience, while they continue to function as a place of discussion, reflection and synergy.

The first *International Symposium on City Museums*, which was held at the Museum of London in 1993 under the title *Reflecting Cities*, focused on the intention of “explaining the city” and during it, the *International Association of City Museums* (IACM) was founded³¹. Two years later, the *Museum International* journal of UNESCO, published a volume with the title *City Museums*. Looking in depth the related articles, we can notice already a denouncing of the older type of City History Museum, that was representing the city only partially through the lenses of the “generous bourgeois patrons”³². Instead, a needed “responsibility towards all citizens” transforms it into an “urban cultural centre,” opening an “almost limitless range of curatorial and interpretative approaches”³³. Other topics discussed are various tools that a museum can use to define and address the city, a forward-thinking project about migration – showing this hidden story in its diachronic existence aiming to fight racist stereotypes and misconceptions³⁴, and many more that had made clear, from the very beginning of this dialogue, the degree of complexity the contemporary City Museum faces.

³¹ J. Roca i Albert, *European city museums in the making*, in T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, cit., pp. 122

³² N. Johnson, “Discovering the City”, *Museum International*, Vol. XLVII, n° 3/187, 1995, p. 4

³³ Ibid., p. 5

³⁴ M. Hebditch, “Museums about cities”, *Museum International*, Vol. XLVII, n° 3/187, 1995, p. 7

A second decisive point in the evolution of this international network was in 2005 in Moscow, when CAMOC³⁵ was formed; “a forum for the exchange of ideas and practice on how best to represent the city, big or small, in all its aspects, its slums, its suburbs, its urban sprawl, its past, its present and, yes, its possible future”³⁶. Based on the previous discourse around City Museums, CAMOC was conceived as a dialogical space for both museum practitioners and scholars, as well as citizens – who were not considered just as audience but as active agents, while the complexity of the living city was also stressed.³⁷

A few months later, the fourth conference of IACM took place in Amsterdam, under the title *City museum as centres of civic dialogue*, which focused on the relation with the modern city³⁸. The conference was separated into three themes: shaping, activating, and representing the city. The emphasis was on the plurality of stories that shape a city’s history, which is considered dynamic and continuously changing, on the *outreach strategy* of the museum in order to play a more active role in the city, and on the various and differentiated images that a city evokes, based on different points of view and goals³⁹. The published proceedings show a big international participation and many different examples of city museum practices, while the keynote speech by Michiel Wagenaar⁴⁰ set the tone for a public/social urban history approach that encompasses many crucial points.

³⁵ ICOM International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums Of Cities, see <https://camoc.mini.icom.museum/> [last access 18/02/2025]

³⁶ I. Jones, *Understanding cities: A brief history of CAMOC, an international committee about cities* <https://camoc.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/11/CAMOC-how-and-why-1.pdf> [last access 18/02/2025]

³⁷ Ibidem

³⁸ R. Kistemaker (Ed.), *City museums as centres of civic dialogue? Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the International Association of City Museums*, Amsterdam Historical Museum, Amsterdam, 2006.

³⁹ Ibidem

⁴⁰ M. Wagenaar, *The urban mosaic. Townscapes and residential patterns in the Western world*, in R. Kistemaker (ed.), *City museums as centres of civic dialogue? Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the International Association of City Museums*, cit., pp.11-21.

A year later, another volume of the *Museum International* about City Museums was published, entitled *Urban Life and Museums* and containing papers from CAMOC's inaugural conference, *Museums of cities: gateways to understanding urban life*, which was held in Boston. Here, the concepts of contemporary urban life and of the museum's contextualization for imagining the city's future reappear, while the presented papers were combining theoretical approaches and practical examples from various backgrounds.⁴¹ Some related highlights could be the appearance of contemporary difficult themes, which were rarely touched until then, and of some forward-thinking museum practices to mediate them⁴², as well as calls for a more active, visible and creative role of City Museums in the diverse globalized reality, and in urban planning and place-making⁴³.

Not even a decade later, the *City History Museums and Research Network of Europe* (CITYHIST) was founded, including museums, research centres and universities, as a response to a series of identified contemporary pressures on museums. These pressures include political ones, such as the growing ideological polarization in Europe and the rise of far-right movements, technological ones, museological ones, such as the opposing understandings regarding the role of the contemporary museum, apparent within ICOM debates of the last years, and armed conflicts and wars.⁴⁴ The *Barcelona Declaration on European City Museums* that the network published in 2013 "intends to contribute to a clearer definition of European City Museums and foster a growing and enduring mutual recognition", and the main proposed axis are that of *History and Heritage, Academic*

⁴¹ I. Vinson (ed.), *Museum International*, Vol. LVIII, n°3 / 231, 2006,

⁴² See for example M. Houlihan, "City Museum, Society and Conflict: the Belfast experience", *Museum International*, Vol. LVIII, n°3 / 231, 2006, pp. 64-70.

⁴³ See J. Lohman, "City Museums: do we have a role in shaping the global community?", *ibid.*, pp. 15-20 and D. Grewcock, "Museums of Cities and Urban Futures: new approaches to urban planning and the opportunities for museums of cities", *ibid.*, pp. 32-41.

⁴⁴ T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert, *Introduction*, in T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, cit., pp. 9-22.

*Platform, Urban Network, Educational Function, Meeting Point, R+D+I centres, Tourism, and City Museums and European Identity.*⁴⁵

Although more specifically described, and with a bigger focus on urban history, these axes are no strangers to CAMOC, which has been tackling similar themes on the discourses happening under its organizing, and which recognized the *Declaration* and published it. The main difference between these networks, apart from their more or less formal/institutional structure, is that CITYHIST is more focused on challenges related to the European context, while CAMOC has an international character that includes viewpoints and understandings of the City Museum coming also from the Latin America, Africa and Asia, which follow different museological traditions and make the debate more plural and less focused at the same time.

The nearly two decades of its existence, CAMOC organized an annual conference taking place every year in a different city, with themes including *Sustainability, Participative Strategies, Social Change, Memory and Migration, The Right to the City, Connection, City Future* and others, while their proceedings are usually available online. At the same time, a *Museum of Cities Review* is being published a few times every year, also being available online, and some special projects have been launched, including the *Migration:Cities*, on (im)migration and arrival cities, and the *City Museums Global Mapping project*.

All the above thematic overviews have been made to justify the fact that the City Museum field is indeed a dialogical space⁴⁶, dealing with emerging contemporary topics, having the city at its core, and aiming for a more social role of the museum towards a more inclusive urban reality.

Lastly, it is worth looking into the two keynotes speeches at the 2024 CAMOC conference, to shape an idea of where this discussion is

⁴⁵ J. Roca and R. Kistemaker, *Barcelona Declaration on European City Museums*, <https://cityhistorymuseums.wordpress.com/> [last access 18/02/2025]

⁴⁶ The need for different frameworks, more or less local and/or institutional, is believed to further strengthen this point rather than weakening it.

at the moment and which are the crucial issues and topics, in order to position our following proposal in the most relevant way possible. The conference took place in Amsterdam in October 2024, it was a joint conference of CAMOC and COMCOL⁴⁷ and had the title *Collecting with(in) the City*. It included artistic interventions, which show the importance that this community gives to interdisciplinarity, as well as different kinds of interaction, from paper and poster presentations to dialogue sessions and workshops, which highlight the various levels of depth, scale and participation in approaching different themes in a short time. These themes spanned from *activism, conflict and oral histories to the sense of home, care and folk, indigenous and decolonial perspectives*. Due to its nature, the conference focused a lot on collecting practices – nevertheless contemporary ones, but in many cases the importance of interpreting and mediating emerged, while ideas of co-creation, participation and plurality were widespread.

The first keynote speech was given by Zandra Yeaman⁴⁸, and her role being *Curator of Discomfort* already makes clear that the City Museums community is both ready and willing to confront difficult topics. During her speech *Power in this Place: Unfinished Conversations*, Yeaman focused on some key areas of museum work, in order for it to become relevant in the 21st century.⁴⁹ She described how a City Museum can be a place of collaborative and collective building of social and cultural capital, if it reaches out to people – especially those that are pushed to the margins, in an interdisciplinary way, instead of maintaining and reproducing cross-generational social inequalities.

Then, she focused on the relation between *internal* and *external* communities. She stressed out much needed behaviors in both areas, such as *active listening, non-violent communication, being transparent, reflective, and radically candid with compassion*, while she

⁴⁷ ICOM International Committee for Collecting, see <https://comcol.mini.icom.museum/>

⁴⁸ Zandra Yeaman is Curator of Discomfort and Head of Strategy, Development & Implementation at the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow.

⁴⁹ Z. Yeaman, *Power in this Place: Unfinished Conversations*, at the *Collecting with(in) the city* CAMOC-COMCOL Conference, in October 2024. [not yet published]

denounced saviorism as manipulative, mentioning cases of “people in the museum sector” treating refugee women “as not very smart or extremely vulnerable”⁵⁰, while for her, their resilience was beyond any comprehension. The participatory framework is another aspect that needs to be considered both *internally*, as a first step, and then *externally*. Here, she recognized the different degrees of participation, from *informing*, to *consulting*, to *involving*, to *collaboration* and then to *co-production*, a situation that one is not supposed to know what the project is about beforehand. She also highlighted the importance of discussing various challenges in meeting occasions like a museum conference, in order “to support each other”.

The second keynote speech, by Léontine Meijer-van Mensch⁵¹, was focused on the “why, how and because” of City Museums and was titled *Re-calibrating the City Museum and Our Professionalism*. Starting from the reasons she feels “melancholic”, she stressed out the fact that the notions of *participation* and *community*, once “our effective instruments and innovative museological toolboxes”, have been “hijacked” and have lost their potential, turning into a “jargon”⁵². And this has happened as much outside the museum field, as inside, where many times “community” ends up isolating different groups in favor of some project or exhibition, instead of connecting them. Other reasons of melancholy are related to the contemporary reality, including the financial difficulties faced by city and neighborhood museums, and the recent political climate, characterized by polarization and the rise of the far-right on a “post-truth society based upon conspiracy theories, fake news, distrust and even hate”⁵³.

On the other hand, she expressed the reason she feels “hope”, based on the social potential of the City Museum. She sees as the museum’s obligation to offer inspiration for connecting, through the recognition of our “shared ownership of the cultural biography of the

⁵⁰ Ibidem

⁵¹ Léontine Meijer-van Mensch is the Director of the Museum Rotterdam.

⁵² L. Meijer-van Mensch, *Re-calibrating the City Museum and Our Professionalism*, at the *Collecting with(in) the city* CAMOC-COMCOL Conference, in October 2024. [not yet published]

⁵³ Ibidem

city”, to become a space for dialogue, and to offer “frameworks of critical reflection and interpretation”⁵⁴. Closing, her understanding of the City Museum as a *village well*, “a place where people come together to discuss issues of common interest, where people get water to survive, where people gossip, and where sometimes princes and princesses turn into frogs”⁵⁵, further illustrates its power as a dialogical space.

Based on the above analysis of the contemporary context of City Museums, in the following chapters we will propose an outline of a more specific methodological framework related to museum mediation that is *in* and *about* the city. This framework will be informed by certain theoretical ideas and insights, as well as by specific City Museum practices and discussions, and will have as a general goal the emancipation and the empowerment of city dwellers to re-appropriate the space of the city and the elements of urban life. In the next chapter we will analyze the pedagogical approach proposed by Paulo Freire, imagining its translation and application in the museal context to act as an approach for cultural mediation processes.

⁵⁴ Ibidem

⁵⁵ Ibidem

Chapter 2: City Museum Mediation as Critical Pedagogy

To expand and move deeper into the possibilities of the City Museum as a dialogical space, in this chapter we will focus on the aspect of *cultural mediation*, which we believe to be the most decisive moment of a museum's strategy in relating to its publics, and thus one of the key elements of a museum's identity and function as a cultural institution. In the case of a museum that is *in* and *about* the city, *mediation*, being an act of bringing together and reducing the distance between the publics and the subject matter⁵⁶, is the way through which it can facilitate the citizens to come closer to an understanding of their urban context, and a consequent appropriation of it. Mediating the common experiences of inhabitants of a city, is the way to bring forward the inclusive idea of "citizenship" that we described in the previous chapter⁵⁷, by fostering a common sense of belonging and by connecting people with each other.

At the same time, *cultural mediation* in the context of a museum seeks "to build bridges between that which is exhibited (seeing) and the meanings that these objects and sites may carry (knowledge)"⁵⁸. Equivalent in this case with the act of *interpretation*, cultural mediation is the *hermeneutic* part of a museum experience, a moment of *unveiling* and deeper understanding⁵⁹, which -as such- starts acquiring *informal learning* characteristics⁶⁰. In the case of a City Museum that does not necessarily focus on historical object collection but has instead a more content/message-oriented character, following the museum developments of the 21st century, this process appears to be a very interesting challenge that has not yet been fully systemized. Thus, it looks like a promising field of experimentation, even if just at a theoretical level for the time being.

⁵⁶ A. Desvallées and F. Mairesse, *Key Concepts of Museology*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2010, pp.46-48.

⁵⁷ See *Chapter 1: City Museum as a Dialogical Space*, p.11.

⁵⁸ A. Desvallées and F. Mairesse, *Key Concepts of Museology*, cit., p.47.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.48.

⁶⁰ See K. Gibbs, M. Sani and J. Thompson (Eds), *Lifelong Learning in Museums: A European Handbook*, EDISAI, Italy, 2007.

On the next pages we will lay out the main points from Paulo Freire's work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ⁶¹, to combine them with echoing ideas from the City Museum discourse and the notions of cultural mediation in a museal context. The goal is to sketch out a methodological framework for a possible mediation strategy for a City Museum, that is in line with and inspired by Freire's methodology, in terms of structure and of clear political aim towards emancipation. Meanwhile, the different context in which the Brazilian educator and philosopher wrote in the 1970s, makes it clear that we need to make certain creative analogies to today's urban living and to the City Museum context, as the locus of this process.

To justify the need for this kind of *pedagogy*, Freire puts forward the *problem of humanization* as a constant struggle to be more fully human, and to be *liberated* from a *dehumanizing* reality, which "although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that [...] dehumanizes the oppressed"⁶². The liberation of the oppressed will only happen through their "recognition of the necessity to fight for it"⁶³ and through their *praxis*, as "to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity."⁶⁴ Thus, a certain pedagogy is proposed, which is shaped *with* the oppressed, entails *their* reflection on the oppressive situation and its causes, as well as their engagement in the process for their liberation, while the pedagogy itself is constantly being negotiated and reshaped during this process.⁶⁵

⁶¹ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin Classics, London, 2017.

⁶² Ibid., p.18

⁶³ Ibid., p.19

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.21

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.22

Naming the world

One of the main concepts of Freire is *conscientização*, which in English can be translated as the act of acquiring knowledge and awareness of a certain situation, as a critical consciousness-raising. This process of "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality"⁶⁶ is what we believe to be important in our case, in order for the citizens to build a more interactive, participatory and decisive relationship to their city; "to enter the historical process as responsible Subjects"⁶⁷.

This strictly connects to *praxis*, as a term that Freire uses to signify the interactive combination of *reflection* and *action*, based on a Marxist line of thought which has since been revisited by various thinkers. In this *praxis*, if any of the two elements are missing, the other is also being affected negatively, either ending up being an alienating *verbalism* without transforming capabilities, or *action for action's sake*, which distorts true dialogue. When both dimensions coexist, then praxis is equivalent to a *true word*, which is both a needed element of dialogue, and a transforming act itself.⁶⁸ "To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*."⁶⁹ And *saying the word* is a right of everyone, to say it by themselves and in solidarity to others.

A crucial point, in this process of naming, is the need for *subjectivity* and *objectivity* to always be in a *dialectical relationship*, since world and humans "exist in constant interaction".⁷⁰ This means that neither objectivity nor subjectivity should be denied in the process of analysis and of action. The recognition of an objective reality is what makes any transforming action possible, while once people start

⁶⁶ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin Classics, London, 2017, p.9

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.10

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 39-40, 60-61

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 61

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 24

unveiling this reality, they can enter it and intervene on it in a critical way. We must note that critical pedagogy is not just about *explaining*, since if people do not reflectively participate in this liberation process, it means that they are treated as objects and transformed into easily manipulated masses. It is rather about entering into a dialogue with the people, who are the ones that must lead the change in their perception of the oppressive world, and consequently *expulse* its myths.⁷¹

A permanent relationship of dialogue is what a *humanizing* pedagogy consists of, and this dialogue needs to have certain characteristics. To initiate it, "trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason"⁷² is needed, combined with their realization that "they, too, 'know things' they have learned in their relations with the world and with other people."⁷³ Meanwhile, when acquiring more qualities such as love, humility and faith, it becomes a *horizontal relationship* which is characterized by mutual trust. Other crucial components of true dialogue are that of *hope*, without which the dialoguers' encounter becomes dull and unproductive, and of *critical thinking*, which denounces the static perception of reality and the focus on *a given today*, but instead understands it as a process and transformation towards humanization.⁷⁴

The basis of the above process of *naming the world* is something that we can directly connect to *cultural mediation*, which aims to lead "each person on the path of a greater understanding of self, and of reality as a whole"⁷⁵. At the same time, to connect Freire's ideas to the City Museum, we can mention again its intention to *explain* the city through dialogical process, as a preliminary step for

⁷¹ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, cit., pp. 27-28, 39

⁷² Ibid., p.40

⁷³ Ibid., p.37

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 64-65

⁷⁵ A. Desvallées and F. Mairesse, *Key Concepts of Museology*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2010, p.48.

the people to claim their *right to the city*; to obtain the necessary agency to appropriate their urban surroundings.⁷⁶

Towards liberating education

Freire stresses out that education often suffers from *narration sickness*, which consists of describing reality as motionless and predictable, or elaborate topics that are not relevant to the existential experience of the people. This is usually related to *banking* concepts of education that focus on transfers of information, and thus lessen or destroy completely the creativity of people, leaving them to be easily manipulated by those that do not want to see the world revealed or transformed.⁷⁷

On the contrary, he puts forward as practices of a humanizing pedagogy concepts of *co-intentional* and *problem-posing* education. In the *co-intentional* education, all sides of the dialogue are simultaneously Subjects that both critically unveil and understand the world, and re-create knowledge. The realization of the people's role as reality's permanent re-creators and as knowledge's re-inventors is what will let them commit to their involvement, and will solve the *teacher-student contradiction*.⁷⁸ In the *problem-posing* concept of education, elements of the objective reality start being perceived deeper, and acquire the role of a problem, a challenge. By supporting people on reflecting upon those elements, through acts of cognition, this kind of liberating education aims for "the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality"⁷⁹. By developing the ability to perceive critically their existence in interaction with the world, is how they will manage to see it as a progressive and transforming reality.⁸⁰ Consequently, the current *present* situation can

⁷⁶ J. Roca i Albert, *European city museums in the making*, in T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, Institut de Cultura, Museu d'Història de Barcelona (MUHBA), Barcelona, 2023, p. 141.

⁷⁷ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, cit., pp.44-46

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.42, 45

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 54

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 52-56

be apprehended as a historical reality, always part of a process of transformation, making it possible to look at the *past* for reasons of deeper understanding of the present, as a tool for a more wise building of the *future*.⁸¹

Similar ideas can be found in the literature of *museum education and learning* developed in the last decades⁸², and especially in the notion of *cultural mediation* which can be considered as an evolved form of the first⁸³. While the two have similar pedagogical foundations, what distinguishes the latter is the merging of stronger forms of *sociability*, “based on the specific expectations, needs and motivations of visitors”⁸⁴. In other words, similarly to Freire’s proposals, one of the prospects of cultural mediation is to break the traditional linearity of *transmission* in the museum, renewing the museum-visitor relationship into a participatory and dynamic one.⁸⁵

Defining the program content of the pedagogy

For all the above ideas to begin materializing, it is necessary to be defined a *content* of this dialogue, a *program content* of this pedagogy, which ought to be determined itself in a dialogical way. For Freire, “the starting point [...] must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people”⁸⁶, which should be re-presented to them as a problem that asks for their response, both intellectually and in action. At the same time, this content needs to be found in the human-world relationship, neither people themselves – disconnected from reality – should be the focus, nor the reality alone.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 57-58

⁸² See for example E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, Routledge, London, 2007.

⁸³ M. Paquin and R. Lemay-Perreault, *De l'éducation muséale à la médiation culturelle au musée : d'une muséologie de l'apprentissage à une muséologie des publics*, in F. Mairesse (ed.), *Définir le musée du XXI^e siècle : matériaux pour une discussion*, ICOFOM, Paris, 2017, pp. 261-265.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.262 (my translation)

⁸⁵ R. Lemay-Perreault and M. Paquin, *Le concept de transmission est-il révolu en milieu muséal?*, in F. Mairesse (ed.), *Définir le musée du XXI^e siècle : matériaux pour une discussion*, cit., pp. 234-237.

⁸⁶ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, cit., p. 68

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 69, 79

Based on the historical nature of humans, and their possibility for a *decisive attitude* towards the world, Freire introduces the terms of *limit-situations*, as a permeable possibilities' boundary, and of *limit-acts*, as those that negate and can overcome a given situation, to better direct the searching of the dialogue's *thematics*.⁸⁸ Further, he describes how an *epoch* can be characterized by the interrelated "ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude"⁸⁹, the representation of which – and of their obstacles – form the *generative themes* of an epoch. In turn, the interacting network of these themes forms a *thematic universe*, while "the *themes* both contain and are contained in *limit-situations*; the *tasks* they [the themes] imply require *limit-acts*"⁹⁰.

Since some people – who are favored by limit-situations – are acting towards maintaining the structures of the status quo, others – who are suppressed by them – struggle to alter these structures by means of limit-acts. This antagonism often tends to mythicize the themes of an epoch, creating a climate of irrationality and sectarianism. In those cases, the *myth-creating irrationality* becomes a theme of itself, since it is threatening to take away from the other themes their dynamic character.⁹¹ In this case, we can hear the echo of Léontine Meijer-van Mensch's keynote speech, that we mentioned on the previous chapter, when she urged for the museum to offer critical reflection and interpretation frameworks, as a remedy to the post-truth society we find ourselves in.⁹²

Furthermore, Freire describes how *generative themes* can be thought of as concentric circles. Within the bigger circles can be found the general themes, such as that of *domination*, which imply their opposites as goals to be achieved, in this case *liberation*. In the smaller circles, characteristic themes and limit-situations of certain

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 71-73

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 74

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 75

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 74-75

⁹² See Chapter 1: *City Museum as a Dialogical Space*, pp.17-18.

societies are found, which imply historical similarities between them. Following, there are *particular themes* of each society, as well as *epochal sub-units*, which although being thematic diversifications inside a society still relate to the whole of it.⁹³ An attempt to define certain generative themes that can be investigated through a City Museum, will be made in the next chapters. We will draw upon the lived experience of the cities in the 21st century, theoretical texts on the urban condition, as well as themes that City Museums, exhibitions and conferences have been dealing with in recent years.

Thematic investigation and decoding

Moving forward, as *thematic investigation* can be defined the analysis of a given existential dimension, in order to have a more critical attitude towards the related limit-situation, introducing people to a more conscious way of thinking about their reality. In cases where the situation is perceived as very dense and impermeable – a coded situation, it is essential to use means of abstraction. This kind of critical analysis – the decoding, is not about reducing the concrete to abstract, but rather about reflecting on the interrelation of both elements.⁹⁴

Since investigating a generative theme means investigating people's thoughts and actions related to reality, it is crucial for the people to act as *co-investigators*. This stance could be considered controversial by some, since it can be argued that the *objectivity* of the investigation is being sacrificed. Although this is not a well-grounded position, because it takes as granted that the themes exist in some pure form apart from the people, while on the contrary they exist in the relation of the people with the world, with concrete facts as references. Another danger that emerges, if people are not involved as co-investigators, is for them to be transformed into the focus of investigation, to be considered as its objects.⁹⁵

⁹³ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, cit., p.76

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.77

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp.79-80

Thematic investigation is proposed as a cultural action and a pursuit of a problem-posing education. Being a dialogical process itself, it analyzes the generative themes that are found in the people's view of the world – from which is thus defined by, and *re-presents* them as a problem, rather than a lecture. Simultaneously, as a creative process, while interpreting the problems, it should critically discover also the links between the different themes, in order to create a comprehension of reality as *total* as possible.⁹⁶

As a next stage in this process, Freire introduces the concept of *codifications*, which are “the objects that mediate the decoders in their critical analysis”⁹⁷. The creation of the codifications should align to certain principles and requirements, the first of which is for them to represent familiar situations, to be easily recognizable by the people whose thematics are under analysis. The second is that they should be neither too explicit nor very enigmatic, because in the first case they appear as predetermined and are approaching the character of propaganda and slogans, while in the other case they seem like riddles. Instead, they should be relatively simple in terms of complexity, and they should offer more than one decoding alternative, to act as *cognizable objects* and to foster critical reflection.⁹⁸

Moreover, in order to amplify the perception of dialectic relations between the different themes and their opposites, it is advised for the codifications to be organized as a *thematic fan*, opening up to multiple directions of other related themes.⁹⁹ Regarding the *channels* a codification might use, Freire mentions that they can be visual, tactile or auditive, as well as any combination of the above, while the selection of the channel depends as much to the content, as to the literacy level of the people involved.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 81-84

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.87

⁹⁸ Ibidem

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.88

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.94

Dialogical and anti-dialogical cultural action

In the last chapter of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire describes certain diachronic theories of *dialogical* and *anti-dialogical* cultural action, in order to theorize further on *praxis*, emphasizing that "it is when the majorities are denied their right to participate in history as Subjects that they become dominated and alienated"¹⁰¹ while "dialogue, as the encounter among men to 'name' the world, is a fundamental precondition for their true humanization"¹⁰². We believe that these insights can be used as filters, together with more personalized observations, in the process of analyzing certain city museums and exhibitions, as in the second part of this thesis. At the same time, they can be thought of as parameters when creating new mediation material for similar settings.

In the complex of anti-dialogical theories, Freire includes *conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural invasion*. As *conquest* he describes the oppressor's attempt to take away the oppressed's potential to *consider* the world, by *mythicizing* it. Portraying the world as something fixed and given that people can only adapt to, increases their passivity and alienation. This way the deposition of myths becomes key to the preservation of status quo.¹⁰³ In the process of *divide and rule*, a crucial aspect is the emphasis on a *focalized* view of a certain situation, rather than on the dimension of *totality*. This leads to isolation of people and strips them off the possibility towards a critical perception of the total reality and of problems of other communities.¹⁰⁴ This echoes one of the melancholy points from the keynote speech of Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, when she was describing the emergence of this exact effect while strictly grouping specific people under the notion of "community", for a specific museum project or exhibition, leading to their separation and

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.103

¹⁰² Ibid., p.110

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.111-112

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.114

alienation from others.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, Freire mentions that the oppressors often appear as *saviors*, to avoid unity and organization between the people, which could lead them to shift their weakness into the power to re-create reality.¹⁰⁶ This point, in turn, echoes Zandra Yeaman's keynote speech, when she condemned the saviorism behavior she has encountered in the museum sector, denouncing it as manipulative.¹⁰⁷

In his analysis, Freire describes *manipulation* as the attempt of the dominant elites to force their own objectives onto the people. The element of myth is again a constitutive one, like for example with the bourgeoisie one that fills people with want for personal success.¹⁰⁸ Lastly, as *cultural invasion* is described the phenomenon in which the cultural context of a group is being invaded, in order to impose the invader's view of the world and to restrain the invaded group's creativity and expression. Cultural invasion is by definition an act of violence, an instrument of economic and cultural domination, as well as the result of domination, that leads to cultural inauthenticity of the invaded.¹⁰⁹ A point that can be of importance for the museum field is Freire's explanation that the institutions of a rigid and oppressive social structure are unavoidably influenced by the structure and adopt its style in their action, transmitting its myths. This leads to the realization that, inside this dominating structure, they end up acting "as agencies which prepare the invaders of the future".¹¹⁰

On the contrary, Freire moves forward by theorizing dialogical cultural action, to understand its fundamental elements and apply them during the proposed pedagogy process. In the second part, during our case studies analysis, we will attempt to highlight such elements and thus consider certain materializations of them in the

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 1: *City Museum as a Dialogical Space*, pp.17-18.

¹⁰⁶ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, cit., p.118

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 1: *City Museum as a Dialogical Space*, pp.16-17.

¹⁰⁸ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, cit., pp.120-122

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.125-127

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.127

museum and exhibition context. At the same time, we can propose some possible alternatives for parts that are characterized by anti-dialogical elements.

The first of these constituent characteristics of dialogical action is the *cooperation*, in which the Subjects meet to name and transform the world. For this kind of cooperation to happen, communication is essential, while, since no one can unveil the world *for* another, all people need to become Subjects of this action, even if they may have not initiated the unveiling.¹¹¹ The next element is that of *unity for liberation*. To achieve this unity, a specific cultural action is needed that will support people in understanding the *why* and *how* of their attachment to reality. Their unity involves solidarity, as well as class consciousness, that will detach them from the myth that binds them to the worldview of the oppressor, while the specific cultural action that will achieve it differs, depending on historical and social factors and structures.¹¹² An example Freire gives is illuminating for our case: the *urban oppressed* "live in an expanding context in which the oppressive command center is plural and complex"¹¹³. They are exposed to an *oppressive impersonality*, while "the oppressive power is to a certain extent 'invisible' [...] because of its dispersion".¹¹⁴

A third element of the dialogical action theory is that of *organization*, as an opposite to the anti-dialogical manipulation, and as a natural next step of unity. In order for organization to happen, a certain *witness* is needed, to the nature of liberating struggle as a common task. This witness requires critical understanding of the current historical context, of the contradictions of society and of the people's worldviews, and is therefore historically situated and not pre-determined. However, some of its elements are diachronic, and those include *consistency* amid words and actions, *boldness* to face the risky nature of existence, *radicalization*, *courage to love*, and *faith* in

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp.140-142

¹¹² Ibid., pp.145-148

¹¹³ Ibid., p.148

¹¹⁴ Ibidem

the people. Since this witness constitutes an action, it is a dynamic element and a transforming part of the societal context.¹¹⁵

Lastly, *cultural synthesis* is put forward as the antagonizing opposite of *cultural invasion*. In this case, the pedagogy's actors – or the museum mediator – that enter the world of the people from *outside*, do not do so to *teach* or *transmit* something, but to learn *with* the people, integrated with them as co-authors of that action.¹¹⁶ On a philosophical level, *synthesis* constitutes, by definition, a process of successive mediations in which "a first situation (the thesis) must pass through the mediation of its opposite (antithesis) to progress to a new condition (synthesis) which retains something of each of the two preceding moments"¹¹⁷. For Freire, the action of *cultural synthesis* is also strictly and interactively connected to that of *thematic investigation*, in a creative act of analyzing reality and intervening in the historical process as Subjects. The main benefit of synthesis lies in the fact that an outside viewer, once having identified with the people's demands, can, and must, pose as a problem the *meaning* of those demands, the historical concrete situation that embodies them. Only this way can people go further than *palliative* solutions and consciously strive for a transformation of reality into a more humanizing one for everyone.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp.148-150

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp.152-156

¹¹⁷ A. Desvallées and F. Mairesse, *Key Concepts of Museology*, cit., p.47.

¹¹⁸ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, cit., pp.152-156

Through the above analysis, we can now conceive a methodological framework of a City Museum *mediation practice* that acquires characteristics of *critical pedagogy*. These include a process of critically *naming* an oppressive and unjust reality in a consciousness-raising and participatory way, as well as elements of *co-intentional* and *problem-posing* education which challenge the static perception of the world and offer to people the necessary agency to conceive their interactive and formative relation to it. This cultural mediation method needs to adopt theories of *dialogical cultural action*, while offering the necessary tools to co-investigate the various socially relevant themes under question. Some possible approaches to such themes, that relate to the city and to urban life, will be visited in the following chapters, in order to further connect the proposed mediation strategy to museums and exhibitions that are *in* and *about* the city. The general aim of this theoretical elaboration is to start conceiving the City Museum as a platform that can act towards stimulating *praxis*, as Freire conceives it in the combination of *reflection* and *action*. For this reason, the next chapter will focus on both *limit-situations* and *limit-actions* in its examination of various urban issues.

Chapter 3: Reading and Writing the City

In order to connect Freire's theorizing to the reality of the city, and to specify and materialize certain concepts in this context, in this chapter we will visit the insights of two prominent scholars who have dealt with the theme of urbanity in a way that aligns with that of Freire and can thus enrich and interact with it. Henri Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city, which was revisited and expanded by David Harvey recently, emerges as a diachronically relevant and contested theme, that can encompass many different aspects of urban life. At the same time, their ability to present and critically investigate certain kind of urban developments and city changes as problems can enrich our proposed mediation strategy with certain valuable methodological tools and approaches.

Henri Lefebvre: the City as Oeuvre & the Right to the City

To shape an idea of our *epoch*, based on the reality of city life, we choose to first turn to the insightful *Writings on Cities* of Henri Lefebvre¹¹⁹, who through a critical analysis described a process of industrialization and urbanization that started in the 19th century. His concepts and ideas, besides revealing some *generative themes*, will also guide us on transferring Freire's ideas to the urban context, making clearer an interpretation of them that a City Museum can more directly use.

Some general descriptions of what a city is, according to Lefebvre, can be very useful from the beginning, to help us guide our discussions. First and foremost, he defines cities as "centres of social and political life"¹²⁰, making clear that we do not refer to some bare

¹¹⁹ H. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* (E. Kofman & E. Lebas, Trans./Eds.), Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1996. [Our main focus, *Part II: Right to the City*, was originally published in 1968]

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.66

background of architectural features, but to a human-world relationship, as we already saw Freire describing. At the same time, a city is being understood as an *oeuvre*, a term that he uses to emphasize the difference between *use value*, which characterizes the *oeuvres* and the social relations attached to their creation, and *exchange value*, which relates to products and commerce, and is a degradation of the first and an expropriation of it from capitalist mindset and practices. On this fundamental difference are based many struggles and violent contrasts, that are part of the urban context's community life and, paradoxically, according to Lefebvre, "do not prevent either attachment to the city nor an active contribution to the beauty of the *oeuvre*", but instead "strengthen the feeling of belonging".¹²¹

A process with two, sometimes contradictory, aspects is being revealed by Lefebvre as taking place in our times, that of industrialization and urbanization.¹²² This in turn implies the production of another process, that of '*implosion-explosion*' of the city, in which the urban characteristics spread in extensive industrial areas where the *urban fabric* becomes more and more tight, while historical urban centres disintegrate, sometimes being abandoned and transformed into ghettos, at other times turning into commercial centres for the more privileged.¹²³ The importance for the analysis of the *urban fabric* lies beyond its morphology, to it being the support – not just the backdrop – for *urban society*, as the way of living.¹²⁴ Thus, when Lefebvre explains how old urban cores, based on their aesthetic qualities, are being transformed into a product, acquiring the double role of "place of consumption and consumption of place"¹²⁵, the domination of exchange value over use value leads to a *crisis* of the city, mainly on the social level.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp.66-68

¹²² Ibid., p.70

¹²³ Ibid., p.71

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.72

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.73

Lefebvre stresses out that this crisis is far from a natural phenomenon, and instead, identifies an underlying *class strategy*. He traces this strategy from the second half of the 19th century, when a wave of revolutionary attempts can be located, at least in Paris, which could have been turned into *urban democracies*, if the threatened ruling class at each time had not prevented it, by ruining *urbanity*. The first act of this *class strategy* consists of the famous Haussmann's renovation of Paris, which Lefebvre interprets as a deep cut into urban life. The replacement of lively streets with avenues and boulevards and of "unhygienic" but vibrant quartiers with bourgeois estates and monumental buildings, did create beautiful views, that still today are being consumed, but at the same time glorified the power of the State and emphasized its monopoly in violence and decision-making¹²⁶. Most importantly, when Lefebvre says that it deeply damaged *urban life*, he means that it attacked what it signifies, which is "meetings, the confrontation of differences, reciprocal knowledge and acknowledgement (including ideological and political confrontation), ways of living, 'patterns' which coexist in the city."¹²⁷

The value of his seemingly specified analysis for this thesis is not the debunk of the myth of Haussmann's planning, which is although true that still needs to escape the enclosure of academic and 'expert' discourse, but to give an example of posing urban changes as *problems* that need deeper understanding and evaluation. Meanwhile, similar ideologies, probably with updated means and plans, are still ongoing, and thus the *class strategy of replanning* could logically be seen as a *generative theme* that spans through different societies, inevitably turning these top-down decisions into *limit-situations*. Through a similar lens, we proceed to the next two 'acts' that he identified for Paris, and which can be even easier projected to our contemporary times, either as planning decisions themselves, or as the consequences they bring to a communal city life.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp.75-76

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp.75

Lefebvre notes that Haussmann didn't succeed, and history tells us the same, with an even stronger attempt at an urban democracy following, that tried to re-appropriate the city and marked European history; the Paris Commune of 1871. We will not try to evaluate this historical period, or to diagnose it, both of which are still ongoing discourses. What is important for us in the process we have started is how Lefebvre describes the *urban planning* of the period that followed, which is not other than the creation of the *suburbs*. In this second act, the State of the Third Republic, by inventing a new notion of *habitat* isolated from urban life, did give a solution to the overpopulation of the city, which had resulted from industrialization. Equally important though is that it started creating a new hierarchy based on property and neighborhoods, and a further dominance of exchange over use value, this time related to housing. With the subsequent focus on everyday life and consumption, *urban consciousness* started to fade in the habitats of those suburbs, supposedly living close to nature but still dependent on the city.¹²⁸

As a third act, Lefebvre identifies the period after the Second World War, when large-scale housing estates and "new towns" started being constructed as a response to the housing crisis and the unstable political climate. The new *habitat*, at the same time *abstract* and *functional*, will be coupled by a further invasion of exchange value, through speculation on plots and property, and a planning ideology of eradication of any urban characteristic. The urban consciousness and the relation to the city as an oeuvre were further diminished, and maybe disappeared.¹²⁹

In our days, further acts of this *class strategy*, conscious and unconscious at the same time, could be identified and posed as challenges for investigation and intervention. For example, the hegemony of private cars in most of our cities, that has recently started to be challenged in the name of more human-centered planning, coupled with the degradation of public transport systems and

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp 76-78

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp.78-80

the continuous suburbanization, perpetuates class differences and the decline of urban consciousness. The dominance of exchange over use value in public spaces has been depriving authentic urban life of its spatiality, replacing it by commercial activities, while the emergence of digital technologies related to the "social", in the last decades, has been creating unpredictably complex situations. Later, we will examine more contemporary thoughts related to urban transformations, as well as some City Museum responses to them. For now, we consider it valuable to mention some more of Lefebvre's ideas, which can guide us by offering a theoretical framework.

A helpful distinction, to be handled with care – as he notes, is the one Lefebvre makes between material and social *morphologies*, between the *city* and the *urban*, the first being the material reality and an architectural fact, and the latter being the social reality and relations.¹³⁰ These two concepts, always related and dependent on each other, echo the dialectical relationship that Paulo Freire highlights between objectivity and subjectivity, in the process of naming and transforming the world. And this, in turn, can take us back to Lefebvre's conception of the *production* of the city, where he stresses out that *city's* transformations are not simplistic effects of changes in the *urban* society, but come from a complex interplay between individuals, groups and larger institutions holding power, always affected by formal, or not, legal codes and "culture". This way of interpreting the *city* as an oeuvre, extends – through the dialogical relationship – to the conception of *urban* as something produced as well; "it is a production and reproduction of human beings by human beings"¹³¹. This realization has the potential to de-mythicize the fixed and given portraying of the world, a false image that Freire see as key in an anti-dialogical strategy which leads to passivity and alienation, as well as to abolish the "evolutionism" and the "continuism" which are

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.103

¹³¹ Ibid., p.101

often implemented in analyzing the *city*, and which for Lefebvre lead to abusive reductions at the expense of creation.¹³²

Further, Lefebvre elaborates on social human needs, which in his reading have anthropological foundations and are opposed and complimentary, and to which he adds *the need of the city and urban life*; the need for the places and times for encounters and exchange that are freed from exchange value. As a means to achieve these *urban needs*, he puts forward the necessity of a *science of the city*, which presupposes the theorization of the urban reality as an *oeuvre* and *in the making*, where past, present and *possible* are inseparable. The new forms and relations, that would be the only possible foundations of this process, can be exclusively defined by the social practice of the urban society itself, and not by the "experts" of the old order. This social practice is his version of *praxis*, while the *urban strategy* that he proposes, and which contains the practical application of the critical theorization, is only possible to be created by the working-class, his interpretation of Freire's *oppressed*, in a process that today we could call *co-production* or *bottom-up*.¹³³

The above is the indirect definition that Lefebvre gives to the *right to the city*; not as a right to visit or to return to the traditional city, but as a *right to urban life*. The right to the city simultaneously implies the right to freedom and to freely individualized socialization, the right to the *oeuvre*, to authentic participation and to *appropriation*, dissimilar to property. This right acts at the same time "as a means and an end, a way and a horizon"¹³⁴, to an urban life where use value has central role. Thus, it also becomes an urban strategy with revolutionary characteristics, that resists the class strategy we analyzed earlier and leads toward a *new (urban) humanism* that proclaims creative production against the *ideology of consumption*.¹³⁵

¹³² Ibid., p.104

¹³³ Ibid., pp.147-154

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.179

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.158, 173-174, 179-180

Similarities found between the writings of Lefebvre with those of Freire do not come as a surprise, since they were both elaborating their ideas at the same period and were influenced by similar lines of thought, even though being in different places. The reason we wanted to combine their insights was because we believe that they can work complementary, with one focusing more on a process and the other on a theme. For us, both imply the need for each other in our process of applying them into a City Museum practice of mediation.

David Harvey: Capitalist Urbanization & Urban Commons

In order to bring the concept of *the right to the city* closer to our times, and to examine a slightly different, but connecting, approach to it, we now turn to David Harvey's latest writings on *Rebel Cities*¹³⁶. Harvey begins by identifying the recent revival of the ideas around the right to the city in relation to urban social movements that have recognized the "struggle over the city" as framing their various needs and demands. He stresses how this is a more meaningful starting point than theoretical elaborations, even though he values the contribution of Lefebvre's critical analysis, which also stems from the lived reality of his times, as an inspiration on how to respond to contemporary *cries and demands*. Today, the "precariat" is the body of Subjects that ought to get center stage in our process, and we must understand its particular nature and its needs, in order to work towards the political task of it becoming a *revolutionary force*. At the same time, Harvey begins his analysis by characterizing the right to the city as an *empty signifier*, focusing, on one hand at the demand for a simultaneous *definition* and *materialization* of it – echoing the double nature of

¹³⁶ D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Verso, London, 2012.

Freire's *praxis*, and on the other, at the importance of *who* gets to give meaning to it, and to materialize it.¹³⁷

Moving forward, in response to this challenge, Harvey doesn't hesitate to elaborate on various aspects of the right to the city, towards its further understanding, or better: interpretation. As he identifies the central role of human rights in our era's political and ethical thinking, he stresses the fact that most of the attention is given to individual rights, often based in property, which by nature cannot challenge the hegemony of neoliberal market, legal and State thinking, to which he attributes much of contemporary struggling, as we will see further. On the contrary, he focuses on some of them that take a collective character, and in this category he includes the right to the city, which he sees today as reviving through many social movements around the world. As "a right to change and reinvent the city more after our heart's desire"¹³⁸, and not just as a demand for access to urban resources, it cannot but exist collectively, due to the *collective power* that needs to be radically exercised over the urbanization processes; a kind of shaping power that is a prerequisite in claiming the right itself.¹³⁹

On his subsequent analysis on *city* and *urban* transformations, he begins by defining urbanization as a class phenomenon, based on the cities' rise through a "geographical and social concentration of surplus product"¹⁴⁰, typically produced and distributed in unequal ways. In Harvey's explanation, capitalism uses urbanization and urban transformation as crucial surplus value absorption and production mechanisms, which have historically been proven to have the ability of expanding even beyond previous barriers. Alongside this, urban re-structuring entails processes of *creative destruction*, that most of

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp.ix-xviii

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.4

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp.1-4

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.5

the time is coupled with class violence in the name of modernization and progress.¹⁴¹

Starting again from mid-19th century Paris, with a slightly differentiated point of view than Lefebvre's, Harvey also connects *city* transformations with changes in *urban* life, while focusing on capitalist processes and moving from the local to the global. If before we identified a class strategy for nullifying urbanity, top-down implemented after periods of urban rebellion, now, Harvey identifies a capitalism survival strategy as the main objective, that transforms the city in the most capital profitable ways, which often have serious negative impacts on urban life, usually followed by urban rebellions as a response. If we see Haussmann's transformation of Paris alongside other huge infrastructural investments of the Second French Empire, both in mainland France and abroad, in colonized terrain and other areas of influence, we can detect an extended strategy of surplus absorption, always in line with the main ruling ideologies of modernization and consequent industrialization needs. Specifically for Paris, Harvey further highlights that the labor requirements of the rebuilding acted as a social stabilator, while the whole process also entailed the creation of a different kind of urban condition, one which could further absorb and generate profit through consumption, pleasure and tourism, echoing Lefebvre's concept around domination of exchange value. This, of course, required the well-known violent destruction of the previous materialization of the city, and its replacement by a new urban form that was characterized by high surveillance and military control capabilities, put forward in the name of renovation and civic improvement. When the financial system based on credit and speculation, on which the new situation was built on, failed, due to its own nature, the civil unrest of the people that were being oppressed turned into the Paris Commune.¹⁴²

In another example, further in time and on a different continent, Robert Moses, genuinely influenced by Haussmann, updated this

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp.5-6, 16, 22

¹⁴² Ibid., pp.7-8, 16, 22

thinking in the whole metropolitan region of New York after the Second World War. Through intense infrastructural works and suburbanization, he totally transformed the city, which also opened the way to the remaking of other metropolitan centers of the United States. This, coupled with the increased consumption that the new suburban lifestyle produced, created a temporary solution to capital surplus absorption that stabilized capitalist economy on a global scale for some time. But this process was once more not without a cost, mainly social. The violent destruction that unavoidably took place, characteristic in the case of Robert Moses and Bronx, did not concern only the built environment, but also the urban life that was based on it, the communities and the social networks they had established. Subsequently, many centers of cities were left neglected, and the quality of life was constantly deteriorating for those that were left behind, because according to class criteria they could not afford the new way of life. A new life that, even though at first it looked prosperous, was soon diagnosed as soulless and with many social consequences that would later manifest themselves through the social movements that followed. Social alliances between middle-class students and marginalized groups, coupled with ethnic, class and gender-based demands, turned into the protests of 1968 all around the world, struggling for their standards of living that were sacrificed in the name of profit. And these movements and revolts, as Harvey further explains, were mainly manifested in cities, unavoidably expressing at the same time the demand for a different urban experience.¹⁴³

In our days, all around the globe, real estate and housing bubbles, closely related to bigger or smaller and local or global waves of financial crisis, play a key role in capital surplus strategies, and do so also through new constructions, both in city centres and in suburban areas. Harvey stresses that these building booms have a crucial class character, either because they are very often preceded by

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp.9-10, 17

dispossession and displacement of more financially vulnerable populations, or because they do not cater at all poverty-stricken arriving populations, while in many cases they are also characterized by disastrous environmental waste. At the same time, urban life and the city itself are being turned into a commodity, with a fictional sense of freedom of choice surrounding today's urban experience. In some cases, there are even attempts to cure the suburban monotony and urban sprawl with seemingly progressive planning concepts, which although often entail commodification of communal concepts. The fact that our possibility for quality urban life is based on our buying power can be spatially witnessed, as in the case of gated communities and privatized public spaces. Another example can be the housing price structure of today's popular urban centers, based on an attack and privatization of previous social housing in cases such as London's and other metropolitan areas. The social division and polarization that this generates can be further witnessed both in the increasing public space surveillance, fortification and policing, and in the nullification of social solidarity and support.¹⁴⁴

Following the pattern we identified earlier, Harvey also focuses on the political answer of today, noting that there are signs of many urban social movements that strive to surmount isolation and move towards the collective right to the city. He stresses that the advanced complexity of our times demands an equal complexity of this answer, as well as a certain kind of connectiveness. Against the privatization of the right to the city, and thus – according to his analysis – against urbanization processes that deploy surpluses, he puts forward the need for more democratic control over these transformations. He recognizes various instances of urban changes and movements that have social and environmental qualities, but he emphasizes the need for them to come together and focus at gaining control over the surplus use that they entail, with one useful step being the centering of *creative destruction* moments, and of the right of the dispossessed

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.11-15, 18-20

to regain control over re-inventing their urban experience and thus the city itself.¹⁴⁵

Harvey goes further, attempting to define this political answer, or at least some characteristics of it, through the notion of *urban commons*. Starting from the fact that the city is the locus of people's interaction, and even though they might be very different from each other and their co-existence can sometimes be characterized by antagonistic relations, he stresses that the kind of life that is produced is nevertheless a *common* one. However, the domination of capitalist urbanization and its manifestations has resulted in rendering "new forms of social relations (a new commons)" seemingly unrealizable. As an approach with anti-capitalist elements, he introduces the idea of *commons*, as a way of managing common resources in collective ways, for both individual and collective benefit, outside the public-private dipole. He also presents the question of *scale*, meaning that different scale of common resources ask for different ways and strategies in their common management, as well as that of *enclosure*, where his position is that "not all forms of enclosure can be dismissed as bad by definition"¹⁴⁶, since *open access* is not an a priori characteristic of every form of the commons, with this being nested in their contradictory nature and contested situation.¹⁴⁷

Turning back to the city and its materiality, Harvey emphasizes the distinction between the *urban commons* and the *public spaces* and *public goods*, by introducing the concept of *commoning*. Public spaces and public goods, as he explains, are traditionally connected to state power and control, while their supply by the administration is at the same time important for capitalist development and a manifestation of political achievements. It is highlighted that, in order for citizens to appropriate them and to make them *commons*, further and ongoing political action is necessary. A concrete example is that of streets and

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.16, 22-25

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.70

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.67-71

squares, which Harvey describes as becoming *urban commons* in moments of political social action, but also places of violent suppression and power enforcement. The notion of social practice and relation, between a social group and an aspect of its social or physical environment, already existing or not, is defined as *commoning*; a practice that needs to be at the same time collective and outside any commodification logic. Since *commoning* is a practice that any social group can get involved in, for various motives, it becomes entangled with the daily activities that shape the city in creating a common framework, and “while this culturally creative common cannot be destroyed through use, it can be degraded and banalized through excessive abuse”¹⁴⁸. An example of this is the street as a common space for socialization and play, which was destroyed by the domination of the car in our cities, while attempts to recreate or appropriate such kinds of urban common are often driven by private interest and are characterized by an aspect of extraction of value, something that enforces certain class characteristics. Another example, where this last aspect is very evident, is the gentrification process of various neighborhoods with rich urban life that resulted from its previous residents’ commoning practices.¹⁴⁹

Through this point, Harvey reasserts the capitalist aspect of value extraction, focusing on the *collective labor* of those that produced the urban common, being them that should be entitled to the right to use it; in other words, to the right to the city. In this way, he poses the right to the city as a struggle against the private character of property rights, with one possible political solution being the *enclosure*, at least temporal, of an *urban common*, of an aspect of the environment that constitutes the product of collective labor, protecting it from the market. At the same time, he argues that, in cases where public goods deteriorate or become privatized, the self-organization of the people in re-producing them as commons is the only viable answer. In this way, he highlights the power towards an anti-capitalist future

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.74

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 72-75, 78

that lies in the political recognition of the possibility for the production, protection and use of urban commons in a more socially just way, as well as the imagination and the further work, both in theory and in practice, that are necessary towards this goal.¹⁵⁰

However, established power structures constantly try to control and suppress any oppositional drive of commoning by reorganizing the urban fabric, by transforming the city into a politically tense site where the various movements seem unable to connect and grow together. Analyzing further urban movements, Harvey highlights that, even if aspects of race, gender, sexuality or ethnicity, and their relation to the urban, are the ones being centered, underlying capitalist oppression and class struggles always exist and need to be located and challenged. In this kind of a wider anti-capitalist alternative political answer, anti-poverty and environmental issues need to also be addressed, while a crucial aspect is for the class struggle to escape the confinement of the workplace. Instead, it must connect to class exploitation in the living space, and merge with struggles for citizenship, as well as to the everyday urbanized labor and the production of value in the various aspects of urbanization and urban life. Such goals can be achieved by additionally organizing the neighborhood, and building “bridges between the community and the workplace”¹⁵¹. That is important because the neighborhood is a political terrain where multiple kinds of struggle are more evident and deeply etched, inevitably directing towards intersectionality and social alliances. Turning back to his approach to the right to the city as an empty signifier, as well as a collective right of all those who constantly reproduce the city, Harvey emphasizes that it further needs to be understood as a right that does not already exist but needs to be created. And when unity and solidarity are formed between different fragments of urban and community life, this struggle is much more possible to have successful results, while success also depends on the

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.78-79, 87-89

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.132

capacity of radical power to mobilize and activate citizens, and on the creation of a certain degree of political and class consciousness.¹⁵²

Another topic that Harvey focuses on, and which appears notably relevant for this thesis, is that of culture, cultural production and symbolic capital. The cultural field is recognized as fertile “for critical expression and political agitation for the production of a new kind of commons”¹⁵³, but also as one in which commodification has also invaded, while at the same time it is a context in which various interpretations can be generated, related – among other themes – to global and local developments. Moreover, Harvey introduces the concepts of *monopoly power* and *monopoly rent*, which are used to extract surplus value and capital from a place. They are related to claims of *cultural uniqueness and authenticity*, and are sometimes coupled with other urban development tactics, such as the branding of cities that often materialize into investments and infrastructures. Such *claims* are based on “historical narratives, interpretations and meanings of collective memories, significations of cultural practices”¹⁵⁴, and thus create a strong link between *collective symbolic capital* and the general flow of capital. This leads to the question and contradiction of *whose* collective memory is being centered, since there are many political implications related to these popular produced urban commons, the aforementioned *collective symbolic capital*.¹⁵⁵

In this open question, Harvey locates spaces of hope for the formation of oppositional movements in the contradictory fact that capital, in the attempt to constantly (re)produce unique and authentic monopoly rent, inevitably leaves space and even supports antagonistic local culture to emerge to some degree, in order to commodify it later. It is before that moment for Harvey that oppositional movements can defend and appropriate their cultural commons, with the possibility of

¹⁵² Ibid., pp.117-119, 121, 127-134, 136-139, 151-153

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.89

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.103

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.89-109

reaching new alternatives to contemporary globalization. Having located these *spaces of hope*, he emphasizes that such *cultural urban commons* need to be shaped and managed from below, from the multiple local movements in a joint way. The contradictions of trying to trade on one's culture and collective memory is the crucial point that opens up the space for political thought and action, with the consciousness and engagement of the cultural producers appearing crucial, while Harvey also emphasizes the value of "popular culture as produced through the common relationships of daily life"¹⁵⁶.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.112

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.109-112

Turning back to Paulo Freire's terminology in order to update our proposed museum mediation strategy, Harvey's proposals that we have followed in the previous pages can be understood as the tracing of a future, and present, *limit-act* from the side of the urban oppressed, meaning those dispossessed of their right to the city. We can imagine a context where the right to re-appropriate our urban surroundings through *commoning*, through and as *praxis*, becomes a *thematic universe* for a city museum, alongside obstacles and counter-acts such as Lefebvre's concept of a class strategy and Harvey's analysis of capitalist urbanization's interplay with surplus value. In this context, the social and environmental implications of these kinds of city and urban transformations appear as *limit-situations*, more easily traceable and unavoidably related to people's lived experience.

The value of the previous visit of certain analysis is not the specific cases themselves, but a way of posing urban changes as problems and challenges, and an attempt of de-mythicizing them towards emancipation. This can be especially useful in other localized cases, where the smaller scale, or the absence, of previous related research activities or collective memory preservation mechanisms has led to either the uncritical perception of such urban strategies or the fading into oblivion of historical cases of urban resistance; or both.

Chapter 4:

The Right to the City as City Museum thematics

The question that arises, in order to move our thinking forward in a practice-contextualized way, is how have City Museums treated the right to the city. Since both Lefebvre's and Harvey's analysis and writings on the city are well-known and circulating, at least in the last years, we choose to turn to the sphere of CAMOC, as a dialogical meeting of City Museums, to explore how these ideas have been interpreted. We have chosen to do this through conference proceedings of the last years, which have been systematically published and constitute a valuable accessible online resource¹⁵⁸.

Starting from the 2017 CAMOC Annual Conference in Mexico City, entitled *Museums of Cities and Contested Urban Histories*, and specifically from Jette Sandahl's critical reflection¹⁵⁹ in the thematic section of *Saying the Unspeakable in Museums*, we focus on the importance she gives to the fact that museums are representatives of certain sets of values and principles, developed at and characterizing their *time* and *place*. As a consequence, new museum paradigms are by definition a radical challenge of the previous order, and they often carry "an element of activism and protest against a perceived covert or overt display of power and privilege"¹⁶⁰. Sandahl, in her call for a rethinking of how museums can become key orientation points towards socio-political change led by communities, makes certain points that are worth highlighting, in relation to our proposal of using the right to the city as a thematic universe for a museum mediation practice. Based on the stance that knowledge is always situated, she brings forward the concept of *advocacy museum*, which includes principles such as the rights to self-representation and accountability. Museum's

¹⁵⁸ <https://camoc.mini.icom.museum/publications/camoc-books/> [last access 18/02/2025]

¹⁵⁹ J. Sandahl, *Contested Issues and Museum Activism*, in J. Savic (ed.), *Museums of Cities and Contested Urban Histories*, CAMOC, 2018, pp.186-191.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.186

accountability is contradicting their supposed neutrality, recognizes their deep affiliation with the status quo, which is itself polarizing inside a societal context, and attempts “to right past wrongs and injustices”¹⁶¹ by adopting ethic principles beyond object preservation, about human relations. Lastly, Sandahl asks for museum responsibility both for radical participatory processes within and for de-pathologizing resistance, opposition and protest; aspects that we saw relating deeply to materializing the right to the city.

Subsequently, we focus on the keynote of the 2018 CAMOC Annual Conference in Frankfurt about *The Future of Museums of Cities*, by Joan Roca I Albert¹⁶², who advocates for a *new urban museology* that combines concepts of knowledge and heritage creation with social and cultural cohesion, as well as with sustainable modes of tourism. Notable is his emphasis on a renewed urban history, which incorporates representation of *urban majorities* and is valuable as a retrospective tool in the post-truth era we are in, opposed to the often renouncement of history in City Museum practice as a kind of knowledge that preserves old power structures; a stance that according to Roca entails the danger of becoming “a self-referencing representation of the community”¹⁶³. His interpretation of the right to the city includes the right to the neighborhood – as the experience of local life, to the centre – as the symbolic representation of the city, to the memory – as a more direct connection to the past, and to history – as a constructed explanation of the city. In this context, he stresses how the decoding of the city is a first step towards its appropriation, while if this decoding is common and shared, it can lead to more inclusive public policies. In this direction, he envisions the City Museum not just as a cultural hub, but also as a knowledge hub, bringing forward the social relevance of research, with an example

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.189

¹⁶² J. Roca I Albert, *At the crossroads of Cultural and Urban Policies. Rethinking the City and the City Museum*, in J. Savic (ed.), *The Future of Museums of Cities*, CAMOC, 2018, pp.14-25.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.17

being the *Research and Debate Centre (CRED)*¹⁶⁴ of Barcelona History Museum (MUHBA), which cultivates an inclusive and reflective museum through its *investigative spirit*.

One year later, such ideas were further worked on and Elena Pérez-Rubiales, in her article *Right to the City, Right of the Citizens: For a new generation of City Museums*¹⁶⁵ at the 2019 CAMOC Annual Conference in Kyoto, presented a multifaceted approach, studied and applied in MUHBA, through which a City Museum can move towards assuring the *right to the city*, by being a necessary space for the passage from Lefebvre's and Harvey's theories, to practice, and by reinterpreting this right from a cultural perspective. In this museum model, where importance is given in guaranteeing *the right to know the city* as a prerequisite for conscious participation, both aspects of generating and disseminating knowledge are center staged. On one hand, providing citizens with access and tools for the entire process of constructing knowledge of the city and new urban narratives, on the other hand, providing a variety of codes that will make the *museum-school* inclusive and interactive with other educational systems. It is worth noting that in Pérez-Rubiales' interpretation, the right to the city belongs equally to old and new, short or long-term residents and visitors of the city, envisioning a wider identity of a *citizen*. When she puts forward the role of the City Museum as a heritage centre, related to urban history, she more widely translates the right to the city as "the right to be represented, the right to know and to form part of the history and memory of the city"¹⁶⁶. When this is indeed based on ideas of cultural democracy and social equality, it relates for example to new collecting practices that include objects from working-class or migration contexts, while incorporation of the different social realities of the periphery can enrich the city narrative,

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.barcelona.cat/museuhistoria/en/research-and-debate-centre-cred> [last access 18/02/2025]

¹⁶⁵ E. Pérez-Rubiales, *Right to the City, Right of the Citizens: For a new generation of City Museums*, in J. Savic & C. Chiu (eds.), *Museums of Cities as Cultural Hubs: Past, Present and Future*, CAMOC, 2020, pp.106-117.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.112

making it more whole and inclusive. Lastly, the multiscale vision that she advocates, equally focusing on neighborhood proximity and its social fabric, on the greater city and urban diversity, and on the global level and the city's international projection, can be seen as transforming the right to the city into the right of citizens, and the city museums into citizen museums.

The previous reflections played a key role in determining the theme of the CAMOC Annual Conference that followed, which was not other than *The Right to the City* itself. Since the conference, that was hosted by the Museum of Krakow, took place online due to the covid-19 pandemic, one has open access to recordings of the whole conference, the book of abstracts, and the book of proceedings that was edited later.¹⁶⁷ All together, these resources can give us a valuable overview of how different City Museums around the world addressed the specific theme, just a few years ago. The first general observation we can make is that, the conference's main aims were to shed light in the role that City Museums can have in responding to the ever-changing city, based on the social trust that characterize them and the relations they have with local communities, and to explore their purpose, their limits and the question of tackling difficult issues and everyday concerns of urban life.

Examining these resources, we can identify different approaches, interpretations and points of focus relating to the wider theme, others more and others less strictly adopting its original theorization. Going through the various presentations and abstracts, the conference's content includes, for example, the negotiable nature of cultural identity in relation to urban heritage, the unavoidable *non* neutral role of City Museums in revitalizing the city amid polarized times, as well as curatorial practices that focus on urban development narratives both from above and below, on oral history projects reaching out to non-visitors, or on artist activism related to difficult

¹⁶⁷ <https://camoc.mini.icom.museum/previous-conferences/krakow-2020/> [last access 18/02/2025]

heritage. Special attention was given to the inclusion of migration narratives, as well as to the active participation of the public in heritage processes. On the subsequently edited book of proceedings, the contained contributions are organized in three parts: strategic approaches towards the social role of City Museums, innovative and creative projects that promote the right to the city, and two texts that link the right to the city with urban sustainability, a succeeding theme of a CAMOC conference.¹⁶⁸

Focusing on some of the edited contributions, we start with the keynote article by Suay Aksoy, which we find considerably relevant and helpful for this thesis. By putting forward an idea related to the *right to the history and memory of the city*, similar to the one we saw earlier, she focuses on the detrimental effect that can have for the collective memory the absence of tackling challenging societal issues. She backs this argument with the example of the Gezi Protest of 2013, where, during an attempt to erase relevant memories, various organizations and individuals safeguarded testimonies of this urban uprising, in the absence of a City Museum in Istanbul. This simultaneously reveals an instinctive need and struggle for the right to memory of the city, and the power of partnership, which she further highlights for the case of City Museums. Lastly, regarding the learning competence of museums, she argues that it has been in some ways overshadowed by the past's *obsession* with collections and exhibitions, and she calls for a shift in attitude: to think of them as a means of learning.¹⁶⁹

Additionally, Joan Roca I Albert in his contribution at this conference analyzes further how urban history can bring together more positivist approaches of explaining urban form and uses, with more historicist ones around heritage, and how the combination of specialist knowledge and citizen participation in the city museum can lead to a more democratic, social just and environmental sustainable transformative urge, simultaneous to the decoding of the urban

¹⁶⁸ J. Savic (ed.), *The Right to the City*, CAMOC, 2022.

¹⁶⁹ S. Aksoy, *Museums: From being for visitors to being for citizens*, in J. Savic (ed.), *The Right to the City*, CAMOC, 2022, pp.16-21.

condition.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Andrea Delaplace in her contribution argues for a multicultural approach of the City Museum in narrating memories of the city, and not a single grand narrative of it. She highlights how migration and multiculturalism have always been important for any city's cultural richness, and even more importantly she stresses the role that migration had in shaping urban development and city geographies. At the same time, she emphasizes the role of oral history in a critical process of decolonization towards social inclusion and justice.¹⁷¹

Turning to the part that consists of city museum practices, we will now notice some that are likewise considered relevant to our focus. Through the presentation of the *Protest Melbourne* project, Margaret Anderson makes some insightful observations regarding the *right to protest* and its treatment in a City Museum context. As she explains, one of the realizations, while developing this exhibition thematically, was the diachronic relevance of contemporary concerns, manifested in protest such as those for better working conditions, for Indigenous land rights, and against domestic violence. While the collection and exhibition of protest usually includes banners and other materializations of them, the achievements of such protests emerge as another crucial point to highlight in the context of a museum. Regarding the treatment of the right to protest itself, she highlights the importance of contextualizing it, both socially and legally, as a means to challenge its increasing suppression in our days, especially after the pandemic restrictions on public gatherings, and thus protest, worldwide.¹⁷² The open question of the future of protest is a central one, regarding the right to the city, and we will visit case studies related to protest in the second part of the thesis, to elaborate on the role of the City Museum in this future.

¹⁷⁰ J. Roca I Albert, *City Museums and Urban Strategies*, in J. Savic (ed.), *The Right to the City*, CAMOC, 2022, pp.22-35.

¹⁷¹ A. Delaplace, *Plural Narratives and Memories: The Centre d'Histoire de Montreal*, in J. Savic (ed.), *The Right to the City*, CAMOC, 2022, pp.41-51.

¹⁷² M. Anderson, *Protest Melbourne: Exhibiting Protest in a City Museum*, in J. Savic (ed.), *The Right to the City*, CAMOC, 2022, pp.58-64.

In a next contribution, Sarah M. Henry connects the right to the city to another right, that *to the data*. While highlighting the importance and power of data, also relating to the city, without emitting its negative correlations and dangers, she focuses on the museum's capacity for a creative design process of making data meaningful, accessible, and appealing. In her analysis, numbers and data are simultaneously potential tools for communication and education, for activism and policymaking, for surveillance and oppression, and that is exactly why a *data justice* movement is important, to empower people in understanding and interpreting, as a critical step to speak up and participate. In the context of a City Museum, she explains how data visualization is itself an act of interpretation that directly relates to the museum practice, it can both contain objective and subjective elements – or bridge them, and it can be more successful as a teaching tool than a simple text. At the same time, its implementation in the museum can contribute to data confidence and literacy, an increasingly crucial element in our post-truth era, and can display unforeseen insights in a very direct and critical way.¹⁷³

Some of the other examples have as a common characteristic the focus on direct participation of citizens, in the wider sense that we came across earlier and includes long-term residents, recent or older migrants, even visitors and university students, while the scale of reference spans from metropolises with existing museum networks to small towns with distinct identities.¹⁷⁴ A last contribution from this conference that we consider useful to mention is that of Kamil Stasiak, focusing on the role of museum education in building awareness and responsibility regarding urban heritage and values. While his prospective goal can be seen as the preservation of historical urban settings, which in itself is not a focus of this thesis, we want to highlight his argument that social awareness regarding local resources

¹⁷³ S.M. Henry, *Art and Data: Exploring Subjectivity and Objectivity in 'Who We Are: Visualizing NYC by the numbers'*, in J. Savic (ed.), *The Right to the City*, CAMOC, 2022, pp.66-75.

¹⁷⁴ J. Savic (ed.), *The Right to the City*, CAMOC, 2022, pp.76-87, 96-113.

and values can increase grassroot acts of care for their protection. Regarding urban planning, he makes a valuable connection between understanding historical practices and evaluating contemporary processes, emphasizing the quality of spaces of everyday life, in a learning context beyond passive storytelling.¹⁷⁵

Another valuable contribution is that of Andrea Delaplace, at the 2021 CAMOC Annual Conference that took place in Barcelona, who, while analyzing a popular-housing exhibition in a suburb of Paris, elaborates more on her previous arguments, and while she is not mentioning directly the right to the city or its memory, she points out the *duty to remember*. By placing *La vie HLM* exhibition, which emerged from an associative participatory museum initiative¹⁷⁶, in the context of *museums of society*, she offers many insights that relate to our previous analysis on urban changes. Working towards deconstructing circulating prejudices and stereotypes regarding social housing neighborhoods and their residents, who very often have migration backgrounds, the exhibition focused on the community life and its transformations, caused by economic and industrial changes, mediating it through housing and working conditions, as well as through social and political movements. Such narratives of socially and culturally mixed peripheral neighborhoods help in claiming their importance in the understanding of the general city history and illuminate the impacts of city transformations on urban life. At the same time, migration is potentially presented beyond its cultural significance, as a phenomenon with economic contribution, as well as from the viewpoints of movement or discrimination. The multidisciplinary method proposed involves both archival research and oral history, while the dialogical potential is also stressed, bringing together history, memory and current urban issues. Delaplace further explains that the social history approach can shed light on current

¹⁷⁵ K. Stasiak, *Museum Education as an element of Urban Heritage Management: the example of the Museum of Krakow*, in J. Savic (ed.), *The Right to the City*, CAMOC, 2022, pp.88-95.

¹⁷⁶ See <https://www.amulop.org> [last access 18/02/2025]

urban transformations and contemporary challenges, related for example to gentrification. Emphasis on this approach, she argues, is today lacking in many City Museums, for instance in the recently redesigned exhibition of the *Musée Carnavalet*, where contemporary urban challenges may be briefly presented in the last room, but not posed in an analytical or dialogical manner.¹⁷⁷

As a response to this well-grounded observation, we can place the contribution of Serena Iervolino and Domenico Sergi, published in the joint book of proceedings of CAMOC, CIMUSET¹⁷⁸ and WORKLAB¹⁷⁹ from the 2022 ICOM General Conference in Prague, which denounces the absence of focus on *class differences* even in very contemporary cultural debates around inclusion and social justice. Through their paper, they try instead to bring it again center-stage, connecting to our previous analysis of the right to the city based on Lefebvre and Harvey. They argue that, on the one hand, in many social and industrial history museums class analysis is based in historical approaches that focus mainly on the past, and on the other, museum that may foreground *identity politics* do not usually take an intersectional enough approach – to include class and socioeconomic differences together with ethnicity, race, disability, gender or sexuality ones, therefore turning class into *the elephant in the room*. The consequence of this is either the unbiased assumption that class differences do not play an important role in society anymore, or simplistic and stereotypical views of the working-class that circulate in media and policy. Against these tendencies, in the *London Museum* during the covid-19 pandemic, they developed a research and collecting project based on oral history interviews and focused on low-paid “frontline” employed Londoners. The research findings about the lived urban experience of the *precariat*, as Harvey would call it,

¹⁷⁷ A. Delaplace, *Narratives of an HLM – Urban and Social History connected*, in J. Savic (ed.), *Connecting cities, connecting citizens. Towards a shared sustainability*, CAMOC, 2022, pp.139-149.

¹⁷⁸ ICOM International Committee for Museums and Collections of Science and Technology, see <https://cimuset.mini.icom.museum/> [last access 18/02/2025]

¹⁷⁹ International Association of Labour Museums, see <https://worklab.info/> [last access 18/02/2025]

pointed to the central role that systemic factors have in the feelings of insecurity and economic precarity, alongside feelings of vulnerability, due to employment inequalities and to existing health risks, for delivery couriers for examples, often coupled with lack of employer's insurance. Simultaneously though, they also highlighted the role of solidarity, support and community feelings, especially among colleagues. Another finding that emerged is the increasing *dis-identification* of class, since many participants would not recognize a collective class identity among them, making clear to us the need for more work in this direction; in recognizing similarities in social injustice experienced in urban life, in order to build a collective struggle around the right to the city.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ S. Iervolino & D. Sergio, *Addressing 'the elephant in the room': Documenting contemporary working-class experience at the London Museum*, in J. Vähäpesola & R. Linna (eds.), *Museums, citizens and urban sustainability*, CAMOC, CIMUSET, WORKLAB, 2023, pp. 70-75.

Through the above overview we were able to locate instances where moments of the City Museum discourse align with key ideas that were already characterizing our proposal for a museum mediation strategy until now. Moreover, this process further enriched these key ideas by placing them in the context of museum practice, and it specified both mediation tools and themes that are in line with our previous analysis. Summing up our findings, the museum's ethical stance towards human relations and the offering of possibilities for participatory creation of new knowledge and heritage are central, while it is also presented as a place of transition from reflection to action, from decoding to appropriation. Among other crucial tools that have emerged, we mention approaches that are multidisciplinary, multicultural, and multiscale, new collections practices, the use of social and public history, data visualization and the interaction of specialist knowledge and citizen participation, for example through oral history projects. Regarding the thematic variations we located, the right to the city can take many related forms, including the right to the neighborhood, the centre, and the periphery, to the history, the memory, and the heritage, as well as to self-representation and to know the city, among some of its cultural interpretations. The right to protest has also been highlighted, along with the right to data, while wider ideas of citizenship have been adopted.

Chapter 5: Reasserting Spatiality

In the light of all the above interpretations and approaches, we now want to further introduce some additional directions, which reassert spatiality and can function in a complementary way. For that, we need to turn to other theoretical resources, related and to an extent influenced by both Harvey and Lefebvre, but not much visited by City Museum practice. We will focus on Edward Soja's and Stavros Stavrides' insights, where we can also locate several *generative themes*, and which can better define the direction that we want to bring forward; one that focuses back on the relations between city space and urban life that we identified at certain moments in Chapter 3.

Edward Soja: Socio-spatial Dialectic & Spatial (in)Justice

Edward Soja's elaboration on the notion of *spatial justice* as an extension of the *right to the city*, which he introduces as "a theoretical concept, a focal point for empirical analysis, and a target for social and political action"¹⁸¹, begins by him pointing out a traditional privilege of the historical and social aspects of our lives, over the spatial one. As he argues, this privilege persists in theoretical thinking, in practice and in popular imagination, even though human existence is ontologically based on the *triple dialectic* between social, temporal and spatial qualities. However, in recent years he identifies a *spatial turn*, meaning that many different socially relevant subjects start being analyzed from a critical spatial perspective, both regarding their cause and their effects. This is not to say that space should now be privileged over time, geography over history, but that they start interacting more equally in significance, rebalancing the spatial, social and historical

¹⁸¹ E. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2010, p.1.

dimensions of reality. Meanwhile, *space* is meant neither just as the materiality of the physical world, nor just as a philosophical quality, but as the complex social configuration that interacts with our lives.¹⁸²

In expanding this triple dialectic to the area of City Museums, one could claim that a similar privileging has been taking place, although they almost always kept a relation with the spatial aspect. In their first version of City History Museums, the intense focus on the grand narratives of the city can be argued that it has been overshadowing the dialectic capacity of space, which would be there more as a background of events. Even though, as we have analyzed, their beginning lies in a period of important urban transformations, the historical model characterized by the dominance of chronological museographies and mediation techniques justifies this argument; a perspective that only in the last decades has started to be challenged.

Passing to the more contemporary version of a City Museum, one could argue that, despite the attempt to overcome the historical model, the triple dialectic is not yet fully balanced. Many times, the social aspect can be argued to be overemphasized, in the attempt of museums to be more close to the citizens; a process that we do not condemn in any way. Instead, we intend to identify a mainly twofold, even though dynamic, link between the social and the temporal, as for example in the past-present-future perspective, or the attempt of establishing social history as an interpretative tool. While we recognize these changes as very fruitful, we here propose a potential *spatial turn* of the City Museum, to offer an even more insightful understanding of the urban condition, in ways that will be further explained based on Edward Soja's notion of spatial justice.

Back to his analysis, the aforementioned *spatial turn* is based, on the one hand, on the idea that the social and the spatial dimensions of human life relate in a mutually influential and formative way, what Soja calls a *socio-spatial dialectic*¹⁸³, and on the other hand, on the

¹⁸² Ibid., pp. 2-3, 13-19, 70-7

¹⁸³ See E. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Verso, London, 1989, pp. 76-93.

realization that assertive spatial thinking can lead to original insightful and rich understanding and theorizing, and to projection of practical knowledge into more impactful forms of action. Subsequently, another part of this *spatial consciousness* is that our everyday geographies can amplify and maintain instances of cultural or political discrimination, oppression, domination and injustice, as well as the realization that we can have agency over these geographies in order to ameliorate such situations, an act that is inherently conflicting since it is challenging an existing status quo.¹⁸⁴ These qualities, not surprisingly, echo in large Freire's ideas such as critical consciousness-raising and the double nature of his *praxis*¹⁸⁵, with a spatial tone this time, towards "entering (also) the *geographical* process as responsible Subjects".

In turn, the specific concept of *spatial justice* is based on the argument that spatiality is an integral and formative element of justice. The *consequential geography* of justice is seen both as an important explanatory spatial perspective for analyzing social justice and as dynamically influencing the social and political processes related to it, rather just as resulting from them. In other words, emphasizing the socio-spatial dialectic means that society is affected by the spatiality of (in)justice, while social processes also define the geography of (in)justice. At the same time, Soja stresses that *seeking spatial justice* does not intend to juxtapose or substitute the struggle for other forms of justice, such as economic or environmental, but instead to give extension to them and push them to new understandings, based on the argument that "everything that is social (justice included) is simultaneously and inherently spatial"¹⁸⁶. Furthermore, he emphasizes that seeking spatial justice is not intended just as an academic or theoretical exercise but aims at

¹⁸⁴ E. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, cit., pp.3-4, 19

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter 2: *City Museum Mediation as Critical Pedagogy*, p.21.

¹⁸⁶ E. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, cit., p.5

providing aspiration for critical and participatory political actions and social movements.¹⁸⁷

Connecting to the above, it is worth mentioning the reason that Soja foregrounds the notion of justice, which he identifies as a more inclusive and solid concept for the contemporary political struggle, regarding other related notions such as freedom, equality, liberty or civil rights. He argues that nowadays, justice is interpreted as being more relevant to the present situation, more open to intersectional social alliances and more focused towards collective action.¹⁸⁸ In his words:

Seeking justice today seems to be imbued with a symbolic force that works more effectively across cleavages of class, race, and gender to foster a collective political consciousness, create a sense of solidarity based on shared experience, and focus attention on the most challenging problems in the contemporary world in ways that span large segments of the political spectrum.¹⁸⁹

In trying to find the reasons behind this phenomenon, spanning from global to local scales, Soja mentions the exaggerating cultural and environmental consequences of globalization, alongside the sharpening of social and political inequalities raised from the new rules of the global economy, as well as the technological gap. Social movements for justice often connect localized struggles with global contexts, they expand to various levels of action and often center a kind of political mobilization that is open to form alliances between a diverse mix of demands under a common strive. Meanwhile, seeking justice usually acts as a more achievable aim than more general, and maybe abstract, notions of equality or revolution.¹⁹⁰

Further, he highlights that understanding the collective search for social and economic justice through an emphatically spatial

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.1-2, 5-6

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.21-22

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p.21

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.22-23

perspective is an efficient way of bringing together, motivational and organizational-wise, even heterogeneous groups towards pluralistic alliances. This *struggle over geography*, understood as a common goal, can build unity and solidarity that is spanning across various communities and individuals, who will have the oppressive and exploitative effects of unjust geographies as common reference.¹⁹¹ In this way, Soja gives an answer, at least for the extent of this thesis and our research on city museum mediation strategy to Freire's incitation. By posing spatial injustices as a problem to be *witnessed*, we can start both unraveling the complex and invisible *urban oppression's command center* and offering a common task under which to *organize* our liberation struggles.¹⁹²

Before turning to more specific examples that Soja gives to illustrate his concept, we would like to highlight another point that we consider useful in turning the idea of *spatial justice* into a thematic universe of a possible city museum mediation strategy, as we have claimed before. He explains that realizing that complete justice, as an ideal state, is practically unachievable, while keeping a sense of strategic optimism, a sense of *hope* as Léontine Meijer-van Mensch stressed in her keynote at the last CAMOC conference¹⁹³, turns our focus on the various cases of injustice, which are always socially produced. At the same time, he correlates injustice to Iris Marion Young's notion of oppression and its five "faces"¹⁹⁴, offering us more specific investigation tools for our mediation, to be coupled and inform Freire's anti-dialogical cultural action theorization. The five interacting forms of oppression/injustice which are identified are: *exploitation* – as in the class phenomenon of unequal wealth accumulation, *marginalization* – as systematic reduction of access to full social participation, *powerlessness* – related to deduction of someone's political power based on distinct human difference, *cultural imperialism*

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁹² See Chapter 2: *City Museum Mediation as Critical Pedagogy*, p.30.

¹⁹³ See Chapter 1: *City Museum as a Dialogical Space*, pp.17-18.

¹⁹⁴ See I. M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1990.

– as a group-to-group cultural subordination, and *violence* – as the danger that is normalized in daily life due to social or institutional factors.¹⁹⁵

Following now Soja in giving some practical examples of unjust geographies, to render searching for spatial justice more concrete and relatable, he first explains that spatial (in)justice can be analyzed in variable societal contexts, as well as in many different scales, with the two extreme limits being defined as the corporeal body and the whole planet. Further, he emphasizes the importance of the *urban condition* in this search, which, while also spanning itself across scales and contexts in the contemporary world, keeps being crucial in understanding the wide importance of a critical spatial perspective.¹⁹⁶ The examples he discusses evolve in three different but overlapping fields of social and political action in which unjust geographies are (re)produced. The first includes *exogenous* geographies of power, which relate to macrospatial structures imposed by political powers seeking social control and cultural domination. Ranging through different scales, he specifically mentions the suburbanization of Paris, especially after the Second World War, various forms of colonial control, such as the South African apartheid, or the more contemporary Occupation of Palestine, as well as other forms of spatial manipulation such as the *Gerrymandering* of electoral district, and urban planning with obsession towards security and surveillance, very often coupled with privatization of public space.¹⁹⁷

The second *arena* is defined by Soja as that including *endogenous* processes on a more local scale, where distributional inequalities result from decision-making of different political actors. Some of the most illustrative examples of such discriminatory geographies can be related to the distribution of health, educational and mass transit services. These injustices often have racial or class

¹⁹⁵ E. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, cit., pp.74, 78-79.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.32-46.

overtones, are interrelated with local, regional or state legislation, and it is crucial to focus on the possibility of challenging them with corresponding social action. Interestingly enough, Soja includes the notion of spatial segregation also in this scale, relating it now to what he calls *geographies of choice and geographies of privilege*, and coupling it with the necessity for more surfacing of spatial structures of privilege, hierarchies and domination related, but not restricted, to race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference or disability.¹⁹⁸ On the third analytical category, he focuses on longstanding geographically uneven development on the regional scale, that may include metropolitan, national or supranational areas. The global North-South problem or the First-Second-Third World division, usually analyzed through historical or sociological perspectives, are part of what can be called *globalization of injustice*, which have strong spatial characteristics and inequalities. He continues by focusing on the notion of *regionalism*, both within the national and on the supranational scales, seeing it as a prosperous context for seeking spatial justice in the form of regional coalition building, including community-based initiatives.¹⁹⁹ While this last scale may seem somehow strange to the City Museum's usual scale, it is interesting to consider this multiscale spatial perspective as another tool for a more insightful understanding of the local urban condition; an approach that has already been mentioned earlier²⁰⁰.

To conclude, we would like to link Edward Soja's notion of *spatial justice* back to the *right to the city*, as a way of summing up crucial insights on placing these concepts as a theme in the process of posing city museum mediation as a critical pedagogy. We will do this by highlighting specific points from his own analysis and connection with both Lefebvre's and Harvey's writings, which played a crucial role in

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 46-56.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 56-66.

²⁰⁰ See Chapter 1: *City Museum as a Dialogical Space*, pp.11,16 and Chapter 4: *The Right to the City as City Museum Thematics*, pp.52, 56.

the formulation of his theorization. By starting with Harvey's analysis of urban development dynamics and its impact on resources and income distribution, it is made clear how social and economic injustices are embedded in the city's geography, while the relative permanence of built spatial forms that may inhibit further capital accumulation and thus need to be *creatively destroyed*, stresses further the socio-spatial dialectic.²⁰¹

Turning to Lefebvre's original theorization, beyond just achieving greater control over the city's shaping forces, the right to the city is understood as the claim to a more active participation in all aspects of urban life that capitalism tries to turn into exchange value. It is also important to emphasize that urbanization today does not concern exclusively the traditional city limits, but spans through many scales that are interconnected and affect each other, thus extending this claim to all many scales.²⁰² This interplay of scales, we may add, should not be considered just as the influencing of city life by processes in wider geographical scales, but also as effects on other spatial arrangements that can be traced back to the city, such as the environmental and social consequences of unjust waste management and pollution, strictly connected to contemporary urban life and the consumerist lifestyle it entails.

Focusing on the socio-spatial dialectic, which is being verified by the analysis of capitalism's survival on the production of urban space, Soja highlights also other *spatial rights* in Lefebvre's writings, moving towards some notion of right of the citizen. Beyond the social production of space, he identifies the just access to the advantages of the city centre, which in our more polycentric times can be reinterpreted and expanded to just access to the advantages of whole regions, and to all basic public services, as well as the right to evade spatial segregation.²⁰³ As Soja explains, "in this version of seeking

²⁰¹ E. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, cit., pp. 85-90.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 96-97.

²⁰³ Ibid., pp.98-99.

spatial justice, the concrete urban geography, the full spatial specificity of the city, becomes charged with practical and political meaning.”²⁰⁴

Lastly, among contemporary revivals of the right to the city in the last decades that Soja describes, we want to emphasize one that we have seen incorporated in seeking spatial justice. By additionally interpreting the right to the city as the *right to inhabit space*, it opens the range of political action and includes various unjust geographies affecting race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, environmental and other factors, alongside always class. This way, Lefebvre’s and Harvey’s approaches broaden to be relevant to the many aspects and scales of the contemporary condition. The consequent struggle over space and more just geographies can appear as an intersectional shared objective and a common strive, turning the new spatial consciousness into an inclusive broad context for essential crosscutting social alliances and connectiveness.²⁰⁵

Stavros Stavrides: Expanding Commoning & (Envisaged)

Common Space

Another scholar whose insights are very useful in order to further connect the social aspect of urban life to the space of the city is Stavros Stavrides, whose elaboration on the concept of *common space* is a valuable way to present and contextualize certain *limit-acts of the urban oppressed*, while offering a more evident spatial turn to the idea of urban commons that we analyzed through Harvey’s work²⁰⁶. Stavrides’ contribution to the previous theorization of commons that we visited is a stronger reassertion of spatiality, a clear stance against enclosures and in favor of *expanding commoning practices*, as well as further elaboration on

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.100.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp.106-109.

²⁰⁶ See *Chapter 3: Reading and Writing the City*, pp.44-48.

the realm of representation, which centers around the concepts of *envisaged common spaces* and *image-thoughts*; concepts that appear extremely relevant in our attempt to map a possible mediation strategy for a city museum.²⁰⁷

Stavrides, while describing the contemporary city as “an urban archipelago of enclosures”²⁰⁸, points out to *urban ordering*, as an always ongoing project whose *mechanisms* need to be located and investigated, if we are to understand its implications in the city and in urban life. These ordering mechanisms are being described as “practices of spatial classification and hierarchization” that are applied to guarantee capitalism’s reproduction, as mechanisms of control as well as *normalization* that ensure specific social relations or roles, and predictable forms of behavior through spatial relations in the city. Stavrides perceives and presents normalization as a project of domination, which will always face instances of resistance, and will in turn adopt mechanisms of exception to suppress them.²⁰⁹

To offer better understanding of such spatial mechanisms, he elaborates on the notion of *urban enclaves*, which he explains as spaces in cities that have specific boundaries and protocols of use. By adopting Foucault’s model-forms of power mechanisms in Western society²¹⁰, he analyzes how *sovereign power* is used to enclose, regulate behavior, and define boundaries by creating *outsiders* and excluding certain aspects of sociality. This is sometimes achieved through acts of suspension of rights in states of exception, which eventually get normalized through repetition. Meanwhile, *disciplinary power* uses forms of social prescription and surveillance, restricting and isolating the abnormal, to eventually define the characteristics of the users of an urban enclave. Some examples of urban enclaves can be considered the various gentrification projects with elements of total

²⁰⁷ S. Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*, Zed Books, London, 2016, pp.1-9.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.13-15.

²¹⁰ See M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–1978*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009.

planning, surveillance, and capital investment, as well as other grand projects, resorts, or prototype suburban neighborhoods.²¹¹

In opposition to top-down creation of social worlds with specific boundaries that people are asked to inhabit, Stavrides presents a different conception, that of *worlds of commoning*, which are characterized by ideas of sharing and active participation that open the limits of belonging, being constantly *in movement*. These urban realities are not shaped by homogenization or normalization but instead include processes of *commoning* at all levels of social life.²¹² For this to lead to an emancipated society, commoning needs to constitute a collective struggle and to keep expanding its sharing and collaboration network. As a possible tool towards that, Stavrides proposes the concept of *institutions of expanding commons*, which have certain qualities that differentiate them both from *dominant institutions* that legitimize inequalities, and from *institutions of enclosed commons*. Firstly, in order to be receptive in including *newcomers* without forcing them into pre-existing taxonomies, inventiveness and flexibility are needed regarding collaboration, with crucial elements being notions of multiplicity and of mutual expose and awareness between different practices or subjects. For that to be possible, tools and opportunities for *translation* between different parts should also be offered. Bridges and intersections between cultures can avoid instances of creation of otherness, sustaining a common world in-the-making. At the same time, modes of egalitarian sharing and of equal distribution of power and decision-making need to keep being invented, to avoid accumulation of power that can potentially be imposing.²¹³

In this way, *institutions of expanding commoning* can set the ground for the co-production of “a common world-in-the-making”²¹⁴,

²¹¹ S. Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*, cit., pp.17-26.

²¹² Ibid., pp.31-35.

²¹³ Ibid., pp.40-44.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.50.

between commoners that might be different but are treated as equals. Stavrides also emphasizes that the idea of *commoning* needs to escape the usual economic reasoning, which constitutes some kind of capitalist reduction, and to be understood in its more general potential, as an “ever-expanding network of equalitarian forms of social organization”²¹⁵. Qualities that characterize it, such as that of solidarity, lead to the realization that *expanding commoning* exceeds even the realm of collective practices, shaping forms of social relations and collective open identities.²¹⁶

Focusing back to spatiality, *common spaces* can be described as “those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in”²¹⁷, and are different from both public and private spaces. While there are cases of secluded commons, Stavrides focuses on those that are more *porous*, always in-the-making, and dynamic regarding both their characteristics and their corresponding community, which can be a non-homogenous or/and an emerging one that centers exchange. These common spaces, he argues, can become meeting points and spatial nodes that turn again the city into a site of politics, by questioning “the dominant forms of living together”²¹⁸, and potentially changing them. Moreover, he highlights that we need to leave behind utopian ideas of “uncontaminated enclaves of emancipation”²¹⁹, and he proposes instead the concept of *threshold spatiality*, which can have a catalytic role in reappropriating the city. Being characterized as “intermediary areas of crossing, by opening the inside to the outside”²²⁰, threshold spaces can potentially avoid the enclaves’ normalizing urban ordering, emphasizing and giving additional meaning to the acts of passage and of exchange.²²¹

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.54.

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp.49-54.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p.54.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p.55.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.56.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.56.

²²¹ Ibid., pp.54-56.

Regarding urban movements, which are born in this context and struggle for the right to the city, while they use and appropriate city spaces to express urban demands, they simultaneously turn them into the means towards a *common world*, they transform parts of the city and produce new emancipatory spatial arrangements as “a first step in the collective production of commons, in and through the city”²²². Concerning *common space*, as he explains, it differs from public space that is *given to* the people, and instead is a shared space that is *taken by* the people. It is a space that *happens*, since it is constantly being shaped, alongside the rules of its sharing, through collective action. Some interesting examples, as well as experiments, of this kind of spaces can be considered various instances of social housing, which further explored “inhabiting practices that may be oriented towards a collectively organized common life”²²³, with an important parameter being that practices of commoning need to take place also during the planning and production phases, if new forms of enclosure are to be avoided.²²⁴

Furthermore, Stavrides invite us to imagine a more dynamic relation between space and collective memory, with the latter also being understood as always in-the-making, contested and a “crucial arena for social antagonism”²²⁵. Collective memory connects with practices of *commoning*, being both a target and a means, as for example through its power to offer form, as well as content, to a past that is recognized as common.²²⁶ This way of understanding collective memory appears extremely relevant for this thesis, with the City Museum being a place where urban collective memory is being both represented and shaped, widening the perception of how a mediation strategy can be conceived in order to acquire characteristics of an expanding commoning practice. In this direction, the main concept

²²² Ibid., p.101.

²²³ Ibid., p.120.

²²⁴ Ibid., pp.96-120.

²²⁵ Ibid., p.183.

²²⁶ Ibid., pp.183-188.

that we want to focus on, among those that Stavrides presents on this theme, is that of *thought-images*.

Beginning from Pierre Bourdieu's research on space-bound identities that are constructed and reproduced through "the struggle over representations, in the sense of mental images"²²⁷, Stavrides argues that representations exceed their function as simple "projections or interpretations of existing realities" and connect to struggles that form reality "both in terms of material interventions and in terms of battles over the naming and meaning of inhabited spaces"²²⁸. Entering the realm of spaces that don't exist (yet), of *possible spaces*, he explains how people can learn to also inhabit shared imaginations, something that potentially shapes both their habits and their actions, while the danger of *domination* is also apparent in this case. In turn, regarding *common space*, its representations become forms of *naming* and *making* it, highlighting the importance of investigating the ways and the tools through which common space can be invented, beyond instances in which the commoning past of certain societies might be represented just as a remembrance of former times. As one such possible tool in the struggle over common space and its meaning, he introduces the concept of *thought-images*, a combination of words and images, especially focusing on commonplace aspects of social life.²²⁹

As he explains, thought-images can be a way of *thinking-in-common*, in the sense of "thinking through shared experiences and shared questions"²³⁰. As a tool in establishing a common ground and in crafting a common world, thought-images can translate experiences and thoughts of people who are sharing them, with city space probably being the most important source of such commonly recognizable realities, offering rich representations of socio-spatial relationships. Critical thinking and writing are considered

²²⁷ See P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.

²²⁸ S. Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*, cit., p.209.

²²⁹ Ibid., pp.209-211.

²³⁰ Ibid., p.215.

fundamental if such thought-images are to unveil instances of oppression and injustice, as well as to think about a more just urban life. The inspiring power, that thought-images may have, is what can trigger the envisaging of potential common space, by offering “glimpses of shared spaces shaped through shared values”²³¹. An important note in this case is that Stavrides differentiates thought-images of expanding common worlds from those depicting enclosed utopias in the sense of organized urban environments, with the latter lacking the capacity to grasp the “transformative potentialities of history”²³², while the first can potentially become a creative force in transforming our contemporary cities.²³³

In the above theoretical analysis, we can once more locate examples of presenting oppressive reality as a problem, with *urban enclaves* being a very clear example of a *limit-situation*, and *common spaces* instances of *limit-acts*. At the same time, through his analysis in *expanding commoning*, Stavrides offers a rich toolset of widening and materializing inclusive participation practices that can extend to many of the areas we have mentioned so far, from spatially re-making the city to collective memory and knowledge building, an aspect that appears crucial for a museum mediation strategy. The concept of *thought-images* is one that relates directly to Freire’s *codifications* and *cognizable objects*²³⁴, now even more elaborated, contextualized, and connected to motivating action, leading us even closer to the City Museum as *praxis*. Lastly, the concept of the *threshold*, which Stavrides visits often in his work, can potentially offer many further insights also related to the (city) museum itself, as a site of mediation and exchange, in-between and bridging *subjectivity* and *objectivity*, *reflection* and *action*.

²³¹ Ibid., p.225.

²³² Ibid., p.226.

²³³ Ibid., pp.215-226.

²³⁴ See *Chapter 2: City Museum Mediation as Critical Pedagogy*, p.27.

Closing this chapter dealing with the reassertion of spatiality, we want to mention that, by proposing that the aforementioned ideas and concepts be adopted and used in the sphere of City Museums, we aim in disseminating them more widely and in putting them more emphatically into the public discourse. This can act towards the cultivation of a stronger *critical spatial consciousness* for the emancipation of the urban oppressed, and an empowerment of *expanding commoning* instances in our social life. At the same time, we believe that the spatiality of the museum itself is a key part of making the consciousness-raising and commoning processes more dialectic and participatory. Other cultural mediums and channels, such as books, podcasts or film documentaries, could equally stress and dive into certain topics, but we strongly believe that the sociality that a museum space can acquire is crucial in opening the way for the much-needed social connectiveness and alliances.

Methodological Findings

In this first part of the thesis, we have attempted to outline a methodological framework for the cultural mediation strategy of a City Museum that is dialogical and empowers citizens in achieving a more active and emancipated relationship to their urban surroundings. Throughout the various chapters, we have highlighted tools, methods, and thematic approaches that are contextualized in, align with, and further elaborate the contemporary discourse around the conception of the museum and its social role towards a future that will be characterized by inclusivity and social justice. Our research was further situated inside the City Museum discourse of the last years, getting informed by its various conversations and practices, hopefully expanding them through more concentrated focus on aspects of *critical pedagogy* and *spatial consciousness*.

The mediation strategy that we propose is based on Paulo Freire's conception of a critical pedagogy model that centers a specific interpretation of *praxis*, as the combination of *reflection* and *action*, which aims to challenge oppressive elements in the human-world relationship. By projecting his key ideas on the sphere of cultural mediation we attempted to locate specific steps and practices that can be applied in a museum. These include the active *naming* of reality through participatory and consciousness-raising practices, and elements of *co-intentional* and *problem-posing* education, on the basis of a decisive, interactive and formative relationship with the city, which is constantly re-created. Another important process is the *co-investigation* of *generative themes*, which are related to the present, existential, and concrete reality of the people's relationship with urban life and the city, and which are posed as problems that demand people's response. During the dialogical process of investigation, the world is *decoded*, and its myths are unveiled, while elements of *cooperation*, *unity*, *organization*, *witnessing* and *cultural synthesis* acquire central role.

By visiting the writings of insightful scholars that offer critical understanding of the urban condition, and which include both the analysis of oppressive and unjust realities, and of hopeful conceptions towards liberation and justice, we located certain generative themes that can be presented either as *limit-situations* or as *limit-acts*. These include, on the one hand, *class strategies* in urban planning, *capitalist urbanization* processes, *geographies of injustice* and *urban enclaves*, and on the other, urban social movements and grassroot initiatives expressing struggles over the city, as well as various cases of *commoning*. During this process, *the right to the city* emerged as an open signifier that can encompass different urban needs or demands and can receive various interpretations, while its extension into the concept of *spatial justice* can offer a broader and more inclusive context for essential cross-cutting social alliances and connectiveness.

Moreover, by researching previous cases where *the right to the city* acted as a theme for a City Museum, we further located museum practices and approaches that can inform our framework. These include an ethical stance towards human relations and the offering of possibilities for participatory creation of new knowledge and heritage, the adoption of multidisciplinary, multicultural, and multiscale approaches, as well as the use of social and public history, data visualization and the interaction of specialist knowledge and citizen participation, for example through oral history projects. At the same time, the museum is conceived as a place for *passage* from reflection to action, from decoding to appropriation, and a place for *exchange* between people, from a wide and inclusive conception of citizenship, that meet in solidarity. These ideas also align with the concept of *threshold*, shedding light on how a reassertion of spatiality in the cultural mediation process can expand into rethinking the wider role and character of the museum itself. Lastly, the concept of *expanding commoning*, can also be used both as a theme, related to city space, and as a methodological tool, if we project its qualities into the mediation process, while *envisaging common spaces* through

thought-images appear as another key idea towards the City Museum as *praxis*.

Part B – Case Studies:

Analyzing City Museums and Exhibitions

In this part of the thesis, we will apply the various methodological findings of the first part as an analytical framework for the study of a selection of museums and exhibitions *in* and *about* the city, that span from city and neighborhood museums to temporary exhibitions about the city, and which have all been visited in person in the course of the previous year (2024). Their examination will start with their own self-presentation and will be enhanced by our visiting experience and critical observations, supplemented by bibliographical resources, if they exist. The examples will be studied in a comparative mode, with each analysis following the same main structure, but at a different depth in the parts that we see fit. The comparative approach will be more evident between museums and exhibitions that relate to the same city, or deal with similar topics. In some cases, when we diagnose a lack or a shortfall, we will try to propose certain thematic extensions or mediating tactics, based on the methodological framework that we analyzed in the previous part.

For each example we will offer a brief institutional contextualization, followed by comments on the general attitude towards social inclusion, as well as on the specific building or space they occupy, before we elaborate on their museological and mediation approach. In that part of the analysis, we will try to recognize elements from the evolution of City Museums that we have studied earlier, as well as characteristics of the contemporary museological discourse related to the social role of museums. At the same time, we will study each exhibition's mediation strategy, through its texts, objects or images, and museographic techniques, to locate instances of dialogical or anti-dialogical cultural action and different kinds of educational approach, based on the theory of Paulo Freire. We will search for various possible interpretations of the right to the city, in terms of also the memories and histories of the city or other cultural

readings of it. Meanwhile, we will also use the critical spatial lenses we developed to understand how each of the museums has treated the spatiality of the city and urban changes in its mediation strategy. To what extent have they posed city transformations as themes to be investigated, and have they recognized any limit-situations in urban life through their museum mediation process? Do they actively invite their visitors to participate and how do they approach urban social movements or community-led activities struggling over geography? Have they been seeking themselves spatial justice or commoning practices by any means?

The specific examples we will study are the *Museum of the City of Athens*, the *Museum of the History of Bologna* in Palazzo Pepoli and the temporary photography exhibition *Bologna Fotografata. Persone, luoghi, fotografi*, as well as the *FXHB Museum* in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district, Berlin. Two of the case studies were purposefully chosen to be from the same city, to offer opportunities to make more comparative observations, based mainly on their difference in approach and aim. The *Museum of the City of Athens* was picked as an example related more directly to the context of the author's lived experience, while the *FXHB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum* as one of the most critical and dialogical museums *in* and *about* the city that we had the chance to visit.

Chapter 6: Museum of the City of Athens, a “village well” or a “dustbin of history”?

The *Athens City Museum – Vouros-Eutaxias Foundation*²³⁵ states to be dedicated to Athens’ growth in *modern* times, and while this could be interpreted as reaching our own days, we would say that in this case the term’s application rather stops in the middle of 20th century, leaving much of contemporary history and today’s themes outside the scope of this museum. This can be justified, in part, considering that the museum opened its doors in 1980, but even its more recent initiatives and exhibition spaces seem to be mainly defined by such a time barrier.²³⁶ It is interesting to note that the direct translation of its name would be *Museum of the City of Athens*, with the kind of language used being *katharevousa* (meaning “purifying”), an outdated form of Modern Greek that was used mainly in formal written cases, and only until 1976. It is a mix of Ancient/Archaic and Modern Greek and, while its conception is a complex intellectual story, in contemporary society it correlates with conservative mindsets and social practices.

The museum’s focus on its building’s legacy, its exhibitions’ focal points and its communication choices, unfortunately verifies to us this correlation, at least inside the City Museum discourse we have analyzed. The “Old Palace”, in which it is partly based, is located in the heart of the historical city center and was built in the first half of 19th century by a wealthy Greek banker family (Dekozis-Vouros). Architecturally it represents early Athenian neoclassicism, and its historical significance, according to the museum, is that it hosted (Modern) Greece’s first royal couple, King Otto and Queen Amalia from 1836 to 1843, before they move to the main Palace built for them, which is today hosting the Greek (Hellenic) Parliament. The second part of the museum’s building is a two-story residence with late 19th

²³⁵ The museum does not appear to have a consistent English translation of its name.

²³⁶ See for example <https://athenscitymuseum.gr/timeline/> [last access 18/02/2025]

century typical Athenian eclecticism facade, that has hosted members of the Dekozis-Vouros family, including the museum's founder, Lambros Eftaxias. As part of the museum, this second building "constitutes a fine example of a wealthy middle-class home and thus, of the 19th-century and early 20th-century urban lifestyle in Athens."²³⁷

Reading this statement in the light of the City Museum development we analyzed, it rather places this museum in the first generation of museums that are celebrating the glorious past, while, as it will be argued also later, we can start noticing a highly partial representation focusing on "generous bourgeois donors".²³⁸ With the museum claiming to constitute an example of the time's *urban* lifestyle, we are left to wonder if it chooses to support a distorted historical view that eliminates the lower classes from the collective memory of Athens, or if it is just a translation misjudgment, since the Greek word *astiko* (meaning "urban") is used both for the *urban* condition, and for the *bourgeois* class, or lifestyle. This linguistic peculiarity could be argued to reflect a (doubtful) historical indicator, related to the primary rural character of less wealthy population's lifestyle of that time in Greece, but for us it rather indicates a historical misconception based on the absence of a strong social *urban* history tradition in the country.

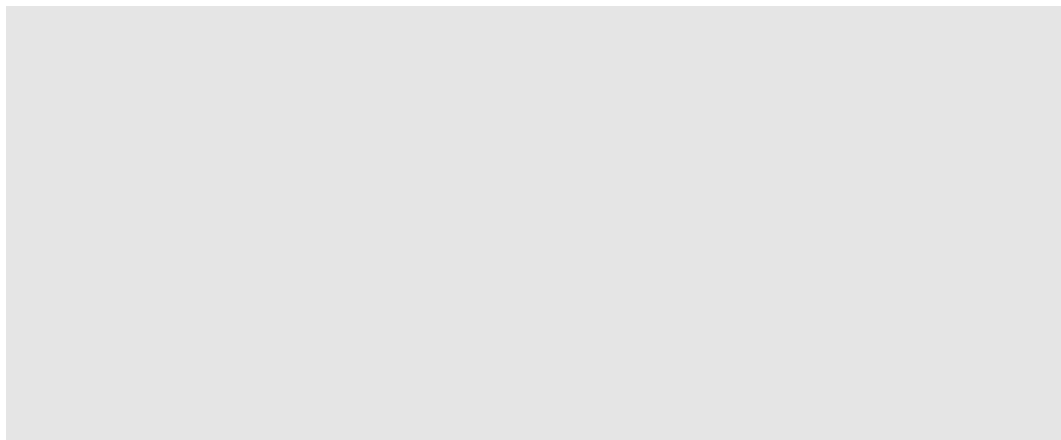


Fig. 1: The Museum of the City of Athens, exterior view. Photographed by the author, November 2024

²³⁷ <https://athenscitymuseum.gr/en/history-and-buildings/> [last access 18/02/2025]

²³⁸ See Chapter 1: *City Museum as a Dialogical Space*

Subsequently, before we start analyzing the mediation of its exhibitions, it is worth focusing on the museum's online presence. We were surprised that, while browsing the museum's website before our visit, we noticed a news update on the homepage (a section that does not exist in the English version of the website) about "The visit of Prince Paul at our Museum" followed by several images of his guided tour. At this point, it is crucial to stress that the monarchy in Greece was abolished through a public referendum in 1974. Since then, the members of the former royal family were stripped from their titles and were officially using the surname "Glücksburg", as part of this *house*. Despite this, many members kept using their titles, an act that was interpreted as *personal identification*, a rather problematic interpretation in social and political terms. In the context of this thesis, it can be argued that when institutions of public interest, such as City Museums, select to reproduce a refuted royal title, based on our previous analysis it can be described as *cultural invasion* and *cultural imperialism*, while the timing of this action from the part of the museum is also important. Since the former king's death, two years ago, various anti-democratic voices have started to reappear in the public discourse, while the museum's action precedes and coincides with the acquisition of Greek citizenship for members of the former royal family, under the surname "de Grèce" in December 2024.

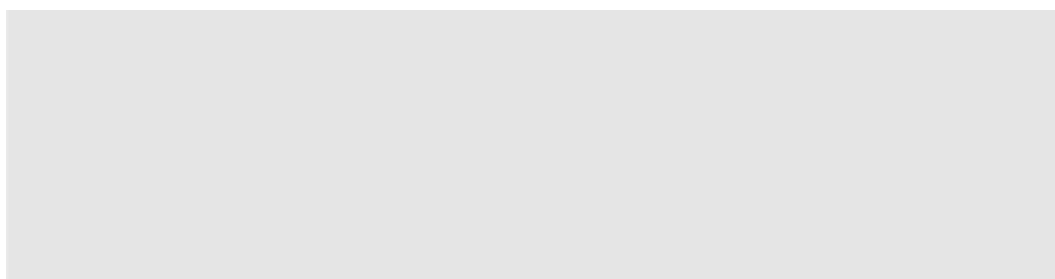


Fig.2: Part of the news update section in the homepage of the Greek version of the museum's website.

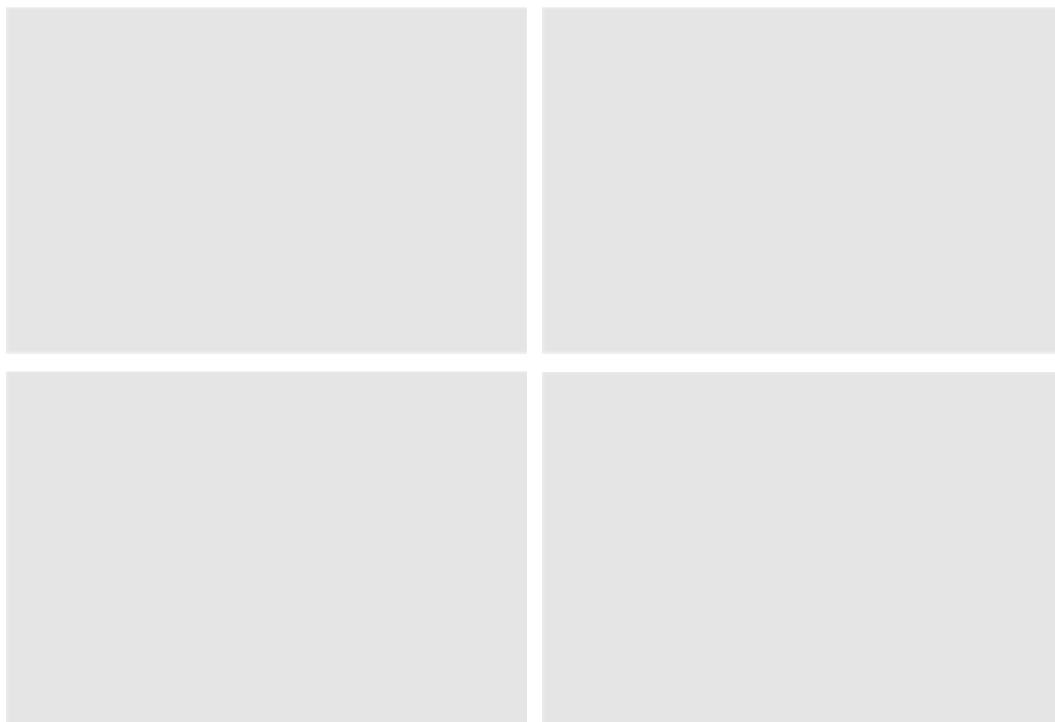
In line with our previous analysis on the social role of the contemporary museum and especially the City Museum discourse related to the right to the city, instead of focusing on this recent event, an opposite but more inclusive stance could be for the museum to

proudly invite and welcome through its doors populations that are usually pushed to the margins, or to shed light to the long and uncertain process that certain groups of people need to pass to gain legal recognition in Greece, and thus to become more fully citizens. As examples we can mention refugees that struggle even for their right to asylum to be recognized, or “second-generation migrants” living their whole life in Greece and not being eligible for full legal recognition, with following difficulties related to employment and other rights. On the contrary, the Museum of the City of Athens follows a rather elitist and non-inclusive approach, not acting as a “village well”, and sadly echoing in reverse, but rather literally, Léontine Meijer-van Mensch’s quote.²³⁹

Another aspect, on which this museum does not represent a “village well”, is the fact that people don’t gather there to speak about issues of common interest. During our two-hour visit, the only other visitors of the museum, a small group of tourists, entered after us and left before we even finish the first room, while in general it cannot be argued that the museum is a well-known and influencing institution in Athens. Furthermore, as we mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the main collections and exhibitions do not reflect any contemporary topic or concern of people living in today’s Athens. The two main parts of the museum, in which we had access to, consist of an exhibition room on the ground floor related to the space of the city – and which we will analyze further later on, and various object-focused rooms on the first floor related to royal and donor families. There is hardly any mediation practice from the museum’s side, leaving the visitor to contemplate the wealth and luxury of these families, in a setting that reminds more of a *house museum*. The kind of social and cultural capital that the museum represents is probably not corresponding to that of most of the museum’s visitors, thus making it a relevantly not accessible place, while if we quote again Jette Sandahl, it is an “overt

²³⁹ See *Chapter 1: City Museum as a Dialogical space*, p.18.

display of power and privilege”²⁴⁰. A kind of privilege that we are constantly reminded that is not ours from the many labels telling us that the space is under CCTV surveillance. (figg.3-6)



Figg. 3-5: Exhibition view, Museum of the City of Athens.

Fig. 6 (bottom right): Exhibition view with CCTV sign, Museum of the City of Athens.

One of the few mediation moments in this exhibition is an installation of the founder’s hologram sitting in one of the exhibited dining tables, narrating to the visitor his vision for the museum (fig.7). While describing his collections, that include objects from many different historical periods, he also mentions non-exhibited archeological objects, highlighting how difficult it was for him to *collect* them. Closing his small speech he further mentions how the visit to the museum will support us in understanding the difficulty of narrating the History of a “people” that managed to be freed from the Ottoman slavery and got recognized as a European nation. In our opinion, this is a very simplistic historical narrative based on a nationalist identity, and not on an inclusive citizen identity that we would hope to see being cultivated in a City Museum that proudly claims to be part of CAMOC.

²⁴⁰ J. Sandahl, *Contested Issues and Museum Activism*, in J. Savic (ed.), *Museums of Cities and Contested Urban Histories*, CAMOC, 2018, pp.186-191.

Before passing on to the exhibition part that deals more with the space of the city, we want to also mention the disappointing fact that the rest of this exhibition's mediating words, written or spoken, concern the family trees of certain *important* families, usually donors of the museum (fig.8). From the museum's website we are informed that there are some thematic guided tours that are supposed to give more insightful readings of the collection, but they are designed mainly as special school educational programs and are not offered to casual visitors.²⁴¹

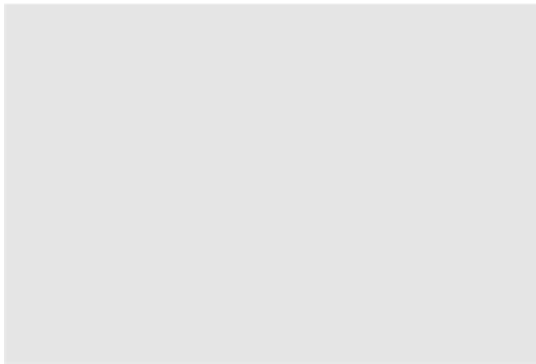


Fig. 7: Exhibition view with founder's hologram, Museum of the City of Athens.

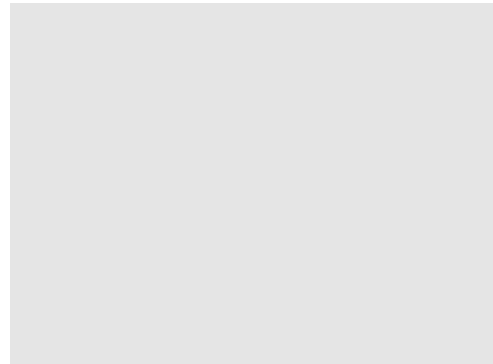


Fig. 8: Exhibition view with Thon family tree, Museum of the City of Athens.

On the ground floor of the museum, one can find an exhibition room that is dedicated to the space of the city of Athens, focused again more on a historical period, and not directly connected to the contemporary urban condition. From the historical paintings and lithographic plates that show Athens in the mid-19th century, in a different era before any of the following waves of urbanization, and a few planning maps, one can get a glimpse of the huge transformation of the city, but the lack of further explanation and mediation makes this process rather difficult (fig.9).

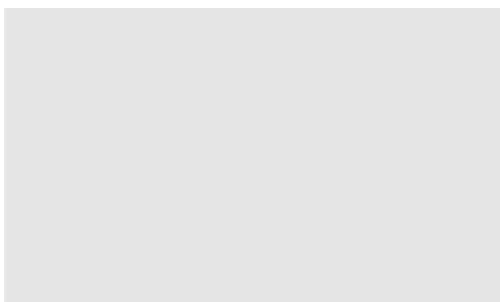


Fig. 9:
Exhibition view with representations of Athens in the mid-19th century, Museum of the City of Athens.

²⁴¹ https://athenscitymuseum.gr/en/educational_programs/ [last access 18/02/2025]

In the same room is located a recent initiative for the digital browsing of Athens through the years, declaring to reach “today”. This resource is based on a digital model of 1842 Athens and is separated in different time periods. A physical reproduction of this model that accompanies the digital experience (fig.10) represents a static image of the city that cannot be related to much of the information that this resource offers. The information that is being offered, in a rather *banking* approach to learning, includes short descriptions of each period’s urban transformation that the visitor cannot visualize, and of specific *important* buildings, mainly with royal, religious or commerce characteristics. The selected historical periods do not reach the present times and constitute a rather simplistic selection, an indicator that the museum reproduces major historical gaps that exist also in Greece’s public education curriculum.²⁴² The model and some of the buildings information can also be found online²⁴³, while another resource of the museum, which studies also more modern architectural examples of Athens, focuses strictly to the city center²⁴⁴, with both resources to be characterized also by a banking concept of learning.

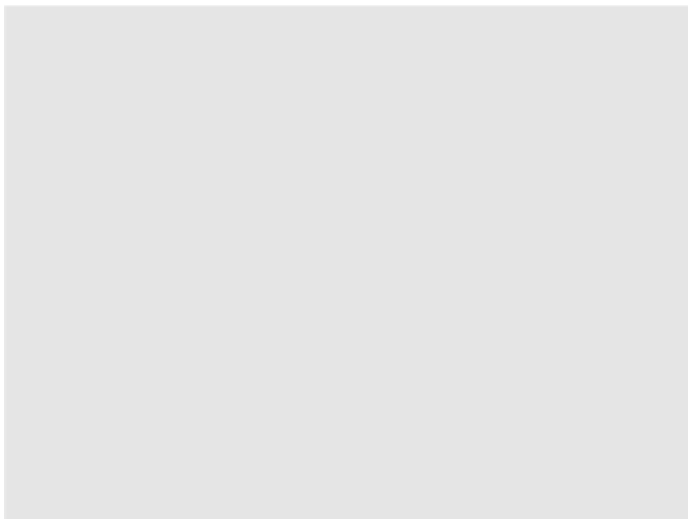


Fig. 10:
Exhibition view with the
physical model accompanying
the digital navigation, Museum
of the City of Athens.

²⁴² See for example the discussion regarding representations of Civil War in Greece and Spain, related both to museums and public education, hosted by Maria Vlachou in Access Culture’s talk series “The activist museum: going deeper” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCCXuLEHdl4> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁴³ <https://www.athenscitymuseum.gr/apps/1842v3/> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁴⁴ <https://athenscitymuseum.gr/architecture/> [last access 18/02/2025]

Summing up our findings, we would say that the Athens City Museum, in its current form, cannot be identified as an inclusive museum with a social relevancy for the contemporary society of the city. It is related more to the grand narratives of the past's elites, and there are no traces of an attempt to move towards a more plural idea of citizenship. The mediation material, such as labels and information text, barely exists, and when it does, it is not seen as trying to create some productive dialogue with the visitor. We want to highlight the importance of any museum's role in the act of mediating the city, because we believe that everyday discourse is very organically related to history, and a museum's status can affirm many exclusive and undemocratic mindsets, if its strategy is not developed with the needed care and attention. Lastly, concerning the spatial aspect, although it is being tackled, the city space appears more as a static background and a frame for specific buildings, not in a socio-spatial dialectic.

In short, this is not an inclusive and dialogical "village well". Based on its obsession with royal families of times long gone and the uncritical static information about the city, that is not related to contemporary life's concerns, we would rather call it a "dustbin of history". We ask the reader to contextualize this rather bold characterization in the *limit-situation* that we find ourselves today in Greece institutional-wise, where such approaches are unfortunately not the exception, and have pathologized the notion of the museum in the collective consciousness. To the long-lasting and perpetuating *cultural imperialism* and *powerlessness*, we need to answer with some kind of challenging *limit-act*, and this small analysis can be seen as a first step to that. After all, according to Freire, in order to transform something, we first need to *name* it; and we need to do that with a necessary *radicalization* and *boldness*.

Closing this chapter, regarding themes that a contemporary and inclusive Athens City Museum can work with, one can start by exploring other organizations that work with social history, such as the *Contemporary Social History Archives*²⁴⁵, that recently created an exhibition called "1974 & 1944: Athens celebrates its freedom". The exhibition combines archival research with more personal testimonies and focuses on two recent historical moments, taking place in Athens and affecting the whole country, by "highlight the collective historical memory and the struggles for freedom and democracy"²⁴⁶. While the 1944 liberation of Athens from Nazi occupation is seemingly *safer* to approach, the 1974 fall of the military dictatorship (Greek Junta), sparked by university students uprising, is still strong in people's memory, while the existence of victims on the side of the protestors, during the military suppression that followed their uprising, is often disputed even by members of today's Greek parliament, in the post-truth era that we find ourselves in.

Extending to *seeking spatial justice* today, following Harvey's proposal to center dispossession and displacement, one example of a difficult theme, but a crucial one to enter more forcefully in the public discourse and the social movements, can be the evictions from primary residences, in Athens and generally in Greece.²⁴⁷ This theme entails crucial spatial, economic and legal parameters, fundamentally concerns the right to the city and is a struggle that is already connected to space-based community-led initiatives. The challenges, in a large, diverse and socially polarized city like Athens, are many and have various similarities with the examples we have analyzed so far in

²⁴⁵ <https://www.askiweb.eu/index.php/en/> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁴⁶ See <https://www.askiweb.eu/index.php/en/410-historical-exhibition-athens-celebrates-its-freedom> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁴⁷ See A. Sapounakis & I. Katapidi, "Evictions from Primary Residences in Greece: Methodological Concerns Regarding the Collection of Data from Civil Courts' Records for Tenancies", *European Journal of Homelessness*, Volume 11, No. 2, December 2017, pp. 149-162. [available at <https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/research-note-18654456556474532517.pdf> [last access 18/02/2025]] and https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-000727_EN.html [last access 18/02/2025]

this thesis. Regional movements towards a contemporary right to the city are also proliferating, and there are comments about them even in the theoretical resources we have already visited.²⁴⁸ Environmental destruction and injustice is another major concern of the citizens, especially during the last years, with forest wildfires reaching suburban areas of Athens, floods often paralyzing the city during heavy rainstorms, the few accessible green spaces being further attacked by administration policies and the city's atmospheric pollution keep rising. Our hope for a contemporary inclusive City Museum in Athens, and other cities in Greece, is that it can offer interpretation and investigation frameworks so the citizens and the various movements can be equipped with further critical spatial consciousness to de-mythicize the unjust geographies affecting our lives. It can even act as a place to come together in dialogue and to form social alliances, to further enlarge and to obtain the necessary agency to acquire our right to the city.

Furthermore, Stavrides also presents in his work another interesting and very meaningful theme, which at the same time constitutes representation of *expanding commoning* practices and opens as a thematic fan to various other crucial themes of Modern Greece, and Athens especially. We refer to his analysis of "Prosfygika area of Alexandras Avenue", a social housing complex in central Athens that was built in 1935 to host refugees from Asia Minor, that arrived after a treaty for large-scale population exchange at the end of the Greco-Turkish war in 1922. Some of the themes that can be narrated through the complex' history, and potentially connect with our days, include nationalist ideologies and war, the harsh experience of refugees, stigmatizing spatial state policies with small-scale shanty town and ghettos, the social aspect that includes both racism from local population and the rich urban culture that many of the refugees

²⁴⁸ See for example E. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2010, p.106. and the mentions of Harvey about the Syntagma Square protests in D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, pp.73, 116, 117, 161.

brought (and still bring today) with them, and insights into Athens' urban development and the short-lived history of social housing in Greece. More, place-based stories related to the end of Second World War, and especially to the beginning of the Civil War, can offer insights into one of the most disputed and untouched moments of modern Greek history, or to the 2004 Olympics and consequent clearance spatial policies. The history of the complex is characterized by situations of commoning, both of spaces and of everyday life, with its original residents creating an open and porous collective life in the shared spaces. The last decades the complex appears relatively abandoned, with state policies and capitalist speculation playing a key role to that, while various citizen initiatives, together with members of the neighboring *School of Architecture* of the *National Technical University of Athens* (NTUA), have tried to bring to light its historical significance and to promote its revival as a common space through various *expanding commoning* practices.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ S. Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*, cit., pp. 66-67, 76-94, 121-123, 194-196.

Chapter 7: Palazzo Pepoli, a city history museum “in progress”

Introducing the following analysis, we want to note that our initial diagnosis from our visits to the exhibition of the *Museum of the History of Bologna (Museo della Storia di Bologna)* was that of a rather traditional and non-dialogical case. However, the recent developments of the wider *Palazzo Pepoli* project, that occurred in the course of our study, seem to acquire certain more contemporary characteristics of today’s city museum discourse. Consequently, we are considering also this new strategy in our analysis, together with the exhibition’s mediation, and we attempt to argue that there is a fine balance to be found in such cultural initiatives; a balance in which, asserting a spatial perspective – especially a critical one – can move towards a more inclusive and socially relevant right to the city.

The Museum of the History of Bologna, located in the deliberately renovated *Palazzo Pepoli Vecchio*, opened to the public in 2012 as part of *Genus Bononiae*, a network of cultural centres in historical buildings spread across the city of Bologna, managed by the local bank foundation, and aiming to preserve, enrich, and make more accessible the city’s heritage²⁵⁰. The museum was closed down in late spring of 2024, only to open again a few months later, under the co-management of *Bologna Welcome Foundation*, a public-partnership organization that includes the municipality²⁵¹. In its new form, which was inaugurated on the 30th of November 2024, the main exhibition remains unchanged, while a dynamic program of public events and a new digital promotion strategy, of a now independent public museum, attempts to re-introduce it to the public.²⁵² In a wider interpretation, this change can indeed make the museum more accessible and maybe

²⁵⁰ See <https://genusbononiae.it/en/the-museum-system/> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁵¹ See <https://www.bolognawelcome.com/en/information/about-us> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁵² See <https://palazzoepoli.it/> [last access 18/02/2025]

inclusive. For example, the reduction of the ticket price is probably going to increase the museum's visitors, while the new public events can enhance the visibility and impact of the institution in the rich cultural landscape of the city. While we recognize as crucial such organizational changes, as well as the role of the citizen in the final decision, and while the museum's longer future seems to still be uncertain²⁵³, considering the scope and focus of this thesis, we will now proceed with the analysis of its mediation practices, both regarding the exhibition and the new public strategy.

As a first step, for the better contextualization of this museum in the Italian museum landscape, we choose to turn to an article published on the CAMOC Newsletter Archive, a previous version of today's *CAMOC Review*, when the museum first opened back in 2012. As we have mentioned in the first chapter, a particular type of *civic museum* appeared in Italy during the 19th century, related to the complex cultural dynamics of the Unification period, which was focused on the proud affirmation of the local identity's specificity and uniqueness.²⁵⁴ According to Layla Betti, while these museums had in their collection many different objects related to the city, they lacked a critical approach that could connect them to the present reality, something that was about to change with the promising and innovative, for the country's standards, project of Palazzo Pepoli.²⁵⁵ Did the Museum of the History of Bologna however stand up to the expectations, amidst the constant development of the city museum discourse of the last decade? One can argue that it didn't, and despite its contemporary well-designed displays and its content-oriented approach, it remained a traditional city history museum, distancing itself from the contemporaneity of the city, its political and social

²⁵³ For example, see V. Tassinari, "Riaperto il Museo della Storia di Bologna. Temporaneamente" (02/12/2024) <https://www.ilgiornaledellarte.com/> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁵⁴ See Chapter 1: City Museum as a Dialogical Space, pp.8-9.

²⁵⁵ L. Betti, "Genus Bononiae. Musei nella Città", *CAMOC News*, 2012: issue 2, 2012, pp.1-3. <https://camoc.mini.icom.museum/publications-2/camoc-review/> [last access 18/02/2025]

challenges and its citizens' concerns.²⁵⁶ Even in the communication of the recent re-launch of the museum, one of the main goals seems to be "rediscovering the identity and soul of Bologna"²⁵⁷. But let's now proceed with observing in more detail its exhibition.

Entering the museum, once we have passed the ticket office, we find ourselves in the covered atrium of the building, where we encounter the main architectural addition, a glass and steel tower that connects the different floors and sides of the building. The "Tower of Time", although related to the scientific and cultural heritage of the city, gives a first indication on which part of the *triple dialectic* this museum is more focused on. The exhibition itinerary follows a chronological order that is although being interrupted by some thematic sections, an element that we recognize as an attempt to create links between different periods in the past and with the present, by focusing on certain characteristic elements of the city. An example can be the juxtaposition of a reproduced horse-drawn vehicle and a Ducati motorcycle in the roman city section's part of explaining the diachronic importance of Via Emilia. In this example, and in other cases of emphasizing historical buildings or urban forms that are still recognizable today in the city, we can affirm a certain importance given to spatiality, which is recognized as a diachronic connecting element. However, a more critical spatial perspective is relatively lacking, an argument that we will analyze further when we focus on the museum's special section dedicated to "Forma Urbis".

The main narration spans over a large timeframe which begins with the Etruscan origins of the city and ends towards the beginning of the 21st century, making it unavoidably selective and condensed, especially in the last periods. Based on the exhibition parts that are

²⁵⁶ F. Lanz, *Pallazo Pepoli – Museo della storia di Bologna*, in L. Basso Peressut, F. Lanz and G. Postiglione (eds.), *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework (Vol. 2)*, Politecnico di Milano, Milan, 2013, pp. 476-485. And T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, Ajuntament de Barcelona, Institut de Cultura, Museu d'Història de Barcelona (MUHBA), Barcelona, 2023, pp. 48-49.

²⁵⁷ <https://palazzoepoli.it/museo-della-storia-di-bologna/> (translation of the author) [last access 18/02/2025]

focused on “key episodes” and “symbolic figures”²⁵⁸, we can argue that a social history approach is rather lacking, with many of the sections being dedicated to noble families or other historically *important* people, battles and sacred events, famous intellectuals, artists and scientists.

There are a few instances where a more public/social historical approach is applied, with the examples spanning from the medieval guilds, to the “profane” urban life of the previous centuries, and the fact that around the period of Unification “the increased wealth of the affluent classes brought out a deep social inequality that exploded in the late 19th century in the form of riots triggered by the rising bread prices”²⁵⁹. Such moments in the exhibition are frequently supported by a proposed visualization in the form of historical paintings, which can be said to leave valuable space for the visitor’s further personal interpretation (fig.11). However, they are not purposefully mediated to connect with the present reality in a *challenging* way, something that could have the potential of posing contemporary situations as *limit-situations*. The only case that we detected a connection happening between “popular” narrative parts and the present is in the case of street markets, something that, if we interpret it according to Lefebvre’s theorization, we can argue that it supports a culture of centering public space’s exchange value (figg.12-13).

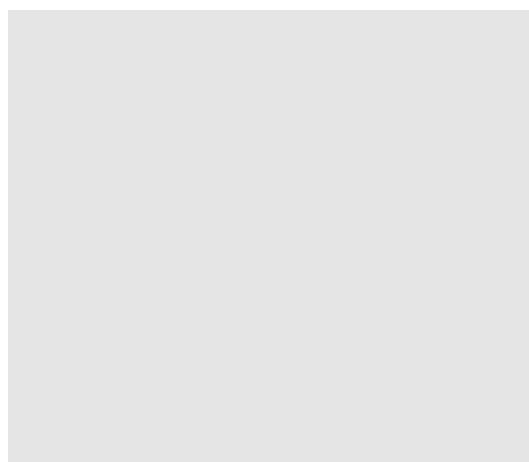


Fig. 11:
Giovanni Masotti, *Bandiera Bianca*, Oil on canvas, 1902-1904, Museum of the History of Bologna, Bologna.

²⁵⁸

<https://www.bolognawelcome.com/en/places/museums-and-private-collections/palazzo-pepoli-museo-della-storia-di-bologna-en> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁵⁹ Excerpt from the English version of the audio-guide provided during the visit.

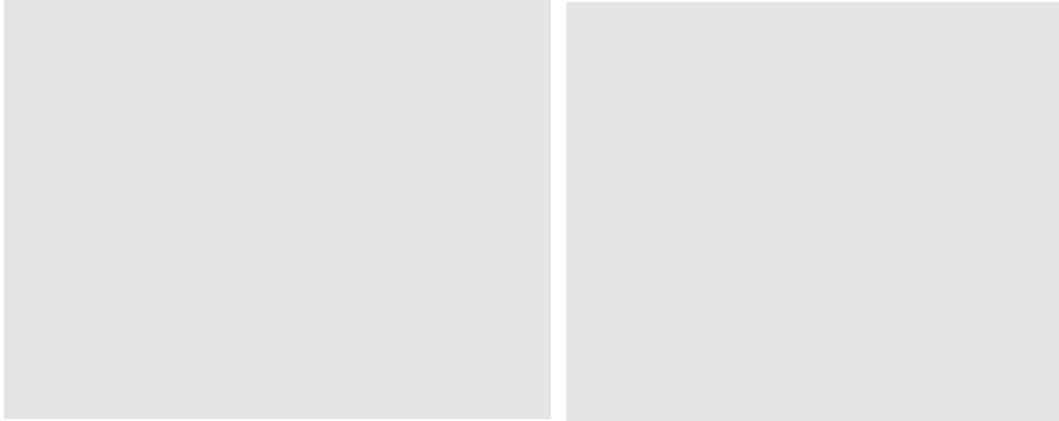


Fig. 12 (left): Anonymous of 19th century, Mercato di Piazza Maggiore, Oil on canvas, n.d., Collezioni d'Arte e di Storia CARISBO, Bologna

Fig. 13 (right): Exhibition panel related to contemporary street market, Museum of the History of Bologna.

Looking for more connections between past and present in the exhibition, an apparent one is the University of Bologna, due to its inter-temporal presence. Besides the dedicated multimedia exhibit that gives an overview of significant achievements related to it, it is often mentioned in terms of the students' important economic role in the history of the city. Other examples are to be found in the last thematic exhibition rooms, after the chronological itinerary, something that proves the ability of this approach to make stronger connections. More specifically, the room dedicated to the "City of Languages" presents the Bolognese dialect, from its ancient origins to contemporary attempts for its preservation, and covers its use in intellectual and artistic cases, across time and even social classes (fig.14), while it also gives a glimpse into the long tradition of the city in comic production and cinema. We argue that if there was more attention given to such more relatable cultural heritage, it would open a wide opportunity towards the right to the city's memory and history, connecting it also to the future and to inclusive ideas of identity and citizenship.

Another space with such potential is the one called "Your Museum", originally conceived for a participatory and temporary use. In practice, it has been dedicated for a long time to sports events, using objects from the bank foundation's collection, an approach that can also be argued to have an identity-building value in the contemporary world, but a rather

non-dialogical one and quite unchallenging for any political or cultural status quo. With the new direction of the museum towards its public, since its re-opening, we wait to see if more chances will be given to the original conception of this space, something that would indeed move towards a more inclusive and plural version of a City Museum, and a cultural *commoning* practice.

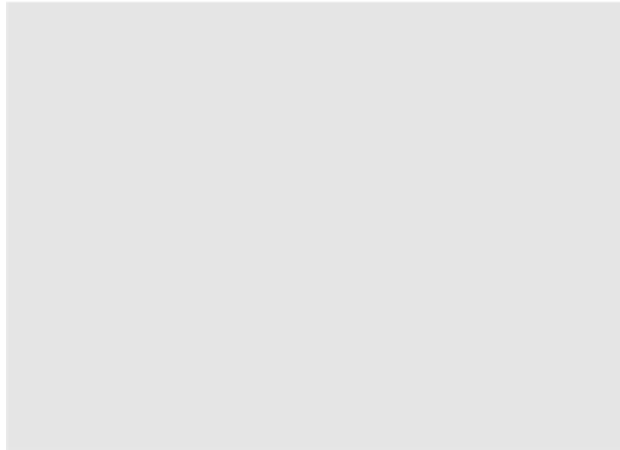


Fig. 14:
Exhibition display about the
Bolognese dialect, Museum of the
History of Bologna.

Searching for other historical connections, more in line with our previous theoretical analysis and thus towards a critical conscious-raising, the struggle for the right to the city, and urban commoning, we here want to argue that there could be additional valuable ones between the rich social history of Bologna and present-day concerns. For example, Harvey gives us a possible hint when mentioning the “inspiration drawn from ‘Red Bologna’ in the 1970s” as one possible answer to the question of *how one organizes a city*, something that he also connects to unions and movements escaping their strict focus on “simply organizing workplaces”.²⁶⁰ This period is shortly mentioned on the last display, following the other significant developments of the post-war Bologna such as industrial production and infrastructural innovations. Here, we notice again the person-centered approach, regarding this time the communist first mayor of Bologna after the war, Giuseppe Dozza, or the specific names of companies and industrial groups that were born in the area and

²⁶⁰ D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p.135.

achieved great success. Although, the use of past tense and the geographical connection of the social services that proliferated in Bologna in the seventies with “northern” Europe, we argue that does not attempt any connection or comparison to the present, but rather reproduces, instead of challenging, concepts of longstanding geographically uneven development as natural and static situations.

Furthermore, we also want to focus on the following section that treats certain events of the last decades, in an arguably insufficient way, which includes their forced and one-way correlation to the non-continuation of the previous era’s social policy. Starting with the police murder of the university student Francesco Lorusso, we first want to state that the demonstration events that were taking place are not contextualized at all. Instead, they seem to begin the “end of an era”, being portrayed as the reason that “social peace cracked in 1977, when excessive violence during a demonstration culminated in the death of a student during clashes with police” ²⁶¹.

The previous short excerpt is from the audio-guide. The Italian and foreign languages version of the audio guide is identical, although the more extended panel texts in the exhibition are only in Italian. On the digital app of the audio-guide, that now has together with the local bank foundation’s logo those of the municipality and the Bologna Welcome Foundation, translation of the long panel texts is provided. In that text (fig.15), that we highly doubt if many visitors read, since listening to the shorter audio-part is rather easier due to museum fatigue from the preceded long time-travelling, we read:

On 11 March 1977, during a violent confrontation between student extremists and the police, a medical student Francesco Lorusso was shot dead. The incident unleashed a series of clashes in the university area and in other parts of the city, along with altercations and demonstrations. For the first time in the history of the Republic, *a climate of urban guerrilla pervaded, until the firm intervention of the police restored city life to normality. For a time, Bologna seemed to be*

²⁶¹ Excerpt from the English version of the audio-guide provided during the visit.

under siege by students, also arriving from other parts of the country and, therefore, in some way "organised". In that period the city found itself at the centre of European debate: newspapers, conferences, and meetings were convened to discuss what had taken place. All this marked the emergence of a rift between the city authorities and students, especially those on the extreme left, and between public administrations and many townspeople. In fact, after that episode and in the years immediately following it, there was a decline in the general consensus existing up to that moment concerning the city's model of development.²⁶²

We identify the kind of language used in this excerpt as both conservative and uncritical, to say the least, and we argue that it pathologizes both protest and organizing, a stance that is diametrically opposite to a socially responsible city museum of the 21st century. And the mediating process is, sadly, getting worse. In the audio-guide, immediately after the mentioning of the student-police clashes, one hears:

The 1980s drive Bologna, just like the rest of Italy, into the nightmare of domestic terrorism and paramilitary arm struggle. The 1980s also opened with two tragic events. On June 27th, 1980, a DC-9 departing from Bologna and bound for Palermo was shot down in the skies over the island of Ustica. On August the 2nd, also in 1980, a bomb exploded Bologna's central train station, leaving 85 people dead and more than 200 injured. Two neo-fascists were convicted of terrorism, but the political instigators were never ascertained.²⁶³

The immensely uncritical mixing together of these three crucial events, with strong but different political meanings and with the last two still not completely clarified, under the connecting umbrella of "tragedy", is for us highly problematic. The absence of a clear separation of events, apparently intentional in order to present them in the same category,

²⁶² Excerpt from the English translation of the exhibition panel texts, included in the audio-guide provided during the visit. (emphasis added)

²⁶³ Excerpt from the English version of the audio-guide provided during the visit.

creates an incomprehensive, or maybe intentionally distorted, tracing of events, which are seen as connecting in a totally unbiased way. The previous student protests are correlated to “domestic terrorism and paramilitary arm struggle”, the airplane crash with the train-station bombing, while the abstract “political instigators” are still missing. As we stated before, the visitor that comes to the museum to get an understanding of (also) recent historical developments is left with the impression that these three events are to be blamed for the “end of an era” of social peace and prosperity, while the mentioned “decline in the general consensus existing up to that moment concerning the city's model of development”²⁶⁴ is never explained further.

At the same time, the panel text bridging the student protests and the terrorist events of 1980 states that “In view of its role as social, economic and political testing ground throughout the sixties and seventies, Bologna was to become the target of a long series of bloody attacks, casting a shadow over the city, and aiming to undermine the entire social order of the Italian nation.”²⁶⁵ We believe that this statement, by relating the progressive character of a city with “bloody attacks”, is very anti-dialogical and pathologizes further any attempt for social demands and struggles.

Closing this part of the analysis, we want to emphasize that in such an attempt at a seemingly neutral and apolitical arrangement of events, the recent history of the city, with strong trace in its collective memory, is being distorted, intentionally or not. Mediating the complex history of a highly politicized city like Bologna is indeed not easy and, most importantly, entails the danger of further feeding post-truth scenarios of our times. In such cases, we argue, in line with other city museum examples that we have studied, that the approach of oral history would be a much more valuable one. Older protestors,

²⁶⁴ Excerpt from the English translation of the exhibition panel texts, included in the audio-guide provided during the visit.

²⁶⁵ Excerpt from the English translation of the exhibition panel texts, included in the audio-guide provided during the visit.

witnesses, victims' relatives and friends, or simply citizens that lived in this period could offer a much richer understanding to the visitor.

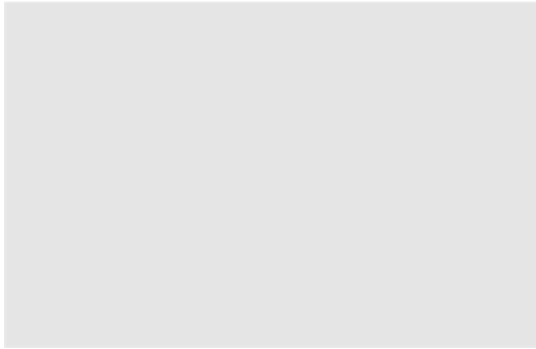


Fig. 15:
Exhibition text panel view, Museum of the
History of Bologna.

Moving on, we now want to analyze the degree to which the museum mediation tackles the socio-spatial dialectic. Regarding cases that we have already mentioned, near the beginning of the exhibition, when the people's social life of the medieval ages is presented, streets and squares have a central role but are seen more as the backdrop on which urban life takes place. Towards the end of the exhibition, the city's model of development in the last part of the 20th century, that we were told was not approved by the general consensus, is not directly explained. Although, hints exist when we are told that "Bologna became the Italian city with the strongest urge towards innovative territorial planning" with "a supreme example" being "the plan for Bologna Nord, for which the great Kenzo Tange designed the sector hosting the trade fair district".²⁶⁶ For more information though, one would need to go back to the thematic room of "Forma Urbis".

This thematic section of the itinerary, while pausing the general chronological sequence, entails itself another narrative based on time, one that is said to explain the urban "evolution" of the city during the centuries. This specific choice of word cannot help but bring to our mind Lefebvre condemning "evolutionism" and "continuism" as simplistic approaches that do not take into consideration the social production of the city²⁶⁷ and make us skeptical for the approach that

²⁶⁶ Excerpts from the English translation of the exhibition panel texts, included in the audio-guide provided during the visit.

²⁶⁷ See *Chapter 3: Reading and Writing the City*, p.37.

the museum takes. Nevertheless, the immersive museography and the objective connections that the city's surviving buildings make across a very large span of time is indeed making for us this exhibition section one of the most interesting (fig.16). The shop signboards above the visitor, across the reproduced *portico*, reminds the social life taking place in the city, and, even if it is once more focused on commerce and exchange value, avoids diminishing urban planning and architectural elements into mere typologies. At the same time though, we want to argue that the large amount of information, combined with the lack of sitting areas, makes it rather difficult for a visitor to make the most out of this section, which is rich in text as well as in historical paintings, diagrams and photographs.

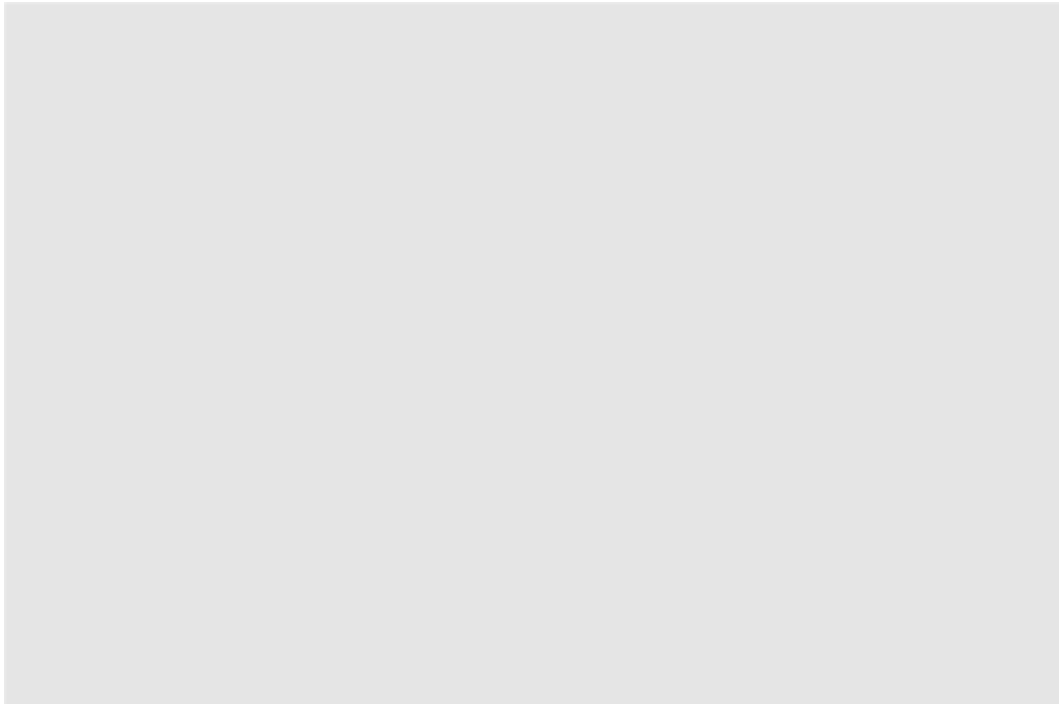


Fig. 16: Exhibition view, "Forma Urbis" exhibition room, Museum of the History of Bologna.

Looking closer to some parts, several of the oldest representations of the city connect it with the religious and learning aspects of its identity, and thus with the urban life that has been shaping it. Some other themes include the relation between city and natural territory, more or less surviving historical urban formations and locations, and characteristic buildings such as the towers. All these elements, that one recognizes and lives every day, are contextualized

here in simple, historical and visually aided ways, working towards a more spatial reading of the city, and possibly even some kind of spatial consciousness, albeit not a very critical one.

More specifically, in the example of the *portico system* (arcade sidewalks), we believe that a valuable chance to center the socio-spatial dialectic has been missed. While the exhibition explains its typological origins and its part in shaping the city's form, identity and representations, it does not deepen in the social factors that created and preserved it, in opposition to other European cities that they were demolished, as well as further social dynamics that were related to it. Such a reading, and *naming*, of Bologna's portico system could provide us, for example, with perspectives on how a housing crisis was treated centuries ago, how diverse activities can be enhanced by specific qualities of the urban space, how Bologna's authorities reacted to an originally informal urban process or on the long-lasting gains from the public use of (semi) private spaces, in contrast to today's private use of public spaces.²⁶⁸

Another case in which the museum could focus more on the interactive relation between an urban feature and social life is the canal system of Bologna. Even though in this exhibition room there is no panel section dedicated to the rich network of the city's canals, many exhibited historical paintings witness the rich social life that was taking place there, when they were still part of the urban cityscape, before they were buried around the 1950s, once they "seized to be commercially and industrially relevant"²⁶⁹. Another room exists, a highly atmospheric multimedia space called "Bologna, the city of water and silk", that is dedicated to the role of these canals in making Bologna "an important silk capital and a major textile production center in the 13th century."²⁷⁰ The museum mediation focuses on their importance regarding the economic development of the city, in relation

²⁶⁸ G. Gualtieri, *Organic Development: The medieval portici of Bologna*, in M. Besters, R. Marrades & J. Kahne (eds.), *OUR CITY? Countering Exclusion in Public Space*, Stipo, Amsterdam, 2019, pp. 325-329.

²⁶⁹ Excerpt from the English version of the audio-guide provided during the visit.

²⁷⁰ Excerpt from the English version of the audio-guide provided during the visit.

to trade and the silk industry that was based on them, and which offered technological innovations and prosperity to those working at it. Despite the importance of this aspect, the adopted approach focuses once more exclusively on the exchange value of the urban form, presenting it as the most important, if not the only relevant. For instance, no connection is made to social history, such as the leisure and cloth-washing moments that we witness in the paintings (fig.17). Furthermore, adopting a more critical spatial perspective, one could start examining the environmental consequences that the process of burying or covering water streams has, a process that has started being reversed in some other cities. Some examples here can relate to urban temperature and microclimate, or to city flooding events nowadays, such as the dramatic ones that have been occurring in and around Bologna, especially in the last years.

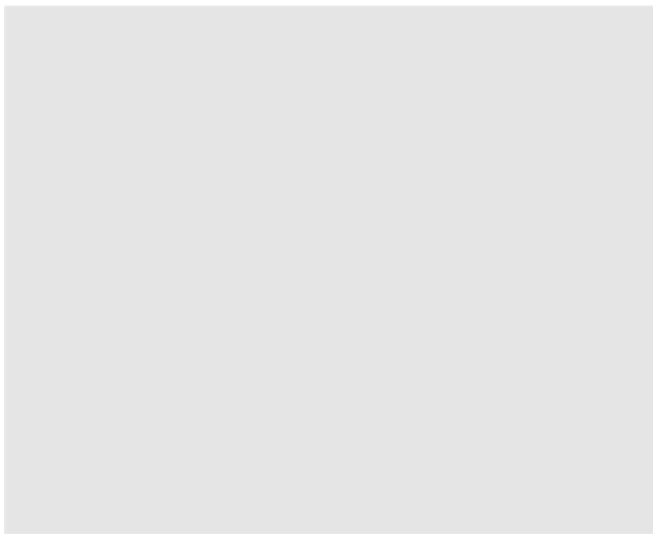


Fig. 17:
Anonymous Bolognese, Il ponte
della via Cavaliere e il canale delle
Moline, Oil on canvas, 1902-1904,
Museum of the History of Bologna,
Bologna.

After the more historical urban characteristics, the exhibition focuses on the city's wider urban transformation in modern times, and especially during the 19th century, a period that we also saw Lefebvre and Harvey beginning their main analysis. Although the museum does recognize the radical growth of the city's size beyond its historical walls, it interprets it as a naturally anticipated *evolution*, aligned with other European cities, and does not proceed to any critical analysis of a class strategy or capitalism's need for expansion. It seems to suffice

in mentioning that “the city assumed a segregated character that would soon lead citizens to mourn the exuberant variety of the ancient centre” and that “the ‘garden city’ that rose [...] in the 1830s, while proof of the quality of local architecture, was unsuccessful in making an impact on the general urban design”²⁷¹. Inside the city centre, the planning of wider road axes is mentioned, accompanied by historical urban planning maps, but how it is presented is that, just as in many other European cities, these urban axes were indeed constructed at the expense of the medieval urban tissue that was being destroyed. While the visitor can recognize these urban configurations today, there is no strong critical investigation of the consequences that these processes had in the urban life of those times, to give them some extra meaning and critical perception.

Moving further in time, the last section of the room is dedicated to the main post-war urban change moments and processes, unfortunately in a very condensed way that doesn’t leave space for elaboration or debate. We argue that those instances are the ones that relate most to the present-day reality of the citizens, and to the challenges they face related to the built environment, and in a contemporary City Museum that would try to connect past, present and future, more exhibition space and mediating attention should be given to them. The first one regards the extended destruction of the *urban form* caused by the several bombings of the city during the Second World War, and what we notice is that the mediation strategy interprets it only materially, counting lost building without mentioning the implications of this period for urban life (fig.18). The second moment is the 1969 plan for the conservation of the historic centre, an indeed very determining and influential planning model, the importance of which extends beyond the scale of the city and even the region. After the short but comprehensive description of the plan and its practical application, the museum mediation does include here also a more social aspect of this urban development, in that “it gave rise to

²⁷¹ Excerpts from the English translation of the exhibition panel texts, included in the audio-guide provided during the visit.

two cities, one within the walls and one outside, each with very different cultural and economic functions.”²⁷² While this could be a valuable moment for the visitor to start building a critical spatial consciousness, the museum does not give more space to further investigation and connection to present day conditions, which could reflect concerns of many contemporary residents, who feel excluded from the city center and its unapproachable rent prices. Instead, the next room is dedicated to an *immersive* installation with mannequins and mirrors presenting “a reconstruction of the Battle of Fossalta (26 May, 1249), and the capture of King Enzo, son of Frederick II of Swabia”²⁷³.

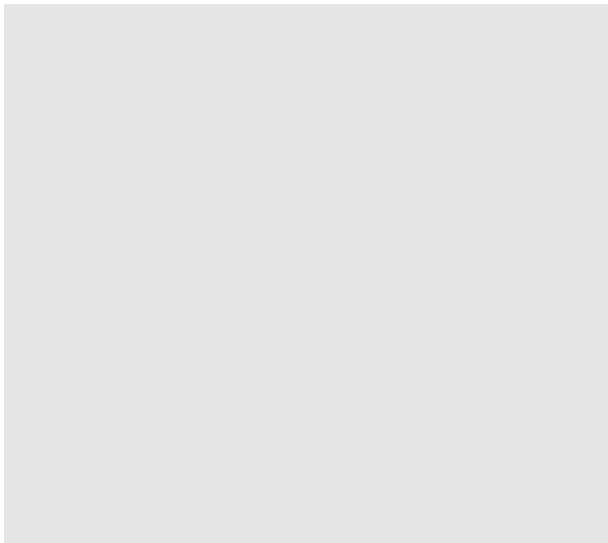


Fig. 18:
Part of exhibition panel “Bononia
Delenda” (Bononia Destroyed),
Museum of the History of Bologna.

The third of the contemporary urban planning instances is the proposal of Kenzo Tange for the urban expansion of Bologna towards the north, part of which has been applied in the case of the Fiera district, as we saw mentioned in the last narrative section of the exhibition. A very general, and rather poetic, description of this proposal does not render it very comprehensive, while in another section of the exhibition we learn that the plan was not fully realized mainly due to the advanced cost. The urban developments that part of

²⁷² Excerpts from the English translation of the exhibition panel texts, included in the audio-guide provided during the visit.

²⁷³ Excerpts from the English translation of the exhibition panel texts, included in the audio-guide provided during the visit.

society was not in line with during this period are never further explained. Lastly, the fourth section, less specific in terms of reference than the other three, in short explains that besides ideas for more homogenous district design outside the historical center, the “building production system” did not allow their realization, resulting to the more irregular urban fabric that one notices in the suburbs of the city today. Again, any further interpretation of the urban form as a support of urban society, instead of just as a morphological backdrop, is not being made, and this kind of modernist planning ideology is presented as a missed opportunity rather than being criticized based on cases of other cities where it was realized. Here, we want to argue that such short descriptions, probably incomprehensible for a *non-expert* visitor, on top of missed opportunities to create a critical spatial perspective, may also contribute to the mythicizing of contemporary urban processes, making the citizens feel powerless in front of the complexity of the dynamics behind the transformation of their urban surroundings.

As a closing part, we want to make some notes regarding the new public program of the *Palazzo Pepoli* project, on which the exhibition of the *Museum of the History of Bologna* is now being regarded as part of and not as its only cultural offer. The homepage of the project’s new website invites us to visit its “covered square” that is “open to all” and where various unique meetings and events will take place to mediate the city and its soul, through art and culture, memory and innovation, traditions and local knowledge, as well as through “initiatives and collaboration with local entities”, with a special focus on “the popular culture of Bologna”.²⁷⁴ Further, from the municipality’s website we get informed that this public program will include guided tours, concerts and conferences, and that this “real cultural space” that opens now will indeed have as a goal to connect history with the present and the future of the city. At the same time, this program is

²⁷⁴ <https://palazzoepoli.it/> [last access 18/02/2025]

also described as having a “structured format”, while it is made clear that access to the “covered square” will be free.²⁷⁵

Even though we have already argued for the City Museum to become a place for meeting and dialogue, a direction that Palazzo Pepoli seems to be adopting, we want to emphasize that the themes and terms of these encounters appear as crucial elements, based on our previous theorization on *commoning*, and more specifically on Stavrides’ notion of the *institutions of expanding commons*.²⁷⁶ There is no doubt that a focus on social and public history, with the example of popular cultural heritage, is a valuable one. It moves the museum’s narratives away from a historiography that focuses on war events or elite figures, and it can strengthen a sense of identity based on local elements. In this category are some of the first events of the re-launched project that concern themes from the exhibition, such as the Bolognese dialect and the local tradition in puppet theater. However, we believe that this kind of identity is relatively unchallenging to the status quo, and, even if space is left for other cultural expressions to manifest, for the time being a certain kind of control of the wider framework is being kept.

Based on our previous city museum references, even in the case where the right to the city is being interpreted in a cultural way, if the representation of the “popular” classes being forwarded is only a historical one, it can only lead in empowering stereotypical views or rendering this identity outdated. Moreover, even if more contemporary cultural expressions and communities start being included in these public encounters, with the example of *street art* being a possible one since it was already present in the museum’s main hall, a certain intersectionality needs to also be applied, in order to bring true connectiveness and not further polarization. Meanwhile, seen from a more skeptical viewpoint, this could also be interpreted as a kind of cultural invasion, a claim that time is to prove it right or wrong. But also, active participation. Based on Harvey’s theorization of *spaces of*

²⁷⁵ <https://www.comune.bologna.it/notizie/riapertura-palazzo-pepoli> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁷⁶ See Chapter 5: *Reasserting Spatiality*, pp.71-72.

hope related to *cultural urban commons*,²⁷⁷ we emphasize that it is up to the citizens and cultural communities that have been previously under-represented to take up such opportunities and bring forward some kind of self-representation that will ensure their true right to the city's culture. We need to place this degree of participation always as a challenge, to keep going towards more emancipating and inclusive dialogue and to avoid settling with the least possible, which in our times cultural authorities *need* to offer in order to not be seen as oppressive, and thus to not be challenged.

Closing, we want to argue that, although such statements as "a covered square" is a progressive direction for a cultural institution to take, we believe that it entails certain *dangerous* implications. From a critical spatial point of view, the kind of discourse that places the notion of certain urban commons, with a central example being the *square*, under strict private or even municipal authority could be seen as foreshadowing existing attempts of privatization and control of public space, and commercialization of urban life. Based on our previous theoretical analysis, we want to re-emphasize that adopting a critical spatial perspective can offer greater insight as well as pose certain issues more emphatically. We recognize that the practice of re-using the enclosed space of an atrium, typical in the urban form of Bologna as the museum's exhibition explains, is indeed a spatial tactic of revitalizing urban voids that might have been neglected, and a cultural enhancement of any use that these atriums might get. However, based on Stavrides' theorization on *urban enclaves*²⁷⁸, we argue that if this is coupled with actions that restrict the free use of open-space public squares, it turns into an oppressive and controlling tactic. Furthermore, if it takes place alongside the displacement and dispossession of previously independent cultural and social centers, it can become an instrument of social and cultural domination.

We believe that such observations cannot be absent from a critical analysis of a contemporary cultural institution, especially when

²⁷⁷ See Chapter 3: *Reading and Writing the City*, pp.47-48.

²⁷⁸ See Chapter 5: *Reasserting Spatiality*, pp.70-71.

its activities further relate to the space of the city, urban life and memory. In this restarted and in-progress project in Bologna, we hope to witness the inclusive participation of the various movements of the city, in a dialogical way and not an exploitative one. In such a dialogue, we hope for the extension of demands beyond cultural interpretation, towards seeking social and spatial justice, and we hope that new inclusive investigation frameworks will be created for the museum with the participation of these movements, for the further extension of critical consciousness and the expansion of *commoning* practices.

Chapter 8: Bologna Forografata, selective gazes into past urban life

In this chapter we will analyze an exhibition of a different kind, nevertheless still one that is *in* and *about* the city. *Bologna fotografata. Persone, luoghi, fotografi* (Bologna Photographed. People, places, photographers)²⁷⁹ was a temporary exhibition that took place in the underpass of Piazza Re Enzo²⁸⁰, a previously abandoned and now culturally revitalized underground urban space in the center of Bologna. The exhibition began in May 2023 and, while it was originally planned to finish at the end of January 2024, due to high popularity it stayed on until August of the same year. It was developed by the *Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna*²⁸¹, an organization dedicated to the preservation of the cinema and film heritage of the city through film archives and public events, in collaboration with *Bologna Welcome* and *Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna* and was, in certain ways, a continuation of a previous exhibition with similar concept in 2017, *Bologna fotografata. Tre secoli di sguardi* (Bologna Photographed. Three centuries of gazes)²⁸². Both exhibitions are related to an ongoing wider project of Cineteca, which is also called *Bologna Fotografata* and constitutes “a large public archive of images of the city”, accessible also online as a “unique heritage that preserves, through images, the memory of our city”.²⁸³

The exhibition is based on the inventive concept of narrating a part of the city’s history through the film photography archives

²⁷⁹ See

<https://cinetecadibologna.it/programmazione/mostra/bologna-fotografata-persone-luoghi-fotografi/> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁸⁰ See

<https://www.bolognawelcome.com/en/places/museums-and-private-collections/sottopasso-di-re-enzo> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁸¹ See <https://cinetecadibologna.it/la-fondazione/> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁸² See

<https://cinetecadibologna.it/programmazione/mostra/bologna-fotografata-tre-secoli-di-sguardi/> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁸³ See <https://bolognafotografata.com/presentazione-del-progetto/> [last access 18/02/2025]

available to Cineteca. This necessarily limits the exhibited time-range, and thus the chronological narrative begins in the late 19th century, when the first photo cameras appeared in the streets of Bologna; an element that can be interpreted as positive, since usually it is this last part of modern history that lacks attention in many city history museums. At the same time though, the exhibition appears with a *natural* time limit also regarding its end, finishing at the last decade of the 20th century, when digital photography started being more widespread. While this stop makes sense, since photography afterwards acquired completely different characteristics regarding its amount, materiality and dissemination, it can be argued that it also creates a *useful* barrier and sets a *safe* distance from contemporaneity. At the finishing panel text, it is promised that the project will continue in finding ways to also narrate the city through digital photography, a “new chapter” that we will be waiting for with special curiosity.

Furthermore, another element that is useful for our analysis is the way that the exhibition approaches the ‘triple dialectic’ of the temporal, spatial and social aspects. Its chronological narrative, structured based on decades or significantly different periods, is characterized by a strong emphasis on urban space, not only as a material background, but indeed in a dynamic ‘socio-spatial dialectic’. At the same time, the use of (also) amateur photography from various types of archives, as a way of “documentation of the everyday photographic life of the city”, reveals a particular social and public history approach in mediating the city’s past, which can even be said to take characteristics of ‘investigation’. It brings to light moments that may had not acquired the status of officially historical ones before, and it presents “a new story” that these images actively suggest, instead of being “illustrations to a story that has already been told”.²⁸⁴

Additionally, an important aspect is that this method entails a certain degree of *poetic license*, which can boost creativity and, for us, is perfectly acceptable for a temporary exhibition. However, it also

²⁸⁴ Excerpts taken from the English part of the introductory panel, signed by the exhibition’s curator Giuseppe Savini.

entails the danger of becoming partial, and even discriminatory, by excluding important elements of the city's past, most probably based on the claim that they were not included in any of the available archives. This highlights the importance of the curatorial and mediation process, and centers once more the non-neutral position, not only of the Museum, but similarly of any exhibition that deals with history, space and society.

The visitor is *warned*: "The Bologna we will be seeing is not Bologna as it was, but as someone wanted it to be seen by contemporary and future generations. It is a premeditated, narrated Bologna." While this excerpt refers to the act of photography, for the goals of this thesis and for the better analysis of this case study, we want to extend it to the act of exhibition making and mediating. Because also that work is "often commissioned by institutions"²⁸⁵. This level of insight from the part of the exhibition pushes us to be even more critical regarding the moments that we judge to be relatively anti-dialogical, recognizing nevertheless the various dialogical, and even conscious-raising, moments that we believe this exhibition to have. To do that, we will follow the chronological sequence of the narrative, especially focusing either on historical facts and periods of Bologna that we analyzed also in our previous case study, to do some comparative analysis, or to other mediation moments that relate to our theoretical framework, as it was developed in the previous part of the thesis.

Already at the beginning of the time-based itinerary, the exhibition starts by connecting the act of photography and urban transformations, through relations of both desire and urgency. Inserting a kind of critical spatial perspective, the urban changes taking place in the late 19th and early 20th century are being introduced through their 'creative destruction' characteristics, interestingly connected to the "demands" of "Progress – with a capital P (or rather,

²⁸⁵ Excerpt taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "Preface"

real estate speculation)". While the demolition of the ancient walls and old houses was taking place by the "new urban powers", we are being said that photographing the soon-to-disappear urban features seems to work as an alibi. "It appears less serious to erase these things from the skin of the city when photography is able to preserve them on paper"²⁸⁶.

This reading, and *naming*, makes for us an interesting connection to the appearance of one of the first City Museums, at least in their European understanding and origins that we have mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, and proposes a new understanding of the initial reasons behind their conception. The creation of *Musée Carnavalet* in Paris, as a memory-keeping apparatus, proposed in large by the same man that was orchestrating the city's transformation through 'creative destruction' processes, is parallel to some of the first photographs of this exhibitions, even though these were, at first, destined mainly for private contemplation. On the one hand, this strengthens this exhibition's connection with the City Museum discourse, and on the other, it can be said that it indirectly raises some interesting critical questions about this museum type itself.

Regarding the complex dynamics of the Unification period, we are being said that, although 'Bologna' is trying to find a balance between the fixed past and the future that is coming, the "demands of progress" *prevail* and succeed in creating a break from the past, "leading to the modernization of the urban layout in a way that satisfies the decorum of the dominant bourgeois class". We could say that what was introduced in *Palazzo Pepoli* as a natural 'evolution' of a European city, here is recontextualized as the domination of a certain class over a different general tendency that the abstract conception of the city itself had. And this domination *results* in the redesign of the historic city, which includes the straight urban axis of via Indipendenza, the renewal, but also restoration, of various buildings of institutional power, as well as the first kind of public transportation infrastructures.

²⁸⁶ Excerpt taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "The Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries"

As a further part of the spatial consciousness that we observe to be constructed, we want to mention the exhibition text's reasoning for the ancient walls' demolition in 1902, which is being related to "real estate speculations, a need to create jobs for the large numbers of unemployed and sanitary considerations".²⁸⁷

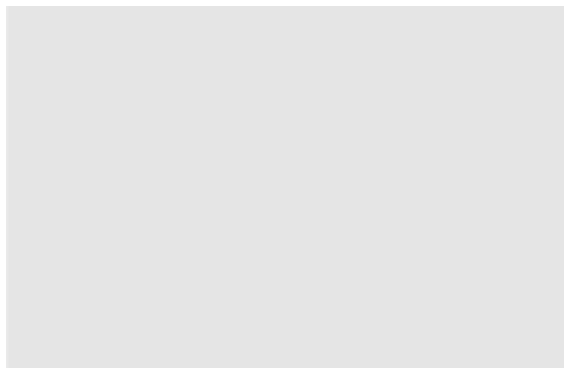


Fig. 19: Exhibition view - video installation, *Bologna Fotografata. Persone, luoghi, fotografi.*

Contextualizing further the rest of the beginning of the 20th century, the exhibition text mentions that, already from the 1914 elections, the "popular class" had elected a socialist mayor in Bologna, something that is being linked to the citizens' "matured social vitality and a new political awareness"²⁸⁸. Adopting a social history approach, it is being explained how this new administration was committed to create changes in favor of the less privileged or wealthy people, with various mentions on policies related to space. These regard both affordable basic-necessities shops (fig.20), housing and education, while at the same time some also relate to individuals and families affected directly by the Great War, which is itself presented in the exhibition through a human-centered approach.

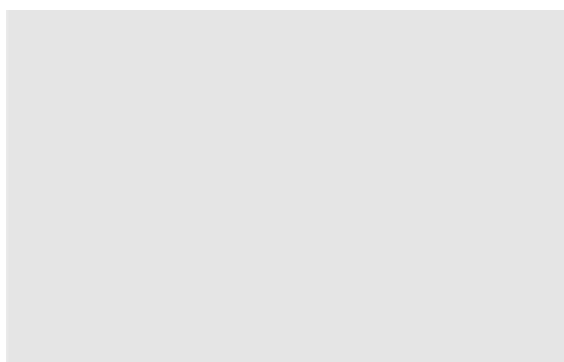


Fig. 20:
Anonymous, *Ente Comunale Autonomo di Consumo. Inside the "Bread oven" in Via Don Minzoni, 1930 ca.* Fondo Enrico Pasquali / Cineteca di Bologna

²⁸⁷ Excerpt taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "Bologna at the Time of the Unification of Italy"

²⁸⁸ Ibidem.

While the subsequent shift in political dynamics and the establishment of fascist rule in the city during the 1920s is not adequately explained, something that could be both socially relevant and spatially symbolic even today, the main interwar period and the characteristics of the fascist regime are portrayed in an interesting consciousness-raising way, if one wants to pay attention. The great construction projects of the period, described as not fully aligned to people's needs, include the city's stadium, grandiose urban planning with a characteristic love for geometry (fig.21), and garden suburbs (fig.22). Meanwhile, a special section on the "subversives", while seemingly not connected to space, can give us an insightful understanding of the period's oppression regarding various aspects of the right to the city. Based on a collection from the *State Archives of Bologna*, the visitor can witness the "political profiling of citizens carried out by the Bologna Police Force from 1872 to 1983"²⁸⁹. The reproduced parts of the interrogations shed light on the period's criminalization of organizing, or even of casual encountering *suspects*, as well as to the surveillance state of the public space. While they are not at all connected to our days and are instead supposed to portray a dark period long passed, the similarity to contemporary practices in many countries and cities can potentially make one wonder. We therefore argue that, even if not directly connected to contemporaneity, shedding light on such moments in history can offer a critical perspective that not only offers better understanding of the past, but potentially interrogates also the present.

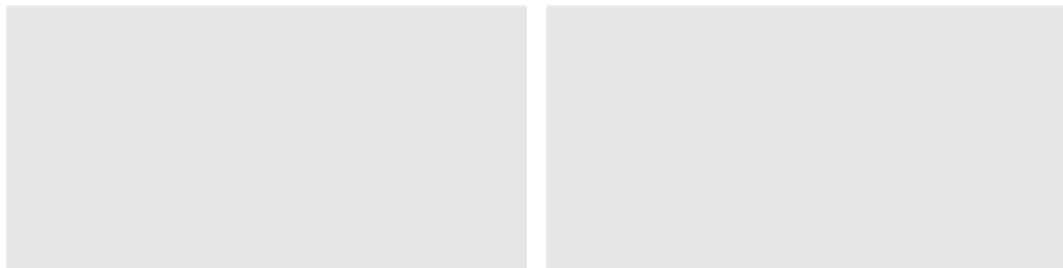


Fig. 21 (left): Ditta Bolognesi e Orsini, The completion of construction work of Piazza dei Martiri and the fountain, 1934-1935, Fondo Miscellanea Novecento / Cineteca di Bologna.

Fig. 22 (right): Anonymous, Village of the Fascist Revolution (now Costa-Saragozza district), 1930s, Fondo Franco Cristofori / Cineteca di Bologna.

²⁸⁹ Excerpt taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "The Subversives"

Moving forward to the representation of the city during the Second World War and the consequent bombardments, opposed to the approach of the *Museum of the History of Bologna*, here the point of view is mainly on the ground – even below it (fig.23) – and towards the people’s experience. From the exhibition text we get informed about the partisan opposition to the Nazi occupation and the important urban battles that occurred in the city, about the shift of the public opinion and how people fled to the countryside, which was safer for some time, only to return later in a supposedly safe again city. This population influx, combined with the reality of a bombed city during war, created a dramatic housing crisis that was in some cases met by turning porticoes into temporary housing places (fig.24), an act that today could be described as ‘informal emergency architecture’. Many of the ugly moments of war are portrayed in this exhibition, opposed to the more grandiose narrative of traditional city history museums. Even regarding the war’s end and the liberation of the city, the camera is not turned only to the military parades, but also to the city’s social life and the people’s responses.

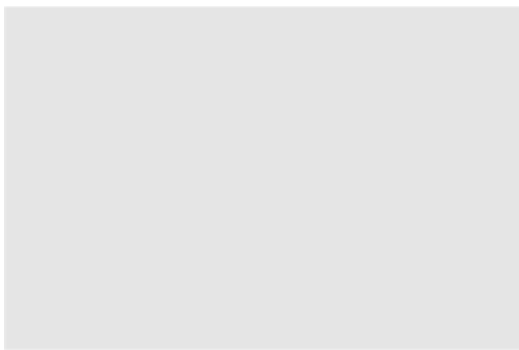


Fig. 23 (left): Studio Villani, Inside the shelter at the Montagnola Park, 1944, Archivi Alinari - archivio Villani, Firenze.

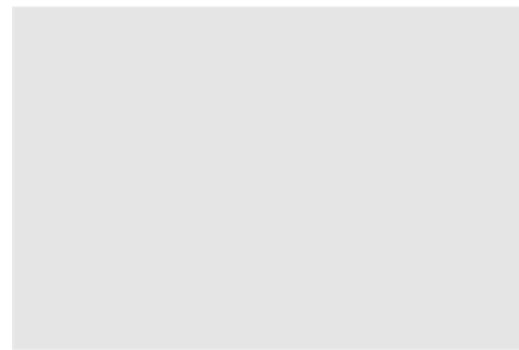


Fig. 24 (right): Foto Camera, City life during the war, 1945, Fondo Studio Camera / Cineteca di Bologna

In the wall text introducing the next post-war section we read that “photographers discover a new social anthropology, a strange public performance: participation.” Where we want to focus in this case is that the necessary reconstruction of the city in this period is not portrayed only as the work of some successful mayor or administration, even though they are recognized, but most importantly

as the work and labor of the people themselves, maybe even as an *oeuvre*. Still following the exhibition's text, this kind of labor sheds light both on the employment offer of the post-war city needs, which answered the decline of employment needs in the agricultural sector due to industrialization, and on the collective character of the rebuilding. The economic boom that followed is portrayed both through the consumerist advertisements that introduce *modernity*, and through the new industrial site of the food-processing factory. As we are being told, the 1950s introduced urbanization and industrialization both in the economic reality and the social fabric, something that is being also visualized by the selected photographs, which now include even more from amateur photographers and appear to have further artistic and sociological qualities. Alongside the making of important public works, including the closing-over of streams, we already start seeing moments of workers' strikes (figg.25-26), as well as everyday moments (figg.27-28), others glamorized and others not, in both private and public spaces, with the last being "no longer a backdrop, but a stage for social sharing"²⁹⁰. From the exhibition text, we are further informed about social alliances and political dialogue that this period of prosperity gave birth to, with an example being the adoption, from the communist municipal administration, of the proposal for the separation of the metropolitan area into *quartieri*, suggested by their political opponents.

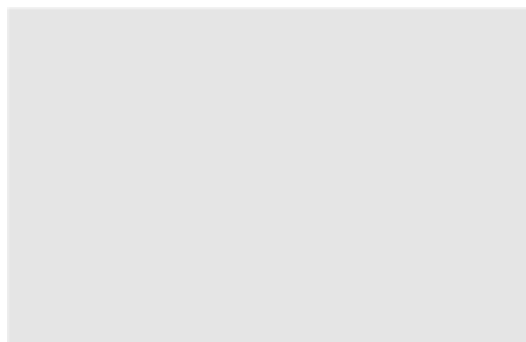


Fig. 25 (left): Enrico Pasquali, Parade, demonstration of farm workers, 1956, Fondo Miscellanea Novecento / Cineteca di Bologna.

Fig. 26 (right): Enrico Pasquali, Agricultural day labourers' protest, Minerbio. Honourable Deputy G. Bottonelli giving a speech, 1956, Fondo Miscellanea Novecento / Cineteca di Bologna.

²⁹⁰ Excerpts taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "The Boom"



Fig. 27 (left): Aldo Ferrari, Family life in the new houses, 1952, Fondo Aldo Ferrari / Cineteca di Bologna.

Fig. 28 (right): Enrico Pasquali, Construction workers taking a break, 1955, Fondo Enrico Pasquali / Cineteca di Bologna.

While all these elements, offered by the exhibition to the visitor to understand a historical period in the past, are very precious, and characterize an approach that is by far different from the one presented at the exhibition in *Palazzo Pepoli*, at times it gets evident that the traditional time-based narrative is restrictive in terms of making connections with the present condition. Most of the urban transformations represented, although seen through a socio-spatial dialectic in the moment of their realization, are not given any contemporary commentary, in order to appear socially relevant also today. The covering of the city's streams, that we have already mentioned, could again be such a moment, while here we further see everyday realities of traffic and public transportation, of demands for social, and even spatial justice.

A suggestion could be that such a linking commentary may take place even during the chronological narration. The exhibition had already introduced a parallel path, dedicated to children and characterized by shorter, more simple and thought-provoking captions in some of the photos throughout the various sections. (fig.29) We believe that a similar mediation technique could be adopted, and thus not interrupt the general arrangement of the exhibition, in order to connect different historical moments with present reality and today citizens' concerns. This would create a stronger social role for this exhibition, beyond the preservation and communication of the city's

heritage, and could adopt a more dialogical form of learning, especially if it was done in the often-used way of short open questions, a technique that would also create the least possible *distraction* from the main historical journey.

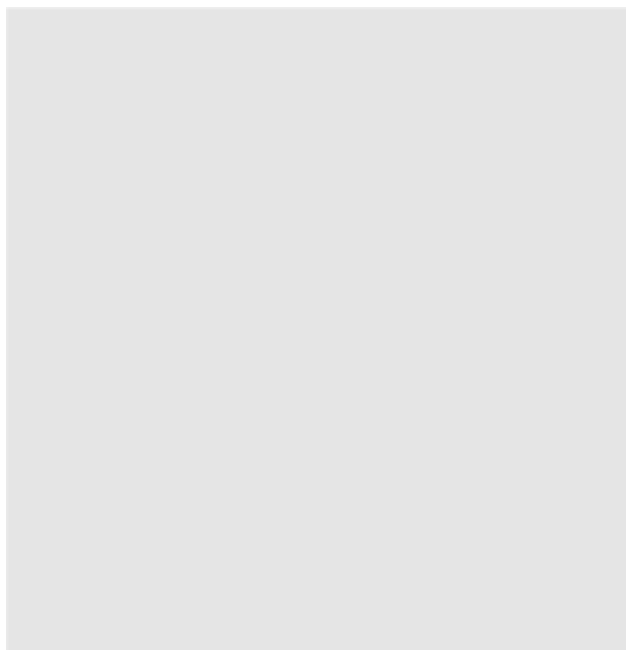


Fig. 29:
Exhibition view of one of the selected
images for the kid-friendly parallel
path (yellow frame and
accompanying small text panel),
Bologna Fotografata. Persone, luoghi,
fotografi.

The city's changes of the next decades, of the 1960s and 1970s, we are told are characterized by urban, social and cultural developments that are now related to economic advancement and to the new improved standards of living; not anymore to post-war urgencies. They include large-scale public-housing projects, the new business district designed by Kenzo Tange, a fact that the official city narrative seems to be very proud of even if it is seemingly irrelevant to not specialized audiences, and other modern social infrastructures that are more related to the daily life of the citizens. This is the period that also Cineteca, the organization that developed this exhibition, is founded, among other cultural initiatives, while we are being further informed that, in this period, the city is characterized by the consumerism, urbanization and cultural transformation climate that exists in the whole country. These developments are presented to be coupled with some more grassroots elements, such as women emancipation movements and the wider political movements of the

60s, as well as the rich and lively cultural and artistic life of the city, which is being presented again as an abstract whole. "Willingly, the city tries to absorb and metabolise this unrest, to transform it into the raw material of its maturation. Bologna wants to be a workshop of culture and equips itself accordingly: it produces music; it welcomes and promotes the arts".²⁹¹

It can be argued that this approach, of portraying the city as an abstract and already existing entity, even when related to seemingly progressive ideas, works mostly towards its mythicization, rather than towards it being understood as an oeuvre and 'in the making'. In many cases across the exhibition, we notice an emphasis on the city and its *soul* as something separated from the people's actions in a certain time period or from their collective shaping power, whether it is used towards liberating or oppressive appropriation of urban life. This stance is seen as evading any collective responsibility and accountability, making as a result any reflection weaker. On the other hand, it creates a supernatural notion which people might not feel capable of dialoguing or interacting with. In other words, this poetic personification of a city apparently moves the understanding away from a 'human-world relationship' and it constitutes another type of 'narration sickness'. One that, even if it is not presenting 'reality' as motionless, it is neither presenting it as something that people are permanent co-creators of, transforming this way the mediation into a rather non-dialogical cultural action.

Going back to the exhibition's presentation of the 1960s and 1970s, by initially presenting this period as one with such a homogenous high quality of life, it is natural for the following students protests to seem illogical, since they are once more presented, in our opinion, inadequately and in a problematic correlation with neo-fascist bombing attacks. For example, taking things with the sequence that a visitor would encounter them, in the wall text panel preceding the one mentioning any terrorism attack we read:

²⁹¹ Excerpts taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "The Years of Protest"

But when you are travelling fast, that's exactly when the bends become dangerous. In 1977, barricades and protests in Bologna bring the decade of dreams to a close: a generation now catches a glimpse into the abyss of the future. It is terrified and disgusted, and attempts to sabotage its own destiny. The people running the city don't understand, they don't listen. The curtain has been torn. There are armoured cars in the university area. Shots are fired in via Mascarella.²⁹²

Even before any mention of the train bombings of those years, we already see some poetic language choices that indirectly relate them to the student protests, which are once again portrayed as the ones to be blamed for the discontinuation of a supposedly utopian urban life, by even sabotaging it. For a moment, the blame seems to be shared with the city's administration who don't listen, and then a war scene follows.

The confusion continues in the following panel, where after the mention of the Italicus train bombing in 1974, which has been officially proven to be connected to a neo-fascist terrorist organization but here is left as an abstract "bloodshed of terrorism", the visitor is being informed for a "renewed effort, made possible by the coming together of several forces, to redress the age-old imbalances". This effort, we are being informed, was not valued by some part of the population, that saw it as "insensitive to the requests of participation expressed by new forms of marginalization (above all the younger generations affected by the economic crisis)"²⁹³. Suddenly, between the lines, the city is not as ideal as presented before, but instead there is an economic crisis and a certain marginalization. There is some part of the population that seeks to participate in the co-creation of their

²⁹² Excerpts taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "The Years of Protest"

²⁹³ Excerpts taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "The Fractures of the '70s"

reality, but their demands for a different urban experience are not being heard. Later we read:

Due to the central role it played in ruling the city, the PCI (Italian Communist Party) was strongly attacked by a large slice of the student population, which had increased significantly but was not very much integrated into city life. The situation came to a head with clashes in squares during the spring of 1977, mainly concentrated in the university area and marked by the violent actions of a movement not entirely unrelated to the provocations of certain elements determined to strike a blow to the traditional democratic image of the city. The killing of student Francesco Lorusso represented a turning point, followed by the difficult restoration of order by public authorities and the resumption of dialogue with parts of the movement, which took the form of organized debates that September.²⁹⁴

Commenting the above excerpt, it first ought to be highlighted the fact that a large part of the city's population, the university students, is being presented as not integrated in a kind of predetermined "city life", an interpretation that appears relatively uncritical and anti-dialogical, as if urban life was not a wider notion being constantly determined anew by the interaction of all the different groups of citizens. Then, follows an abstract relating of the student protests and, probably, the aforementioned terrorist bombing, that due to its vagueness it cannot be adequately understood. At one extreme reading, the confused phrasing could even be described as manipulative in its pathologizing of protest, while at the other the "democratic image of the city", if as such taken for example the arts, can definitely be related to the protestors, whom we witness playing music during their demonstration (fig.30). Moreover, the "killing" of Lorusso is vaguely left without a perpetrator, while the public authorities are only left with the difficult task of restoring the order, meaning probably the burning cars that we witness in the exhibited photographs.

²⁹⁴ Ibidem.

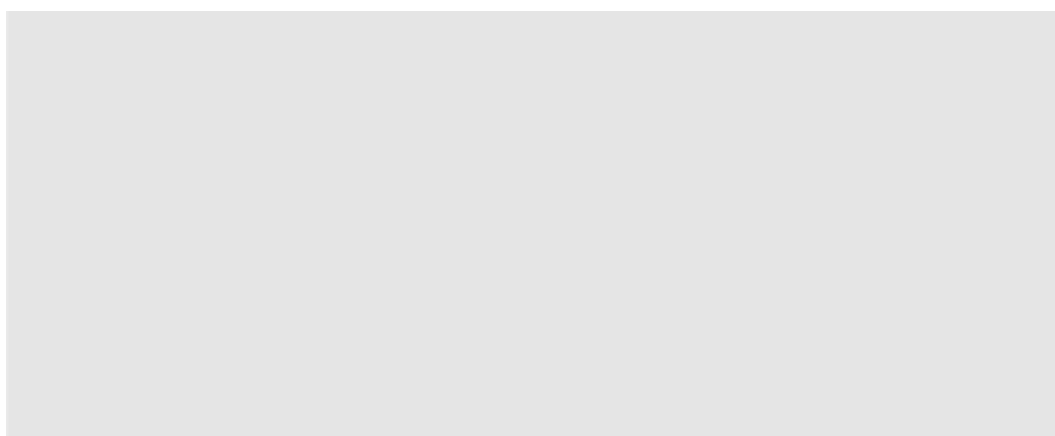


Fig. 30: Exhibition view of the projection room dedicated to the student protest of the 1970s, Bologna Fotografata. Persone, luoghi, fotografi.

As a conclusion of this section's analysis, the mediation texts lack in sufficiently contextualizing an important moment of the history of the city, while the visual testimonies sometimes represent an even opposite situation. Even if indirectly, a certain pathologization, and even criminalization, of opposition and protest occurs, which unfortunately continues in a certain way also in the next section, the one dealing with the 1980s and the train station bombing tragedy.

A weakened and disorientated Bologna, bewildered by its own sons and daughters, is an all-too-exposed, all-too-vulnerable target. Amidst the rubble of the station, on August 2nd 1980, photographers rediscover the acrid stench of war and destruction which they thought had disappeared forever. The city has been attacked by an enemy that does not show its face.

There is little doubt that a visitor, through the above introduction, connects the following section with some kind of blame to the student protests. And while it can be argued that this decades in Italy had been intensely polarized with many politically motivated armed attacks, and that these events can be seen under the same umbrella, we believe that this is a very dangerous task that needs adequate contextualization to not lead to a distortion of reality, especially in the post-truth era that we find ourselves in. The intentional a-politicization of certain events, in order for someone to appear neutral, combined

with mixing of these events, does not appear as a responsible stance on behalf of public bodies while narrating an officially presented version of the city's history and memory. At the same time, we are staying skeptical with bestowing the task of overcoming polarization and violence to some abstract, undefined and relatively supernatural shared heritage of "Bologna-ness" that the exhibition proposes.

Regarding the last section of "The Last Analogues (1980-1994)", one observes that the exhibition barely puts any effort in elaborating the many different cultural and social moments that the selected photographs depict. Even less in contextualizing them enough or connecting them to present concerns and realities. Expanding on a previous argument of ours, we want to highlight that the exhibition further evades connecting moments of the city's history and memory, especially the more *revolutionary* ones, to their current correspondence, in a way banishing them to a romantic past version of Bologna. For example, photographic representations of various "occupied social centers" have won their place in this exhibition, as part of the cultural heritage of the city, but nothing is mentioned regarding their current state or the relevant struggles for their existence (figg.31-32). Communal gardens are depicted, and while they constitute a direct appropriation of urban space, relating to both anti-commercial and environmental struggles, nothing is mentioned regarding their possible existence today, or of other recent demands for the protection of green spaces, that have instead been pathologized and attacked with violence (fig.33). Regarding other exhibited moments, characteristic signs of "Bologna-ness" that could be commented regarding their current state are public space celebrations, which are increasingly being commercialized, manifestations and protests, which are being marginalized and pathologized, as well as raves and other forms of cultural expression that are being either commercialized or criminalized (fig.34).



Fig. 31 (top-left): Massimo Sciacca, Progetto B42K. Opening of Livello 57 occupied social centre, Via dello Scalo, 1993.

Fig. 32 (top-right): Gianluca Perticone, Bologna Youth Culture. The historic Livello 57 occupied social centre, located at the ex-Bestial Market in Via dello Scalo. Self-produced CD by bands supporting or performing at Livello 57, 1994, Eikon Studio.

Fig. 33 (bottom-left): Paolo Ferrari, Communal gardens in the suburbs, 1982, Archivio Fotografico Genus Bononiae – Paolo Ferrari.

Fig. 34 (bottom-right): Massimo Sciacca, Progetto B42K. Street Race in piazza Maggiore, 1997.

Instead, the last exhibition's text mainly focuses on the more recent changes regarding the act of photography. In the panel text we read: "Today, it no longer seems possible to obtain a single, all-inclusive, recapitulatory photographic image of Bologna"²⁹⁵, and we wonder if the initial stance of the exhibition to present "an imagined Bologna, perhaps a little imaginary, and highly imaginative"²⁹⁶ has changed. Or does it simply want to justify its *natural* ending, highly diasporic and partial, but consequently leaving the visitor with a sense of powerlessness regarding the interpretation of contemporaneity?

²⁹⁵ Excerpts taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "The Last Analogues (1980-1994)"

²⁹⁶ Excerpt taken from the English version of the exhibition's text panel entitled "Preface"

As a last comment, we want to mention that the exhibition is characterized by the loud absence of any mention to the long and important queer history of Bologna. Even in its more officially recognized form, the movement for LGBTQIA+ rights has been for decades present in the city, in its initial form as "Collettivo Frocialista" from 1977 among the student's movements, while in 1982 the "Circolo di cultura omosessuale 28 giugno" was the first gay and lesbian social organization in Italy to be recognized by a municipality administration, acquiring an allocated physical space in municipally owned building.²⁹⁷ There cannot be any doubt that this is an important historical omission, since this part of Bologna's memory have been socially, culturally, and as we see even spatially, formative of the city's wider plural identity, while its inclusion in the exhibition would support a more intersectional approach to contemporary citizenship.

Meanwhile, we believe that any possible attempt to seek the justification of this omission in relation to its absence from the available archives would be at least hypocritical. While it is true that on the online open archive of *Bologna Fotografata* there is no presence of these memories, many of the exhibited images, especially the most recent ones, are also nowhere to be found in that resource. Instead, as the minimum example, we present the following poster (fig.35), retrieved from an online archive supported by both the municipality of Bologna, the region and the ministry of culture, and thus most probably available for such an exhibition. In the included photograph, an investigative curious eye can further notice at least two photographic cameras depicted, giving only an indication for the rich archives of queer photographic memories that an organization such as *Cineteca* could potentially have access to.

²⁹⁷ See <https://centrodocumentazionecassero.it/storia> [last access 18/02/2025]

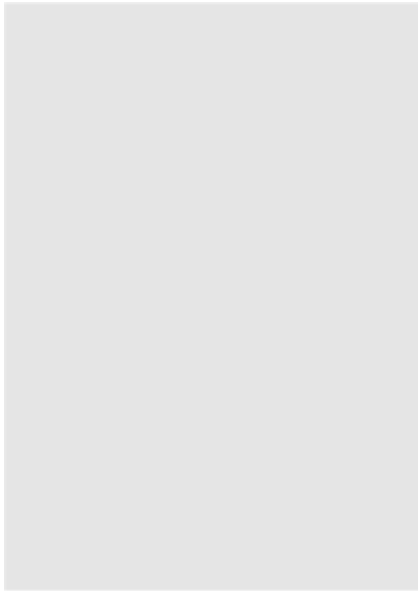


Fig. 35:
Cassero 1982-2007. 25 anni di lotta con classe, Offset
lithography on paper, 2007.

Summing up, we believe that the exhibition adopts a critical investigatory perspective for the first periods it depicts, from the last decades of the 19th century to the mid-20th century, through the use of social and public history approaches. However, it does not appear as dialogical and critical regarding the crucial decades from 1960s to 1980s, since it does not offer enough interpretative tools to the visitors, while the last depicted decades are barely elaborated, thus not leading to any form of cultural synthesis or consciousness-raising related to contemporaneity and commoning practices that have taken place in the city, and still do so today. At the same time, the absence of an important part of Bologna's memory forbids the construction of an inclusive enough idea of contemporary citizenship, which could potentially lead to the shaping of concrete and plural demands for the right to the city. In contrast, it reinforces polarizing tendencies in our society, often leading to social erasure of many different identities, needs and wants. All the above is combined with the fact that no attempt is being made to escape a traditional heritage logic and to connect all these memories with the present and the future of the city. For these reasons, we would characterize this exhibition as offering *selective* gazes into *past* urban life.

Chapter 9: FHXB Museum, history and geography “in the making”

In this chapter we will focus on the *FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum* in Berlin, a district museum whose work is centered around social movements, urban development, industrial and migration history. As we will see, the museum puts great emphasis on ‘the right to the city’, in this case also ‘to the neighborhood’, and especially on ‘the right to memory’, while it frequently also adopts a critical spatial perspective, and even expanding commoning practices. It does not avoid contemporary challenging issues but rather brings to the forefront topics such as discrimination and displacement, lifting previously unheard voices and positions, with a wider aim of enabling empowerment. Recognizing the fact that museum work is not neutral, it adopts a critical position, participates in the current district’s developments and creates networks and collaborations with local initiatives and actors, constantly reflecting back on its practice.²⁹⁸

The museum was created in 2004 through the merging of the *Kreuzberg Museum for Urban Development and Social History* (founded in 1991) and the *Friedrichshain Local History Museum* (founded in the late 1980s), once the two districts were joined in the administrative reform of Berlin in 2001, a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany.²⁹⁹ Regarding the current identity of *FHXB Museum*, it is worth mentioning the decisive formative role of the *Association for the Research and Representation of the History of Kreuzberg*³⁰⁰, which was founded in 1978 with a clear aim to develop, preserve, and discover the local social history and memory, paving the way for the creation of the *Kreuzberg Museum*.³⁰¹ The

²⁹⁸ See <https://www.fhxb-museum.de/museum/ueber-uns> [last access 18/02/2025]

²⁹⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰⁰ Since 2021 known as *The Association for the History of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg eV* (*Der Verein für die Geschichte Friedrichshain-Kreuzbergs e.V.*)

³⁰¹ See <https://www.fhxb-museum.de/museum/verein> [last access 18/02/2025]

building that houses the museum today, the one that used to house the *Kreuzberg Museum*, is a restored five-story factory building, typical of the area in the first half of the 20th century, in a very central part of the district and with an outdoor space that is often used for community events during the warmer months.

The museum currently hosts three permanent exhibitions, while it develops many temporary exhibitions and other projects, frequently organizing events and talks related to them. It also houses a collection and library with archival material about the district, which is available for a visit as well. We would characterize it as a content-focused museum, and while the area of reference is not the whole city, but a district of it, it is still a museum *in* and *about* the city. The written material in all its exhibitions is both in German and English, while also native languages of the migrant population of the district are often used. The inclusive approach extends to accessibility features such as “easy or simple language booklets” and audio or video pieces in the exhibitions, as well as an evident strive for communication of existing accessibility barriers. Among further elements that prove this museum’s social responsibility, we mention the “after-work tours” that it is hosting, extending its usual timetable, without any ticket fee – similarly to all its other activities.

The first exhibition we will analyze is the oldest of those on show today. It was initially developed between 2001 and 2003, with the participation of local residents, and it was updated in 2015, in light of new changes taking place in the urban reality of the district. “History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor”³⁰² is probably the most traditional one, among the museum’s exhibitions, regarding the museography, at least in its current form. A simple combination of short bilingual text and images, mainly photographs, that follows chronologically the urban changes of a neighborhood, don’t seem

³⁰² See

<https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/geschichte-wird-gemacht-abriss-und-aufbruch-am-kottbusser-tor> [last access 18/02/2025]

groundbreaking at first glance. However, its critical approach and its particular take on the 'triple dialectic' of the temporal, spatial and social aspects, renders it a very forward-looking and socially relevant exhibition, even if moderately small in size. Furthermore, it can be seen as an instance that cultural mediation in the museum takes the form of *thought-images*, creating shared ground for *thinking-in-common*.

The first observation related to the mediation process, is that the images that accompany the textual narrative evidently come from various different sources, and many are from amateur photographers, showing aspects of the actual everyday urban life of the district throughout the decades. They are not simply illustrating the text in a decorative way, but in a meaningful one, offering additional degrees of understanding and contextualizing (figg.36-46). On top of that, the fact that the creation of this exhibition was a participatory project, where residents of the neighborhood were not only 'consulted', but were actively 'involved', and even 'co-produced' it, demonstrates that the museum intended to act as a platform for them to 'name the world', offering this right without discriminating, by trusting and including "students, retirees, carpenters, artists, historians, and the unemployed"³⁰³. While we do not have many testimonies or descriptions from the actual process, which took place more than twenty years ago – a fact that reasserts the forward-looking strategy of this museum, we can imagine that this participatory process of archival research by the participants was a very meaningful one. Going through the archive and encountering moments from the neighborhood's memories, a few of which made it into the final exhibition, is sure to have given to the participants a very rich understanding of the historical processes that took place in their district. In this way, it is seen as adopting Freire's proposal for *co-intentional* learning practice, in which all sides of a dialogical

³⁰³ Excerpts taken from the English version of the text on the exhibition's panel.

process are critically unveiling and understanding reality together while re-creating knowledge.³⁰⁴

Moreover, we want to make a comment regarding the timeframe of the exhibition's narrative, which spans from 1945 to 2015. While in many museums that aim to recount the urban development of their city or neighborhood the second part of the 20th century, and even more the turn of the millennium, is hardly elaborated, here this recent and politically charged period becomes precisely the one to be presented in the permanent exhibition. This proves even more that the museum's mediation aims to be socially relevant for the contemporary residents, or visitors. Furthermore, the urban changes that have been taking place are not presented as a grand narrative, but instead, the moments and reasons for opposition to the official plans for urban renewal of the area are the main focus. The city is presented as an 'oeuvre', as constantly being made by the various social movements that strive for their right to the city; a task that is highlighted as still going on. Following the exhibition text: "At first glance the neighborhood seems discordant and disheveled. Upon closer examination, however, we see the result of a stubborn struggle for a livable inner city – a process that is far from finished."³⁰⁵

Separated into sections covering a few years, thus acquiring the form of investigation and avoiding generalizations, the exhibition begins by presenting the 'limit-situation' that the Second World War left behind, with almost half of Kreuzberg's residential buildings uninhabitable in 1945, due to airstrikes at the ending of the war. The mediation though focuses also on the aspect of hope and the tenants' 'limit-act' of repair, contextualizing how the official reconstruction was still "out of the question". The next decade, from 1949 to 1961, the official rebuilding efforts will start, following the principle of "light, air, and sunshine", combined with plans for a highway network and the condemnation of the "Kreuzberg mélange" as outdated (fig.36). This modernist stance, characteristic of that era, will start being

³⁰⁴ See *Chapter 2: City Museum Mediation as Critical Pedagogy*, pp.23-24.

³⁰⁵ Excerpts taken from the English version of the text on the exhibition's panel.

reevaluated already two decades later, and the exhibition text will mention that, but only in that section. Here we notice a narrative technique that lets the visitor free to practice their critical thinking, by not imposing opinions, but rather letting the historical process – nevertheless a critically mediated one – unfold the past's right and wrongs.

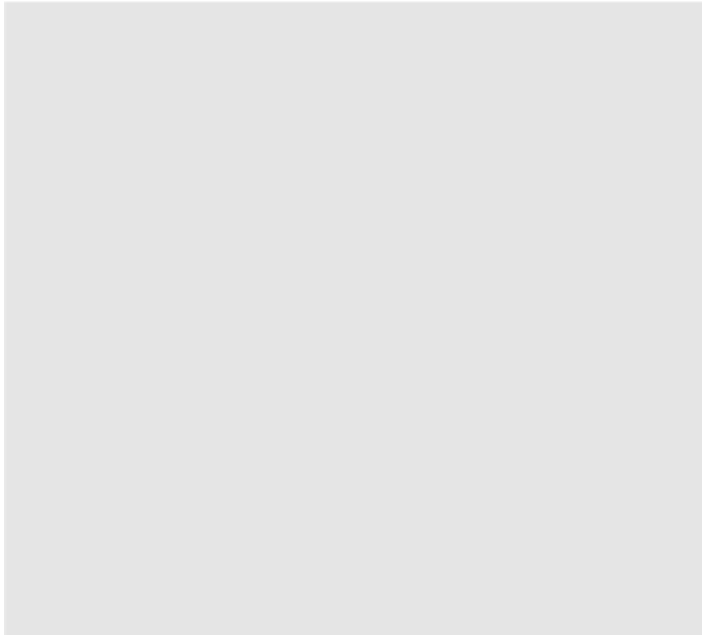


Fig.36:
Part of exhibition panel from
the section "1949-1961: Light,
Air, and Sunshine", History in
the making! Demolition and
Protest at Kottbusser Tor,
FHXB
Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg
Museum.

The next section, characterized as a "turning point", regards the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Although there is no historical contextualization (there are many other exhibitions in the city presenting that exact historical event) the implications of this 'spatial segregation' and the ways they affected the neighborhood get center stage. The labor shortage that the new border created for West Berlin, that Kreuzberg was now at the edge of, resulted in the arrival of many migrating "guest workers", a large number of whom found affordable housing in this district. This started creating the new multicultural population of Kreuzberg, which was soon to be enhanced by many artists who found its peripheral position (throughout the segregation period) to be an optimal place to settle.

Without going into all the details of the following sections, we want to highlight that the exhibition's mediation cultivates a critical consciousness, at times especially spatial. Regarding the general

official plans for the urban development of the area, we observe a shift from ones that are more in line with the 'creative destruction' logic, here described as "clearance renovation" and shown coupled with acts of displacement (fig.37), to others of more "cautious urban planning", with elements of partial preservation and "concerted dialogues with tenants in the area".³⁰⁶ This shift was a result of both different international urban planning trends of these years, and the disapproval of the local population that had materialized in many grassroots initiatives towards social and spatial justice. As we have seen during our analysis of the City Museum discourse in the first part of the thesis, when presenting social movements and protests it is crucial to also emphasize their achievements³⁰⁷; something that is indeed taken into consideration in this case. This way, the social movements get the historical and spatial importance they deserve, while contemporary movements can be de-pathologized, and a sense of hope can be built for new achievements. (fig.38)

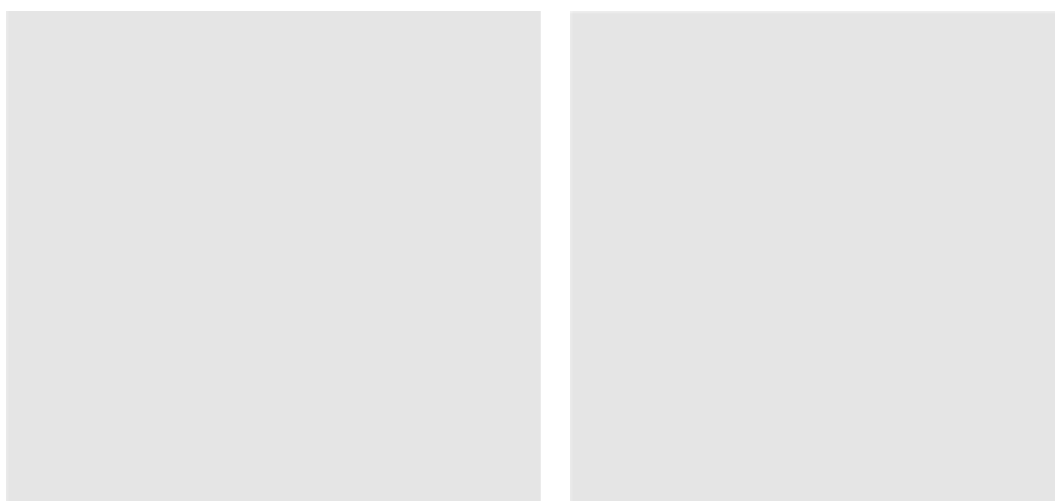


Fig. 37 (left): Part of exhibition panel from the section "1963-1975: Clearing the Way for a New City", History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

Fig. 38 (right): Part of exhibition panel from the section "1975-1979: New Models for Urban Planning", History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

Throughout the exhibition, the important role of the arriving migrant populations to the district's history is also unraveled. Short but

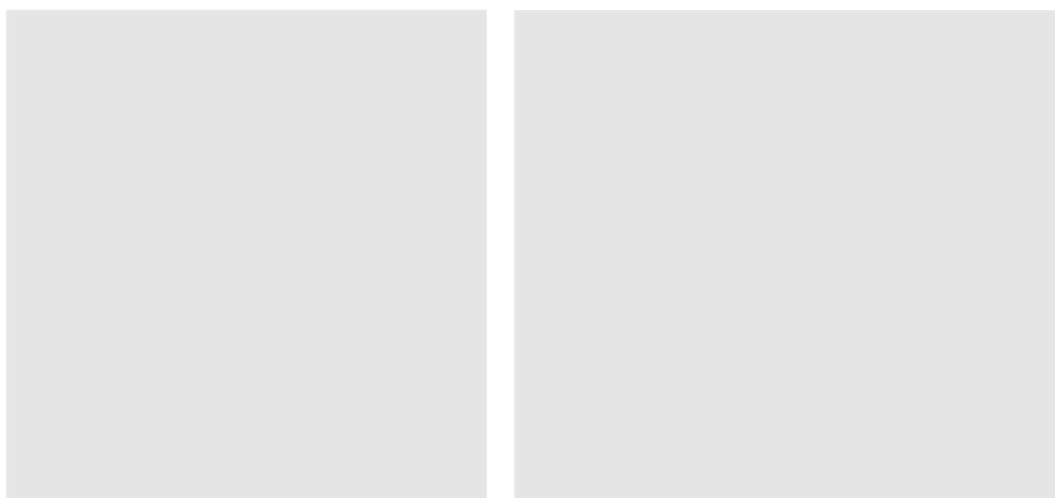
³⁰⁶ Excerpts taken from the English version of the text on the exhibition's panel.

³⁰⁷ See *Chapter 4: The Right to the City as City Museum thematics*, p.55.

useful explanations of various legal aspects contextualize their constantly increasing recruitment until 1973 and the families' reunifications from then onwards, as well as the housing needs that this entailed. While during the next years they had started putting down roots in Kreuzberg, we get to learn that the state apparatus and its infrastructures were not ready for their inclusion, acting with discriminatory "settlement bans" in 1975, and other "no-tolerance" approaches related to forced youth employment, in 1981. This, in turn, led to "calls for resistance" and community organizing in political, cultural, and religious terms, something that in time empowered this population to form "a solid middle class" and establish the multicultural identity that characterizes the neighborhood until today. Reflecting on our previous analysis of today's City Museum discourse, presenting migration, not only from a cultural perspective, but also in terms of movement, discrimination and everyday life, is a more responsible and inclusive approach, which we observe *FHXB Museum* applying already from this exhibition.

Concerning acts of opposition to the unjust spatial developments, one of the key moments of Kreuzberg's history in this regard is the squatting movement that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. This side of local history is presented through a very respectful perspective by the museum mediation, without being criminalized, but instead shown as a natural struggle towards the right to better living conditions. Starting from 1971, the first abandoned building is occupied in Kreuzberg, managing later its temporary legalization, while the "alternative lifestyle" that this movement entails attracts many young people, giving rise to a vibrant urban life, with many collectively organized initiatives related to it. The model of "rehab-squatting" undertakes the bottom-up renovation of many abandoned apartments and acquires an intersectional character, including women's initiatives, daycares, community and cultural centers. (figg.39-40) The official policy's responses to this movement vary, according to the different political position of each office, and spans from attempts for dialogue

and offers for legalization under “conventional lease”, to violent evictions coupled with police brutality. The side of those occupying the empty buildings also varies, with some aiming to safeguard the homes they have themselves renovated, and others refusing any negotiation, demanding the unconditional appropriation of the previously abandoned apartments.

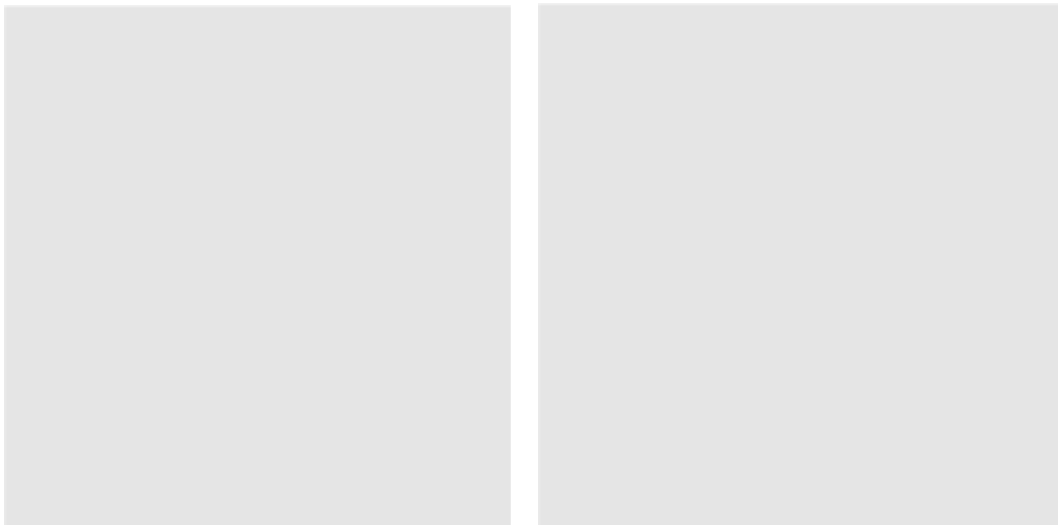


Figg. 39-40: Part of exhibition panel from the section “1979-1984: Squatting, Protest, and Self-Organization”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

The exhibition closes the section on these decades of “political turbulence” by highlighting the “common sense of place – a feeling of ‘We’” and the “multi-ethnic” inclusive idea of citizenship that started developing in this neighborhood.³⁰⁸ Meanwhile, we want to emphasize the fact that the mediation strategy went a step beyond posing unjust urban changes as problems, into further presenting as ‘generative themes’ the grassroot urban initiatives themselves, which struggle for more human existence by turning the city into a collective ‘oeuvre’. Reflecting back to our theoretical analysis, we can notice in these sections the ‘right to appropriation’ being represented, different from that to property, as well as traces of a ‘new urban humanism’ and ‘creative production’ processes. The various movements presented are not uniform, but ‘in unity’ and in constant dialogue towards a right to the city and to their neighborhood, while they are being presented acquiring a ‘collective shaping power’.

³⁰⁸ Excerpts taken from the English version of the text on the exhibition’s panel.

The next sections, the ones succeeding the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, take a slightly different turn, with the neighborhood not being anymore in the periphery, put again in the center of the unified Berlin. The freedom of movement and the establishment of greater capital in the city starts creating speculative rises in rents and general land value, while public funding for urban development is mainly concentrated in East Berlin, leaving Kreuzberg relatively neglected (fig.41). The exhibition also gives an insight into the rising racism amidst the cultural dynamics of reunification, highlighting that “residents without a traditional German appearance experience an increase in outright discrimination and targeted violence”. In the meantime, anti-racist resistance that starts appearing is often criminalized (fig.42), among a general climate of unemployment and an increasingly bad reputation of the neighborhood, related also to the “open hard drug and alcohol scene” that renders it as dangerous.³⁰⁹

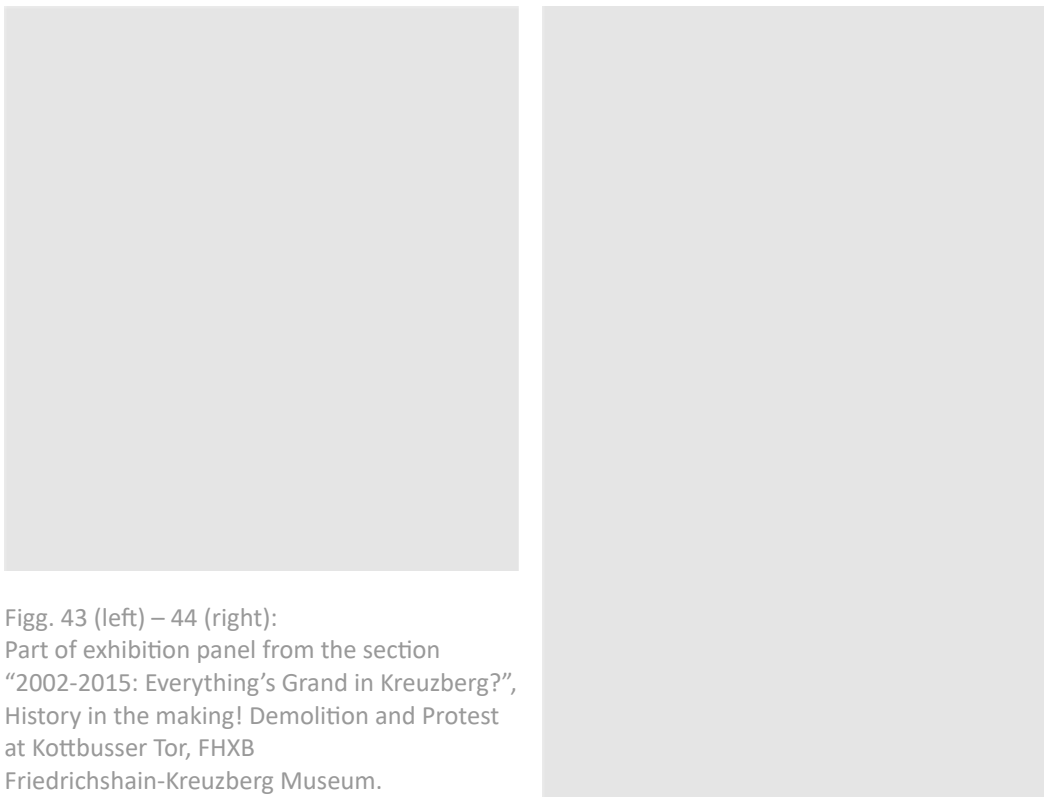


Figg. 41 (left) – 42 (right): Part of exhibition panel from the section “1990-2002: Stagnation and a Downward Spiral”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

However, as happens in many neighborhoods that are left neglected, being at the same time cheap and maybe attractive – in this case also alternative and creative, a new era of gentrification, touristification and privatization started, and during the last years Kreuzberg started being “hip”. In the first part of this last section, the

³⁰⁹ Ibidem.

mediation focuses on posing the problems of the new urban reality. Those include attempts to commercialize the protest character of the district, a certain kind of 'consumption of place' if we apply Lefebvre's theorization³¹⁰, as well as privatization of social housing, and increasing prices in rents and real estate values, very often related to over-tourism and the subsequent transformation of apartments into short term rental ones (fig.43). Small independent local shops are disappearing, often being replaced by bigger chain stores, while the commercial focus of the neighborhood changes to clothing and ready food; "the local population's daily needs become subordinate to the consumer preferences of temporary guests". The fame of the once alternative lifestyle gets translated into a tourist destination trait, "testing the tolerance of Kreuzberg residents who live in the midst of the party zone"; a party zone that is characterized by disrespect and apathy for the local population and the pre-existing urban life. (fig.44)³¹¹



Figg. 43 (left) – 44 (right):
Part of exhibition panel from the section
"2002-2015: Everything's Grand in Kreuzberg?",
History in the making! Demolition and Protest
at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB
Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

³¹⁰ See *Chapter 3: Reading and Writing the City*, p.34.

³¹¹ Excerpts taken from the English version of the text on the exhibition's panel.

The second part of this last section focuses on the responses of the citizens, on their 'limit-acts' towards these 'limit-situations' that were presented. The exhibition chooses to highlight the strong, and often successful, resistance against big investment projects that prompt further gentrification, as well as some crucial occupation initiatives that have taken place in the neighborhood the last years. One of them is *Kotti & Co.*, a grassroots tenants' movement from the former social housing units of the neighborhood that opposes unjust rental increases and evictions, the neglect of their homes, and the wider suppression of affordable housing. This inclusive and intersectional organizing materialized its protest through a "pop-up protest house", the *Gecekondü*, and is still active today, while the fact that the museum mentions it so emphatically in this exhibition is believed to create a valuable bridge and connection to the district's contemporary life and challenges (fig.45). Another example from the exhibition is the occupation of an abandoned school from refugee asylum seekers, which was supported by many local residents, and beyond housing it offered to the asylum seekers the strength and social alliances needed to demand their rights to housing, movement, and work (fig.46). In 2021, the museum initiated a further project related to this occupation, entitled "The Occupation of the Gerhart Hauptmann School (2012-2018)", highlighting that several years after the last evacuation of the refugee occupation the building remained empty and abandoned. The project included documentation and digitization of the building, as well as several oral history interviews of people that participated.³¹²

³¹² See <https://www.fhxb-museum.de/museum/news-detail/die-besetzung-der-gerhart-hauptmann-schule-2012-2018> [last access 18/02/2025]



Figg. 45 (left) – 46 (right): Part of exhibition panel from the section “2002-2015: Everything’s Grand in Kreuzberg?”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

In the closing text, the exhibition ends by wondering who gets to acquire the right to the city, “to whom does the district belong?”, to state that “the future is unwritten!”; an open-ended conclusion that is at the same time a glimmer of hope and an urgent call to action. This is contextualized anew through today’s multiplying social contrasts and the “expulsion and displacement” of the local population, which was until now characterized by an inclusive idea of citizenship and “the coexistence and interconnection of different ethnicities and social groups”. We believe that the main achievement of this exhibition is the fact that it offers a certain kind of ‘witness’, an understanding of the historical context that, according to Freire, is a necessary part of and step to organization and action towards a more humanized world.³¹³ And the witness that this museum mediation offers is indeed one that is characterized by consistency, boldness, radicalization and faith.³¹⁴

Furthermore, this ‘witness’ acquires a double function. On the one hand, it attempts to ‘explain’ the district to its residents, giving a name to many of their possible challenges and everyday concerns. Posing these challenges as collective, by showing that they are experienced by the whole neighborhood, it prompts the search for a collective answer, maybe similar to or inspired by the various initiatives presented. On the other hand, considering the museum also as a place visited by “tourists”, the current situation of the neighborhood and its

³¹³ See *Chapter 2: City Museum Mediation as Critical Pedagogy*, p.30.

³¹⁴ Excerpts taken from the English version of the text on the exhibition’s panel.

urban dynamics are posed as problems to them as well, offering a chance for reflection. By understanding that the place one visits is not just one 'to consume', but a lived district with a population that struggles to safeguard the right to their neighborhood, there is the probability to move towards organization also from that side. For example, Kotti & Co., understanding the unavoidable reality of "our new neighbours, high-income earners and tourists", reach out also to them, asking their support: "To support our camp, help us during the night watch; bring chairs, colours, chalkstone, ideas and cake! Protest along with us!".³¹⁵ And while short citations like this, or poster 'slogans' as in the photos of the exhibition, can be said to be condemned by Freire's theorization as 'propaganda', we do believe that adequate contextualization has the power to turn them into 'cognizable objects'. Especially in the era of social media and short attention span, finding this balance might be one of the main mediating challenges of our times.

The second exhibition that we will analyze is the one more often mentioned in the City Museum literature, and not without a reason.³¹⁶ In 2012, the *FHXB Museum* was developing the project "local chats. city – migration – history: from hallesches to frankfurter tor", a participatory mediation project that is based on public oral history and characterized by a crucial 'socio-spatial dialectic'. This project, which we will analyze in more detail, together with two more sections, the "long-distance chats" that includes the participation of the visitors in narrating their own experiences of the district, and the "local histories" of specific places, form a permanent exhibition, which used to spread in two levels of the building, but today is occupying only one, leaving more space for temporary exhibitions. The floor of this exhibition space is covered by a map of the district, on top of which one can find

³¹⁵ See <https://kottiundco.net/english/> [last access 18/02/2025]

³¹⁶ For example, see F. Lanz, F. Miera & L. Bluche, "ortsgespräche", *Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum*, in L. Basso Peressut, F. Lanz and G. Postiglione (eds.), *European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework* (Vol. 2), Politecnico di Milano, Milan, 2013, pp. 504-509.

markings with different numbers, which correspond to the exhibition material that can be accessed through portable electronic devices and smartphones (fig.47).³¹⁷

From the subtitle of the exhibition, "city – migration – history: from hallesches to frankfurter tor", we understand that the museum mediation wants to focus on the multi-ethnic population of the district, in line with and building on the narrative of the previous exhibition, while the area of reference in this case is enlarged to include the whole district and not only a specific neighborhood. It approaches migration through oral history interviews that aim to fight stereotypes and discriminating assumptions, and instead try to shed light on the personal experience of the people. The exhibition achieves that by adopting an inventive strategy that does not mediate only their subjective reality, focusing exclusively on the people and thus possibly objectifying them, as we analyzed in the previous part of the thesis, but instead emphasizes the human-world relationship. By applying "a topographical approach" – according to the curators³¹⁸, or a 'critical spatial perspective' – as we could say based on the analyzed theory, it connects people's experiences, personal memories and views of certain places in the district, acting in two levels. On the one hand we get to know those people and their stories, and on the other, we get to explore the neighborhood from a special perspective, that of its residents.

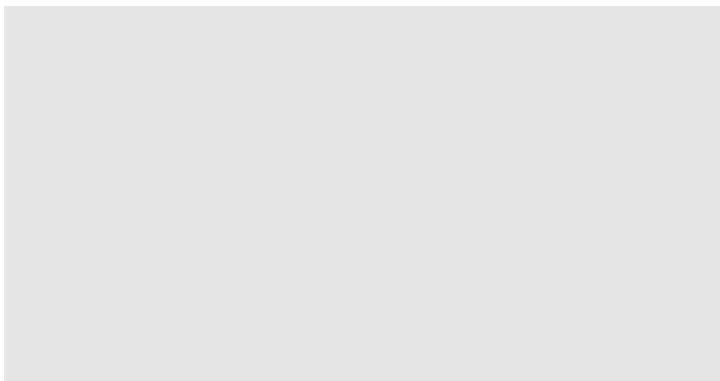


Fig.47:
Exhibition view, "local chats.
city – migration – history:
from hallesches to
frankfurter tor", FHXB
Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg
Museum.

³¹⁷ See

<https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/ortsgespraech-ferngespraech-ortsgeschichten> [last access 18/02/2025]

³¹⁸ F. Lanz, F. Miera & L. Bluche, "ortsgespräche", *Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum*, cit., pp. 504-509.

The introductory text starts with the statement that “cities are shaped by migration on every level”, and in this case we understand that the *city* is indeed meant as the center of social and political life, with emphasis being given on the *movement* that migration entails, being both immigration and emigration, and which “give rise to new forms of everyday urban reality”. In this way, the mediation process wants to highlight that “urban history is always migration history”.³¹⁹ This multicultural approach can work towards an inclusive idea of common citizenship, one that we saw Kreuzberg having in previous times. With this exhibition, the museum seems to want to build further on that, focusing on the contemporary residents and their memories, witnessing their connected or related experiences. The initial common reference of these experiences is space, which according to our previous theorization, can indeed support an inclusive collective consciousness; one that is based on a contemporary socio-spatial relationship, and not on some supernatural and idealized common heritage, as we have observed in other cases³²⁰.

The inclusive and responsible social role of this museum is further demonstrated at various levels throughout the exhibition, while its approach connects collective memory with expanding commoning. In the participatory workshops that took place during the design process many people from different social groups and generations were involved, including also immigrants without an official legal status, with the aim of the museum being to raise “voices that are often overheard”³²¹. During these workshops, some specific places that are highlighted were decided with the collaboration of the participants, while the interviews took place in their native language when needed.

³²² During the visit, the interviews are accessible in both German and English, as well as in both audio and text format, with recent photographs offering further contextualization. The visitor can choose

³¹⁹ Excerpts taken from the English version of the exhibition’s introductory text panel.

³²⁰ See for example *Chapter 7: Palazzo Pepoli, a city history museum “in progress”*, pp.123-124.

³²¹ Excerpts taken from the English version of the exhibition’s introductory text panel.

³²² F. Lanz, F. Miera & L. Bluche, “*ortsgespräche*”, *Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum*, cit., pp. 504-509.

to follow different paths, consisting either of an individual person's stories, or of a specific theme, while one is also free to follow an independent path focusing on specific places. The thematic groups that were put together by the curatorial team relate to migrating movement, social or cultural aspects, positive or negative experiences, and living or working conditions, offering a wide range of understanding of today's urban life in the district.

As a last comment, we want to mention that, although this exhibition's mediation strategy is being widely used nowadays, the museum's physical space approach offers an extra degree of connectiveness. Thematic mapping, the technique of creating an additional level of information on top of a seemingly neutral map, by locating specific inputs related to various possible themes in different places, can indeed offer a valuable spatial perspective. At the same time, in cases where the theme is one that challenges dominant power structures, the process turns into a *counter-mapping*. Meanwhile, if open to participation, it can attract very large involvement, especially in the digital era, cultivating a *critical* spatial perspective to certain common struggles.³²³ However, in this case, a *counter-mapping* that is projected on physical space seems like a more immersive, and thus effective technique. The fact that this experience can be shared in real time and space, not only with a friend, with whom you could also browse together online, but practically with anyone that happens to be with you in the same room, highlights the crucial social aspect of a physical museum, as a place of meeting. This physical meeting is key, and even essential, for dialogical encounters to take place, and the *FHXB museum* seems to be working in this exact direction, with one example being the various thematic events that it organizes, and which are often taking place also in this exhibition space.

³²³ See for example <https://www.queeringthemap.com/> [last access 18/02/2025]

From 2018, with the change in the museum's direction, the new activities continue to build on the approach that the museum already had, with social history and local movements still being the starting point but placed now into a wider and more global context. Alongside the many temporary exhibitions that have been taking place, a new thematic permanent one has also been developed, based on an analysis of the collection, a collaboration with universities and documentation centers, and reflecting on major themes that structure social life today.³²⁴ The museum continues to work in a message/content-oriented way, building on both historical consciousnesses and a sense of place, through a challenging way against grand mainstream narratives that often bury certain aspects of everyday life. The themes continue to be highly characterized by contemporary social relevance, while the process of the museum keeps being open, aiming to greater participation and dialogue, something that is evident first and foremost in the applied curatorial and mediation strategies.

The new third permanent exhibition of *FHXB Museum* is entitled "Bringing Together Antiracist Struggles: An Open Archive".³²⁵ One observes that the multicultural and migratory character of the district gets again center stage, not just through the aspect of discrimination, as we have seen being emphasized in today's City Museum discourse, but a step further, through the struggles for social justice and against dehumanizing oppression. In the introductory text we read that the exhibition aims to mediate decades of resistance against racism and of fights "for social change and equal participation", together with activists and people with personal experiences of discrimination; them being immigrants, part of passing populations, or non-natives but locally born. The message is clear: in the mainstream narrative they

³²⁴ U. Rada, "Leiterin des FHXB-Museums im Interview „Ich beobachte viel und gern“ Von München nach Berlin, aus der Modebranche ins Museum: Natalie Bayer, Leiterin des Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg-Museums, hat wenig Angst vor Veränderungen." (20.06.2021), <https://taz.de/> [last access 18/02/2025]

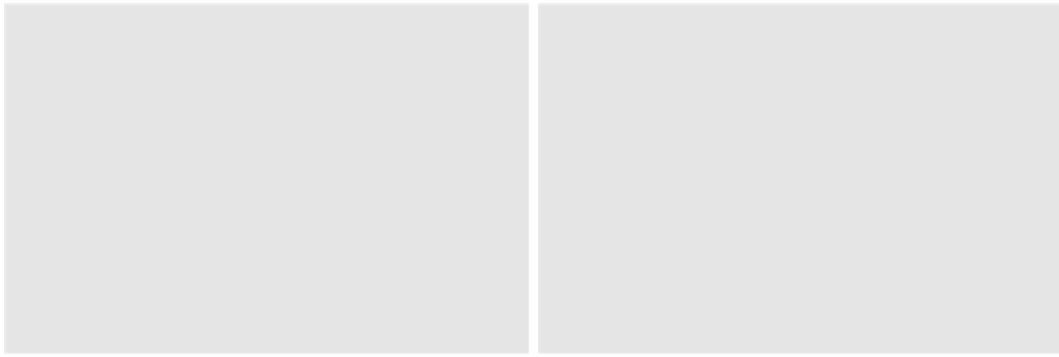
³²⁵ See <https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/ver-sammeln-antirassistischer-kaempfe-ein-offenes-archiv> [last access 18/02/2025]

are either instrumentalized and portrayed as “victims” or “Others”, or their experience is missing, while “these voids are not accidental”. For that, the museum attempts to “tell the wider story”, from their perspective, as a history of resistance, and through a collaborative inclusive search for “new ways of collecting, processing, and passing on information”. An open archive is created, to grow continuously with the people’s inputs, as “a space for debate” that merges experiences of the past with contemporary challenges.³²⁶

The main display of the exhibition is a series of shelves with archiving boxes organized in decades, starting from the 1950s and reaching until the 2020s, subdivided into related themes and events. The archive’s collection contains documents, leaflets, and publications, as well as photographs, some of which are enlarged and hung in space, and video interviews that are shown on various screens. Some screens are placed on a round table in the middle of the exhibition space, where visitors are also invited to bring the archival boxes and explore their contents. Some of the boxes are intentionally left empty to highlight the gaps and voids regarding knowledge about antiracist initiatives. They are expected to be filled with time through the participation of people, with their own experiences and memories. As we read in the second introductory panel, entitled “Re-Assembling Knowledge in the Museum: Networks, Ruptures, and Fragments of History”, “only through collective endeavor can this knowledge be increased and hitherto dominant historical narratives challenged”.³²⁷ This stance on behalf of the museum, reaffirms that it approaches ‘witnessing’ as a common and collective task towards liberation and humanization, showing a strong faith towards the people, whose active involvement is not only valued but also encouraged. (figg.48-49)

³²⁶ Excerpts taken from the English version of the exhibition’s introductory text panel.

³²⁷ Excerpt taken from the English version of the exhibition’s introductory text panel.



Figg.48-49: Exhibition view, Bringing Together Antiracist Struggles: An Open Archive, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

In some hanging thematic texts one can read more specific gathered information, related in space with the printed photographs. Regarding "the Struggles of Refugees", we are being told that they are fighting "for their right to stay" and against "deportation policies, camp accommodation, compulsory residence, and state as well as non-state racially motivated violence", through "hunger strikes, blockades, squats, camps, protest marches, as well as rallies and congresses". More specific events or legislation are also being highlighted in these texts, focusing on Berlin and extending to other cities in the country. Some of the rest thematics include "Black Movements in Germany", emphasizing the diversity inside this movement and its various origins already since the 1960s, "Antiracist Feminism", focusing on the forming of cross-community alliances and networks, and "Migration Struggles in the Federal Republic of Germany", re-stating the immigration history of workers after the Second World War, the discrimination they faced, and the resistance they organized striving for social justice.³²⁸

Another section, that is unique and daring in its relation to a 'difficult' theme, is that of "Struggles for Commemoration". This text panel deals with the remembrance of victims of racially motivated violence, often murderous, as well as with the "attack after the attack" related to "the racism of the investigation authorities and the criminal justice system, the media, and of other social institutions". At the same time, the existence of contemporary organized "pogrom" attacks is being tackled, which have only recently started being investigated as

³²⁸ Excerpts taken from the English version of exhibition text panels.

such, thanks to mobilization of victims' relatives and the political support from groups in solidarity with their struggle.³²⁹

These panels emphasize, testify and recall moments of cooperation, unity, organization, and some kinds of cultural synthesis, constituting an example of highly 'dialogical' and 'consciousness-raising' mediation practice, and centering the 'duty to remember'. All that, combined with a space whose museography offers the feeling of literally immersing in an enlarged open-ended archive (figg.13-14), with a warm and welcoming atmosphere and without any highly technological fanfare, leaves the visitor with a sense of, also anger, but mainly hope, and a genuine want for action. We could say that exhibitions like this could indeed turn the museum into a place of 'praxis', offering a space for reflection, at the same time within and detached from the objective reality, where further action is both empowered and supported.

The museum extends such an approach of critically centering previously overlooked parts of history, promoting organization and radicalization while creating bridges with the past, and actively building coalitions and collaborations, also through its rich activity on temporary exhibitions and other projects. Some examples of temporary exhibitions range thematically from housing conditions in the district³³⁰, intersectional and plural grassroots initiatives of self-organization, which are not presented as "relics from earlier times" but as still socially relevant in humanizing our world,³³¹ and photography exhibitions, which either narrate challenging lifestyles and worldviews or portray the district's change in the last decades, by its

³²⁹ Excerpts taken from the English version of exhibition text panels.

³³⁰ See

<https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/dach-ueber-kopf-wohnraumfragen-in-friedrichshain-und-kreuzberg> [last access 18/02/2025]

³³¹ See

<https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/dann-machen-wirs-halt-selbst-40-jahre-selbstorganisierte-raeume-in-berlin> [last access 18/02/2025]

local photo artists in an “unvarnished” way.³³² At the same time, the museum gives stage and voice also to recent debates and oppositions, as with the exhibition “I am not participating because... The Coalition of Cultural Workers Against the Humboldt Forum (CCWAH)”, which presented the decolonial opposition of many cultural organizations against the cultural and political decisions related to the rebuilding of the Berlin Palace and the colonial collections that it hosts since its re-opening in 2021.³³³

Regarding the temporary exhibition that was on show when we had our research visit, it focused on “contemporary revolutions” around the world and the solidarity movements that manifest in Berlin, which are shaping both the city and possibly the revolutions themselves.³³⁴ In this exhibition, entitled “We call it revolution. Transnational activism in Berlin”, the museography once more aligned to the theme, with the panels loosely resembling protest placards, and the display techniques were similar to the third permanent exhibition, with video and audio interviews, photographs, and explanatory texts. The intersectional and inclusive approach of the mediation was once more evident, highlighting these elements also in the demonstrations themselves, in various acts of political solidarity.

Furthermore, we want to mention specific forward-thinking elements of the exhibition, such as the only object that was on display, other than some published material, and a special scenographic element, the “room within the room”. In the first case, although displaying a protest banner might not seem like the most radical

³³² See <https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/ralf-marsault-berliner-jahre-auf-der-wagenburg> and <https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/ungeschoent-menschen-bewegungen-stadtansichten> [last access 18/02/2025]

³³³ See <https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/ich-mach-nicht-mit-weil-the-coalition-of-cultural-workers-against-the-humboldt-forum-ccwah-1> [last access 18/02/2025]. Regarding the contested topic of Humboldt Forum and the reconstruction of the Berlin Palace from the part of CCWAH, see <https://ccwah.info/about/> [last access 18/02/2025]

³³⁴ See <https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/wir-nennen-es-revolution-transnationaler-aktivismus-in-berlin> [last access 18/02/2025]

museological technique, the unique element was that this banner was up to lending, with the object panel stating that “This banner can be lent for marches, rallies, and other actions of solidarity. Please talk to the attendants in case you’re interested.”³³⁵ (fig.50) The decision to offer an object for lending, not to another museum but to a group of demonstrators, can be seen itself as an institutionally radical act. However, where we want to focus more is the fact that in this way the museum moves even closer to the idea of ‘praxis’, actively inviting and supporting further instances of ‘action’ from the side of the visitors, who had the chance to ‘reflect’ through the exhibition.

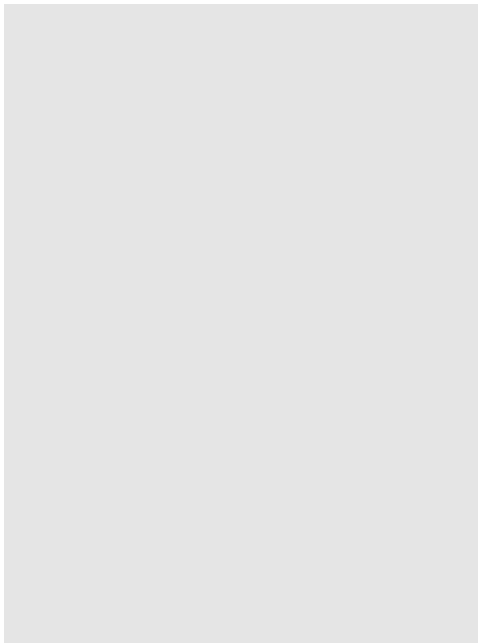


Fig.50:
Exhibition view with the banner, We call it
revolution. Transnational activism in Berlin, FHXB
Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum, photographed
by the author, February 2024.

In the second case, we observe the ‘space’ acquiring a significant political meaning, with the creation of a “spot in the exhibition” which included a group seating area (fig.51). In this instance of ‘assertive spatial thinking’, the main message was that “political organizing needs physical spaces where people can meet and exchange”, while the accompanying text was also emphasizing the loss of public spaces due to capitalization and privatization, setting some foundations for ‘critical spatial consciousness-raising’. Simultaneously, its respectable size, combined with the active series of public events that the museum organizes, offers the opportunity to indeed act as a

³³⁵ Excerpts taken from the English version of exhibition text panels.

dialogical space, inside an environment of knowledge and reflection, creating possible moments of collective 'naming' and 'understanding' reality.

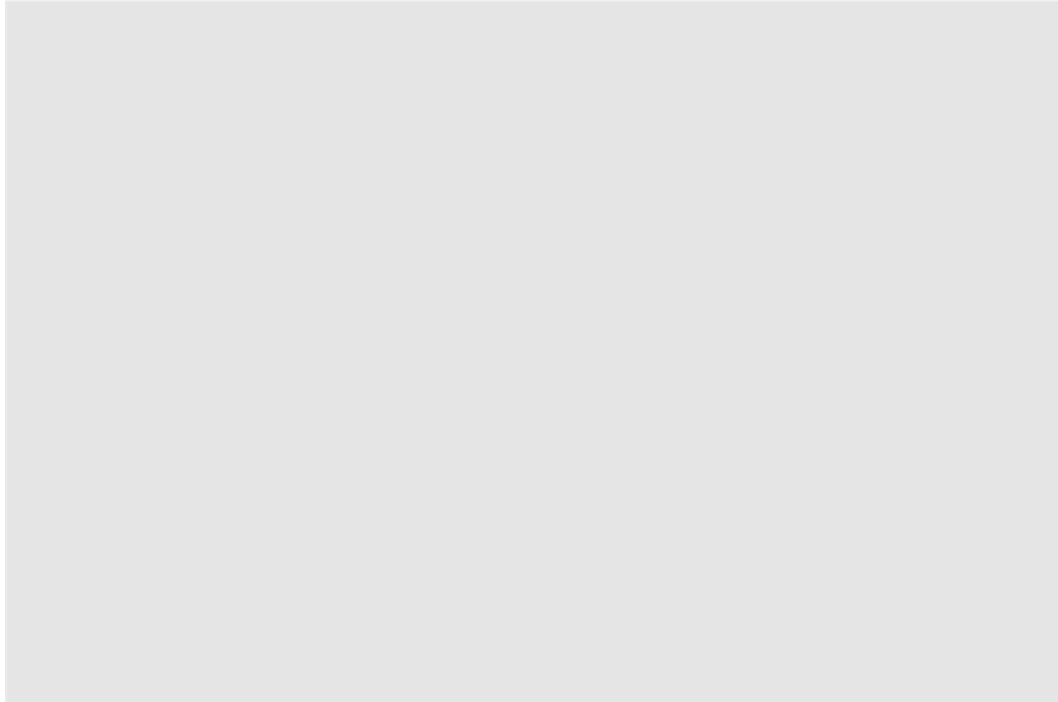


Fig.51: Exhibition view with the 'room within the room' visible on the right side of the image, We call it revolution. Transnational activism in Berlin, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

As a conclusion, *FHXB Museum's* mediation strategy in general is considered a highly dialogical one, characterized by critical consciousness-raising, at many times also spatial. The museum is actively striving to align with the social and cultural capital of the local population, actively listening and collaborating with the people. It treats the 'cultural biography of the city' as of 'shared ownership', in a connecting space of dialogue which offers various interpretation frameworks, for both the past and the present. This is indeed an 'advocacy museum', supporting the right to self-representation and adopting ethical principles regarding human relations, while developing radically participatory processes for decades. The exhibitions not only de-pathologizes resistance, opposition and protest, but indeed contextualize them and poses them as a collective need, an answer and a way towards the right to the city.

The museum adopts a multidisciplinary approach that combines archival research and oral history, to the degree that in certain moments the latter starts informing and shaping the first. Memories, especially previously marginalized ones, acquire an important role in the making of history, in a process of collectively shaping new and/or previously missing knowledge and common heritage. The museum not only recognizes polarization, but actively takes the side of the urban oppressed, centering their struggles through the approach of social and public history. At the same time, it acquires certain characteristics of an *institution of expanding commoning*, such as the creation of mutual awareness and flexibility in *translating* differences, emphatically welcoming newcomers to the *common worlds* of the neighborhood and the museum itself, both of which appear to be *in movement*. In this direction, we could say that it becomes an inclusive and plural urban culture center, a threshold space for a possible passage from theory to practice, a place where history and geography are constantly in the making.

Analytical Findings

From the above analysis it becomes clear, even from a relatively small sample, that museums and exhibitions *in* and *about* the city vary greatly, and their approaches can differ to a great degree. While the contemporary City Museum discourse and the theorization of this museum type's development, point towards approaches that adopt many characteristics of a socially relevant and empowering urban cultural institution, the reality of existing operating City Museums proves a much more diverse situation. As we have seen, some museums still adopt old-fashioned, and even outdated, elitist and non-inclusive approaches of grand narratives, often based on historical valuable objects, while at the other extreme, some are positioned as participatory platforms that re-create collective memory through oral history, in an inclusive way that recognizes the non-neutral role of the museum.

The factors that may determine these different approaches and positions are many, and even if the sample analyzed is small, we can already make some valuable observations. The original conception of the museum and the condition under which it was founded seem to have a catalytic role even many years after its opening. For example, private initiatives such as the *Museum of the City of Athens* and the *Museum of the History of Bologna*, seem to share a more traditionally historical approach, even though they are very different. Their similarity lies in a certain degree of proudly centering the uniqueness of the History they are presenting and in the fact that they do not necessarily consider the citizens as their main audience. They also have many differences though, with the example from Bologna having a much more elaborate mediation aspect, probably due to the wider cultural network inside of which it was conceived, as well as the aspiration behind its creation. On the other hand, *Bologna Fotografata*, as a municipal initiative of a publicly managed cultural institution that is not strictly a museum, adopts a much more creative approach in

narrating the city, while *FHXB Museum*, as another municipality managed museum that was from its conception focusing on social history, continues to pursue this approach in many critical ways. Meanwhile, the recent change of management in the wider *Palazzo Pepoli* project and its municipal takeover further justifies this observation, since it now acquires a more open and inviting character towards the citizens.

The wider geographical place where the museum is located also plays a role, mainly regarding the traditions of this type of museum, and maybe a general political mobilization and its relationship with the world of cultural institutions. Since museums that aim to present the history of a city exist in the Germanic zone for almost two centuries, it seems like a local maturing of the type through the years have created proliferate ground for museums that focus on social history to emerge in the end of 20th century, as well as for citizens to consider them as a reference point in their city, while the metropolitan character of Berlin, and a multicultural and highly politicized neighborhood like Kreuzberg, have undoubtedly played also a role. The latter don't seem to have played such a central role though in the case of Bologna and Athens, both cities also being highly politicized and with lively parts in their population. Instead, in both cases of Bologna, the characteristics of the civic museum type seem to still be influencing, with both examples centering the uniqueness of the city through their narratives, even if in different ways. On the other hand, the studied case in Athens, with the almost complete lack of any city museum tradition in the country and a weak relation, even hostile at times, between politicized and active parts of the population and cultural institutions, at least in the most part and until recently, appears more like a hybrid between a historical, even archeological, and a house museum, rather than a city one.

Moreover, how recently the different cases have been created, while it would initially be thought that plays a crucial role, and does so regarding museographic techniques, it appears to be a secondary

factor in determining the mediation approach. As an example, we can mention that both the main exhibition of the *Museum of the History of Bologna* and the "local chats. city – migration – history: from hallesches to frankfurter tor" exhibition of *FHXB Museum*, opened to the public in 2012, with the first being – for the most part – a traditional chronological narrative of a city's History, and the second being a participatory oral history project connecting personal memories of local residents – even traditionally excluded ones – with the spatiality of the city and the crafting of its collective memory. This shows that directing and curatorial decisions, organizational or personal, alongside the general positioning of the institution, probably play a much more important role regarding the mediation approach than the year that it is taking place.

Concerning other conclusions that we can draw from our analysis, it has been observed that when citizens are participating in the creation of an exhibition's mediation, it almost unavoidably acquires elements of social history and relates to their contemporary needs and demands over the city, proving that this is indeed a suitable method towards approaching such themes. On the contrary, when exhibition settings that were supposed to function in a similar way, do not, such as the "Your Museum" room of *Palazzo Pepoli*, they appear as static and distanced from contemporaneity, even if they touch recent events.

Moreover, we witnessed cases which verify that, when the approach of *thought-images* acquires critical thinking and writing characteristics it has the potential to create common ground for shared reflection, and even the power to motivate, with the main examples being two of *FHXB Museum's* temporary exhibitions. Unlike that, a seemingly similar setting that includes images with rich opportunities for thinking-in-common, but combines them almost exclusively with group texts, as in the case of *Bologna Fotografata*, lacks opportunities for reflection, while the written parts risk becoming generalizing and

disorientating. In certain moments in that exhibition, where more targeted texts were accompanying a smaller group of photos, or even only a single one, the thought-image was becoming much stronger in terms of engaging and provoking thinking. At the same time, as we have mentioned in various instances, the spatiality of the exhibition also plays a crucial role, especially in cases that aim for a more collective and common experience. When sitting options, or even dedicated spaces for reflection and discussion, were offered, the exhibition space acquired a completely different dynamic regarding connectivity and dialogue.

A final comment is that various theoretical points from the methodological framework of the first part can be applied also to the museum itself, apart from its mediation practice applied in the exhibition, offering further valuable insights, possibly even towards it being conceived as praxis. Since the City Museum is also part of urban reality, with a strong hold upon its collective memory and many times directly influencing its shared spaces, a critical perspective should be applied also to other aspects of its relation to its publics, as they eventually affect and shape its wider cultural mediation strategy. As examples can be mentioned the concept of the "covered square" that *Palazzo Pepoli* is recently putting forward, seen through a critical spatial perspective that can include the negatively charged concepts of urban enclosures and enclaves, but also *FHXB Museum's* characteristics in its relation to local residents that can be said to incorporate elements of an *institution of expanding commoning*.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the main ambition has been that the City Museum can become a way through which citizens of contemporary urban settings will be empowered and supported in finding reasoning behind the complexity of their everyday surroundings and in understanding complex mechanisms that may prevent them from living more fully and “after their heart’s desire”. At the same time, they will hopefully get motivation to act towards a more decisive relationship with their city, as well as much needed tools and the connectivity to do so in a collective way.

In order for that to appear possible, in the first part of the thesis, we outlined a critical mediation strategy, a kind of methodological framework that can inform the museum’s practices in relating to its publics. We did so while taking into consideration the context of the contemporary City Museum discourse, that for more than three decades now have been emphasizing the social role of the museum in a dialogical way. Certain elements of this discourse that have been emphasized are the dynamic relation between past, present, and possible futures, interactive and participatory approaches that are inclusive and support a wider conception of citizenship and sense of belonging. Meanwhile, themes that are controversial, or previously untouched, now get center stage in the search for a new relation to the city, which tries to understand its complexity while embracing plurality and dialogue. At the same time, we also took into consideration the latest instances of this discourse, with the keynote speeches of the last CAMOC conference highlighting the need for collaborative and collective building of social and cultural capital, by reaching out and actively listening people that have been pushed to the margins, instead of reproducing cross-generational inequalities, as well as the need for connectivity, dialogue, and frameworks of critical reflection and interpretation.

As a way towards shaping ways of including such elements into the cultural mediation processes of a museum that is in and about the city, we decided to visit the theorization of various scholars and their insights into the city. In between this process, when we had traced a relatively sufficient framework, we reflected back on the City Museum discourse, in order to better direct our further inquiry. More specifically, we first analyzed the central points of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy model, to define certain steps and crucial characteristics that the relation between the museum and its publics should have in order to be consciousness-raising and liberating, with a main concept to be envisioned being that of *praxis*, as in the combination of *reflection* and *action*.

Then, in order to inform our approach regarding the theme of the city and urban life, we followed Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey in their investigation of the city's mechanisms, where a main open-ended, emancipating and inspiring concept that emerged was that of the *right to the city*. The *right to the city*, as a theme that can be interpreted through many different ways, was visited by various City Museums, and we carefully studied many of them through the proceedings of CAMOC conferences. A general conclusion, up until this point, was that a more emphatic and critical relation between the many facets of urban life and the crucial spatiality of the city was relatively lacking. For that, we decided to turn to Edward Soja and Stavros Stavrides, whose theorizations are characterized by a critically spatial turn in analyzing both the current alienating, normalizing and unjust human-world relationship, and possible active ways towards more *just* and *common* worlds.

In the second part of the thesis, we applied this methodological framework as an analytical one, to carefully examine a selection of city museums and exhibitions. This analysis showed that existing museum mediation strategies that deal with the city and urban life can be very different, with each other and from the above-mentioned City Museum discourse. The reasons for their variations and for the degree in which

they move towards praxis also vary, with their origin, conception and managing being the most central ones, coupled with the museal, political and cultural traditions of the place where they are located and the time when they opened to the public or were re-designed.

Some other general observations that occurred are that participatory methods of public history can indeed strengthen the museum's focus on relevant and contemporary thematic variations, while the concept of *thought-images* can be one that, even if simple museographical-wise, offer instances of thinking-in-common, and even prompting to action. At the same time, we witnessed that applying a critical spatial perspective, on the one hand, can indeed offer many valuable insights on the city, urban life, and collective memory, oftentimes even unpredictable ones, while on the other hand, if applied to the museum itself, it can create a richer, wider and more encompassing understanding of its role in shaping the urban condition.

This last realization, specified in Stavrides' theorization of the *institution of expanding commons*³³⁶, sparked our imagination regarding possible further research and practice. In our analysis we observed the *FHXB Museum* acquiring many of the characteristics that Stavrides attach to this concept, such as those of mutual awareness and collaboration between different subjects and practices, which include the museum itself, as well as bridges that translate and connect those different parts alongside a common cultural resource that is in-the-making. However, it being institutional-wise a typical municipal museum, even if a very inclusive one, seems to put a barrier regarding the distribution of decision-making power and certain aspects of its managing, since a traditional structure and division exists, the rigidity of which we are not although in a position to know. As one possible different example that appeared momentarily during our research, we can think of *AmuLoP*³³⁷, an "association for a museum of popular housing" that created the *La vie HLM* exhibition

³³⁶ See *Chapter 5: Reasserting Spatiality*, pp.71-72.

³³⁷ See <https://www.amulop.org/l-association>

that we have discussed³³⁸, and which offers a different mode of structuring a museum that is *about* the city; and hopefully soon *in* it, since the long-term project is still in the making.

Meanwhile, another possible research inquiry emerged during our research, one that mainly relates to the aspects of *investigation* and *decoding* that Freire centers in his theory.³³⁹ Although we encountered various instances of investigation, such as archival research and oral history projects in museums or theoretical analysis in our literature resources, the additional emergence of the “right to the data”³⁴⁰, as well as the wider frame of a post-truth era that we find ourselves in, can jointly indicate to us another relevant conception, that of *investigative aesthetics*, as it is theorized by Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman.³⁴¹ The ideas they present, and which are put in action in the practice of *Forensic Architecture*³⁴², can be considered as a possible starting point for outlining further tools that could be used in a City Museum that adopts a critical mediation strategy. These tools and mediation techniques would have architectural origins and would incorporate spatial characteristics, something that does not seem strange, but rather aligns with the City Museum in various moments of its development³⁴³. Since, until now, this concept and its toolbox have been mainly used in relatively short-duration instances of violence, a different assembling of methods, material and equipment would be needed. However, its application in instances of more subtle forms of spatial injustice and disempowerment in the city is considered as possible, opening up a vast field of research and experimentation.³⁴⁴

³³⁸ See Chapter 4: *The Right to the City as City Museum thematics*, p.57.

³³⁹ See Chapter 2: *City Museum Mediation as Critical Pedagogy*, pp.26-27.

³⁴⁰ See Chapter 4: *The Right to the City as City Museum thematics*, p.56.

³⁴¹ See M. Fuller & E. Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth*, Verso, London, 2021.

³⁴² See <https://forensic-architecture.org>

³⁴³ T. Marshall, *City history museums and city museums in Europe: a survey*, in T. Marshall and J. Roca i Albert (eds.), *European City Museums*, cit., pp. 92-94.

³⁴⁴ See A. Gillick, “Matthew Fuller: Conflict, aesthetics and architecture” (No.100) [Audio podcast episode], in *A is for Architecture*, 2024, April 10, https://open.spotify.com/episode/0RKYqrdvmUnDXKogiRrIji?si=55dc9c6cfb704556&nd=1&dls_i=455ec3a29adb4522

These two ideas for further research are presented here, at the closing of this thesis, as a way to show that our inquiry into more critical mediation methods in and about the city is considered as a continuous one. Various complementary concepts can offer further rich and meaningful extensions to the already presented ideas, outlining more complex answers for the complex times and geographies we find ourselves in and which we share. For the time being, we hope that the findings of this thesis, both the methodological and the analytical ones, general or more specified, can contribute towards collectively seeking our *right to the city* and *spatial justice*, as well as towards the *City Museum as praxis*.

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Fig. 32: Gianluca Perticone, Bologna Youth Culture. The historic Livello 57 occupied social centre, located at the ex-Bestia Market in Via dello Scalo. Self-produced CD by bands supporting or performing at Livello 57, 1994, Eikon Studio.

Fig. 33: Paolo Ferrari, Communal gardens in the suburbs, 1982, Archivio Fotografico Genus Bononiae – Paolo Ferrari.

Fig. 34: Massimo Sciacca, Progetto B42K. Street Race in piazza Maggiore, 1997.

Fig. 35: Cassero 1982-2007. 25 anni di lotta con classe, Offset lithography on paper, 2007. Retrieved from

<https://centrodocumentazionecassero.it/oggetti/65-cassero-1982-2007-25-anni-di-lotta-con-classe-2007?i=7> [last access 17/07/2025]

Chapter 9: FHXB Museum, history and geography ‘in the making’

Fig.36: Part of exhibition panel from the section “1949-1961: Light, Air, and Sunshine”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 37: Part of exhibition panel from the section “1963-1975: Clearing the Way for a New City”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 38: Part of exhibition panel from the section “1975-1979: New Models for Urban Planning”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 39: Part of exhibition panel from the section “1979-1984: Squatting, Protest, and Self-Organization”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 40: Part of exhibition panel from the section “1979-1984: Squatting, Protest, and Self-Organization”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 41: Part of exhibition panel from the section “1990-2002: Stagnation and a Downward Spiral”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 42: Part of exhibition panel from the section “1990-2002: Stagnation and a Downward Spiral”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 43: Part of exhibition panel from the section “2002-2015: Everything’s Grand in Kreuzberg?”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 44: Part of exhibition panel from the section “2002-2015: Everything’s Grand in Kreuzberg?”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 45: Part of exhibition panel from the section “2002-2015: Everything’s Grand in Kreuzberg?”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 46: Part of exhibition panel from the section “2002-2015: Everything’s Grand in Kreuzberg?”, History in the making! Demolition and Protest at Kottbusser Tor, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig.47: Exhibition view, “local chats. city – migration – history: from hallesches to frankfurter tor”, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Source:

<https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/ortsgespraeche-ferngespraeche-ortsgeschichten> [last access 17/07/2025].

Fig. 48: Exhibition view, Bringing Together Antiracist Struggles: An Open Archive, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig. 49: Exhibition view, Bringing Together Antiracist Struggles: An Open Archive, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

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<https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/ver-sammeln-antirassistischer-kaempfe-ein-offenes-archiv>

Fig.50: Exhibition view with the banner, We call it revolution. Transnational activism in Berlin, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. Photographed by the author, February 2024.

Fig.51: Exhibition view with the ‘room within the room’ visible on the right side of the image, We call it revolution. Transnational activism in Berlin, FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum.

Source:

<https://www.fhxb-museum.de/news-detail/wir-nennen-es-revolution-transnationaler-aktivismus-in-berlin> [last access 17/07/2025].