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#### BOOK REVIEWS

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# Social inequalities and spatial exclusion in Italian and Canadian metropolis: a challenge for citizenship

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is a preliminary consideration, from a geographical perspective, about the increase of inequalities in Canada and Italy. We would like to highlight the spatial dimensions of this phenomenon within the urban environment and its consequences for citizenship, in particular in two metropolises, Montréal and Milan. The analysis of the Italian and the Canadian cases shows that there are signs and boundaries that are becoming very visible in the urban environment. These signs and boundaries confer to spatial exclusion an unprecedented dimension, nourishing and strengthening inequalities. To contrast and prevent these problems, it is necessary to implement common medium-long term strategies, coordinate all territorial actors and resort to public and private partnerships.

*Keywords:* social inequalities; spatial exclusion; urban regeneration; Milan; Montréal.

*Parole chiave:* disuguaglianze sociali; esclusione spaziale; rigenerazione urbana; Milano; Montréal.

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## 1. GROWING INEQUALITIES AND SPATIAL EXCLUSION IN URBAN SPACES

Due to the economic, social, and spatial consequences caused by the economic crisis which started in 2008, the topic of inequality within the most developed countries receives great attention nowadays (Castells *et*

al. 2012; Florida 2017). The economic crisis, the most serious in many decades, is producing important consequences also within countries that had already reached high levels of collective wellness and social protection. Today, particular attention is paid to income disparities as it is proven that a society is healthy when it is able to guarantee equality and impartiality to all citizens (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009); in this sense, the places where these inequalities show themselves with greater intensity are the cities, which at the same time represent key centers for the development of individuals' potential (Amin and Thrift 2005; Scott 2011). In this regard, Saskia Sassen points out that "the move from Keynesianism to the global era of privatizations, deregulation, and open borders for some, entailed a switch from dynamics that brought people in to dynamics that push people out" (2014, 211), with a strong impact on development equity.

The aim of this paper is a preliminary consideration from a geographical perspective on the increase of inequalities in Canada and Italy, highlighting the spatial dimensions of this phenomenon within the urban environment and its consequences for citizenship, in particular in two metropolises, Montréal and Milan. In general, it can be observed that the discomfort produced by social recession is reinforced by the appearing of new forms of spatial 'impoverishment', which nourish and strengthen inequalities, risking an evolution into genuine social and territorial pathologies. The evolution of poverty forms inscribes itself, in fact, into space with extremely diverse modalities. The 'traditional' poverty profiles allowed the detection of some areas of concentration and specific zones of deprivation (ghettos, poor or deprived urban enclaves, inner rural areas). On the contrary, the new poverty profiles are definitely more liquid (working poverty) and changeable because they are often related to specific events in a person's life (work termination, separation, illness) and can be inherited, persistent, recurrent, or transitory (Paugam 2008). Today, attention is drawn to the multidimensional character of this phenomenon, which can derive from income shortages, family charges, health difficulties, housing problems, etc., in this way making attempts at defining and individualizing deprived spaces more difficult; or else, this character can depend on the territorial scale of observation and analysis used, on the basis of which poverty and social exclusion assume different dimensions (Boulineau et Bonerandi-Richard 2014). The economic, social and job market transformations, thus, project their effects on the territory, producing a diversification of poverty spatial forms which can be seen today in particularly marked forms in the urban

and metropolitan peripheries. These phenomena are made sharper by the incessant and widespread suburbanization. In addition, the national welfare state models allow one to face these problems through various means of action, with consequences that deeply affect social wellness and spatial justice.

As highlighted by recent studies, which have investigated the link between individual psychology and social structure (Putnam 2000; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009), the heart of the matter regarding inequalities lies not so much in a country's level of wealth but in its inner disparities (OECD 2015); for this reason, in terms of justice, social and spatial balance the position related to the individual is relevant – in terms of material standard of living – within the social space in which the individual lives (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, 37). In geographical literature (for example Brun et Chauviré 1983; Séchet 1996; Pacione 2004; Cassiers and Kesteloot 2012; Florida 2017) it is highlighted that with the presence of inequalities and social imbalances, serious problems of managing and governing urban space arise. Moreover, these problems risk evolving into genuine socio-territorial pathologies as the imbalances that materialize in the space will tend to persist and increase (Brun et Chauviré 1983, 77; Johnston 1984; Bellanger *et al.* 2018). Today, numerous cities, which have long been considered spaces of social and cultural integration, foment a new 'urban issue' which has inevitable implications also in terms of citizenship. Rights and duties related to citizenship – the result of a social pact – vary in time and space, and, around them, a significant part of the future of societies and of civil and political cultures of Western countries takes place.

## 2. WORRYING SIGNALS AND NEW POLICIES IN MILAN

Between the aftermath of the Second World War and the 1980s, Italy experienced growth rhythms so elevated that it was able to reach the wealth levels of the most advanced countries. This “economic miracle” was characterized by radical transformations which also redesigned the urban, productive, and social geography of the country, deeply permeating civil society with ideals linked to subjective, individual and familiar action (Ginsborg 1998, 59), politically similar to Liberism and deregulation but less sensitive to the public dimension. This makes Italy a country equipped with a relatively weak system of social protection within the

European frame (Ferrera 2006; Boulineau *et al.* 2014), with a low capacity of reducing inequalities<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the Italian system of social protection is skewed towards the protection of the elderly, reserving residual resources for all other social risks (Ferrera 2006, 26 and 45). From this brief preamble, it can clearly be seen that in Italy social protection policies operate in a frame of overall weakness.

Nowadays, after the economic crisis has affected the country in a particularly severe way, the condition of poverty and social exclusion, which was highly compromised in the years before the beginning of the crisis, is becoming sharper (Cies 2010, V). This is registered also through the Gini index, which has grown from 0.306 to 0.337 in the last 30 years, marking bigger disparities in comparison to the European Union average<sup>2</sup>. In addition, inadequate assistance policies intended for families and the poor exist, with increasingly wider territorial gaps, decreasing financing and, last but not least, with a relative absence of these topics from the political agenda and the circuits of collective mobilization. In general, the quota of families that perceive a condition of discomfort grows proportionally to the increase of the municipal demographic size (Freguja e Pannuzi 2007, 55); furthermore, in every local reality, uneven resources are attributed to social policies (Cies 2009; Urban@it 2018)<sup>3</sup>.

Situations of impoverishment or deprivation nestle also in the more advanced economic realities of the country, in big cities in particular, and Milan, the propulsive heart of Italian economy, is no exception. This metropolis lies in the center of a vast city-region and various studies collocate it among the main global cities (Taylor 2004; Scott 2011) in transition towards a post-Fordist advanced economy, electing it to primary market, center of services for enterprises and convergence point of excellence and scientific-technological innovation (Dell'Agnese and Anzoise 2011; Bolocan Goldstein 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the three profiles defined by Esping-Andersen (1990), Ferrera (2006) detects a welfare model typical of southern-Europe (Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain), in which various factors contribute in deterring the possibility of developing an organic system of social protection.

<sup>2</sup> OECD 2011 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932535204>). The Gini index is a synthetic measure of the degree of inequality in income distribution. This index is equal to 0 in cases of perfect equality in income distribution, that is, assuming that all households receive the same income. On the contrary, it is equal to 1 in case of total inequality, that is assuming that the total income is received by a single family ([www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)).

<sup>3</sup> For a deeper analysis of the territorial implications linked to poverty in Italy refer to: Banini and Palagiano 1997; Brandolini e Saraceno 2007; Molinari 2014.

The city and its metropolitan area are undergoing a substantial process of territorial transformation and creation of infrastructure, partly extended on the occasion of 2015 World Expo. The presence of the most advanced economic sectors, thus, allows important income accumulation, but it also produces an increasing social polarization, which can again be observed through the Gini index, which in Milan reaches a high value (0.51) (D'Ovidio 2009, 39-40 and 42).

Everywhere in the Milan region, one can observe an increase in social polarization and growing intensity of poverty. In demographic terms, for example, in the regional capital the resident citizens are mainly elderly, families with no children and immigrants (the latter representing an appraised quota equal to 19 to 22% of the residents, due to illegal immigrants), while families with children are pushed out of the regional capital by prohibitive housing costs and substandard childcare services (*Tab. 1*)<sup>4</sup>.

*Table 1. – Milan and Montréal: some key-indicators.*

	MUNICIPALITY OF MILAN	CITY OF MONTRÉAL
Population 2011	1,341,830	1,649,519
Population 2016	1,368,590	1,704,694
Population Variation (2011-2016)	+1.99%	+3.34%
Immigrants Rate (2016)	19.2%	23.4%
Unemployment Rate (2016)	7.5%	6.7%

Sources: Comune di Milano, Open Data (<http://dati.comune.milano.it/>); [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it); Ville de Montréal, Montréal en Statistique ([http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?\\_pageid=6897,67633583&\\_dad=portal&\\_](http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=6897,67633583&_dad=portal&_)).

Therefore, Milan tends to be further characterized as a destination of substantial streams of commuters due to the highly specialized activities it hosts as well as unskilled foreign labor for the personal services industry and general work.

In Milan one will not encounter pronounced examples of urban segregation. Nevertheless, there are several districts, including peripheral neighborhoods, more connoted by a lack of social and public spaces, low urban quality, a considerable multiethnic presence, and various social problems. In particular, the most problematic situations can be found in the districts of Quarto Oggiaro, Baggio, Ponte Lambro, San Siro, Moli-

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<sup>4</sup> Milan Statistics 2018 (<http://dati.comune.milano.it/>).

se-Calvaire, Gallaratese, Adriano, Corvetto, Niguarda-Bovisa, Stadera, Giambellino, Via Padova, Gratosoglio, Barona, Selinunte, Bruzzano, mainly in the areas of public housing. In all cases it is a matter of districts already known by social services, which shows that no new areas of decay and disadvantage are appearing, but also that the action taken so far should be accompanied by new initiatives in order to affect more efficiently on issues at stake. This includes, in particular, the vast 'grey area' composed of families which have an excessively high income to benefit from social welfare, but still not sufficient to satisfy all own requirement. Numerous operations of housing valorization in many areas of the city, some of which are still in progress, have contributed to the expulsion of the weakest and most deprived social categories towards more peripheral areas, the increase in social and spatial polarization and, often, the diffusion of a feeling of higher urban lack of safety. Some worrying signals generated by the ongoing crisis have already been registered by social services, with an increase in the instances of depression and violence.

Following the process of decentralization and redistribution of local powers (Gavinelli et Molinari 2009; Salone 2017), today, regions have exclusive competence in terms of social assistance; nevertheless, the municipality remains the central actor of the welfare system as it has the institutional task of having to guarantee the application of social and housing policies. Even if they represent only a part of public resources aimed at alleviating the poverty and economic discomfort of individuals and families, municipal resources are indeed the ones that have better chances of being effective, having the possibility to directly transform into social services and personal services.

Due to the substantial resources available to a large municipality, and due to the national special plans, the Municipality of Milan has recently activated Peripheries Plan (Piano Periferie), now known as Neighborhoods Plan (Piano Quartieri). The Peripheries Plan's main aim was to reduce the gap between the 'growing city' and peripheries through intervention of integrated urban regeneration, improvement projects and actions for public and private housing, public space, green areas, infrastructure, services, economic development operations, social cohesion and cultural animation of the Milanese peripheries, which involved local actors (*Fig. 1*). The new Neighborhoods Plan also aimed at shifting perspective in terms of citizenship, considering peripheries as districts of the city that require measures to improve community life. In Milan, a third sector's leading role in the management of new social risks is evident.



*Figure 1. – In the Giambellino district, migrants comprise approximately 21.7% of residents and numerous examples of ‘residential public building’ in a state of progressive deterioration can be seen. In this district, many initiatives of urban regeneration have been undertaken.*

*Source: Molinari 2019.*

In addition, in the frame of a more solid partnership logic, it is evident that there is the need for tighter integration of the diverse territorial levels of social planning. In this sense, the Area Social Plans (Piani di Zona) constitute a valid attempt at connecting social and health policies, but this dialogue should also be extended to housing and employment policies.

The rigidity of national intervention tools in the field of social inequalities leads to ‘downloading’ a considerable part of the imbalances on the local level, which familiar, informal – belonging to social and associative networks –, Third sector and public administrations solidarity try to face daily. In this regard, Milan can boast a specific Ambrosian welfare model, based on the strong role of families and secular or religious associations, inspired by civil Christianity. A recent example in these terms is provided by the *Fondo Famiglia Lavoro* established by the Arcidiocesi of Milan, to provide several kinds of help, including microcredit and training courses for job reintegration.

### 3. FIGHTING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN MONTRÉAL

Also in Canada the creation of a welfare state is relatively recent. Historically, social assistance was a field competent to religious institutions and it was only with the Great Depression of the 1930s that national social policies started being introduced. The birth of the welfare state followed the aftermath of the Second World War and culminated with the Canada Assistance Plan in 1966, which then converged into the Canada Health and Social Transfer. Starting from the 1960s, in particular, the advent of the affluent society led to thinking it was possible to definitively beat poverty through economic growth, full employment and the adoption of adequate social policies. The economic crisis of the 1970s marked the end of this illusion and determined the massive diffusion of structural unemployment; furthermore, in the 1980s and 90s, the Canadian financial crisis caused a reshaping of the social state. This crisis influenced the 1996 reform, which partly transferred competences in the social environment to provinces. Among the most important effects of the aforementioned reshaping was an exacerbation of inequality, an increase in residential segregation bound to income, and the decline of a consolidated method of territorial governance, based on intergovernmental cooperation among the federation, provinces, and territories. The 1996 reform marked for the country the transition from a welfare regime, of an assistance type, to one of workfare, oriented towards the valorization of work as a resource and towards addressing social help in favor of employment market placement. 1989 was the year in which income distribution was the fairest and the least polarized in the country's recent history, but in the five years that followed an opposite path started, which saw inequalities and social polarization become considerably worse. Indeed, between the second half of the twentieth century and the 2008 economic crisis, Canada was one of the countries that saw inequalities grow the fastest domestically (OECD 2008). This is registered also through the Gini index, which in the last thirty years has grown from 0.297 to 0.324. In general, the bigger concentrations of poverty are found in the so called 'mixed-minority enclaves' of the major metropolitan areas (Montréal, Toronto, Vancouver), in the Amerind and Inuit communities, and among mixed race population. In the last years, in particular, immigrants have seen their income decrease faster than the income of their Canadian-born counterparts (Walks 2010). In spite of the strong economic health, a mechanism of inequalities production seems to have been triggered, at the moment still under control, which

could show pronounced and widespread effects in case of the slowing down of economic growth, in particular in the provinces in which the systems of social protection is less structured. In this sense, in the last years a slower reabsorption of unemployment following the 2008 crisis is already evident.

Currently, welfare is a provincial competence and, following the federal lack of commitment, uniformity of treatment on the Canadian territory is delegated to interprovincial horizontal cooperation. In fact, this has produced in Canada an increasing provincial differentiation, with interesting and distinct models of social protection, which constitute attempts at responding to the need of guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens.

In general, in Québec the role played by civil society, through civic networks which have the right to public financing, constitutes a distinctive characteristic of the social protection system, defined “régime libéral du bien-être” (Lefèvre *et al.* 2010, 134). Second in the country by dimension, the metropolitan area in Montréal, which accommodates slightly less than half of the entire provincial population and more than 70% of the annual immigration to Québec, is highly stimulated by the problems in question; in particular, the Island of Montréal, “capitale de la pauvreté au Canada”, appears clearly segmented into a south-western part, with an Anglophone majority and more favorable social and material conditions, and a north-eastern part, mainly Francophone, with more uneven conditions and bigger concentrations of social and material deprivation (*Tab. 1*).

So far, the Francophone metropolis still enjoys a satisfying level of ‘urban health’, with contained levels of violence and criminality, absence of ghettos, weak discrimination and low incidence of districts in which a single minority clearly prevails. However, there are various districts that display a concentration of economically disadvantaged people and with percentages of visible minorities higher than 70%, in spite of the absence of a prevailing minority; nevertheless, several and consecutive studies agree upon not recognizing the characteristic elements of segregation (Séguin 1998; Walks 2010; Groulx 2011). Following the 2002 Summit, the city of Montréal has renewed its commitment in the field of fighting poverty and social exclusion. Among other initiatives, there exist projects of *revitalisation urbaine intégrée* (RUI), real catalysts of communitarian multisectorial commitment to the long-lasting betterment of the life conditions in sensitive districts (Germain *et al.* 2010). These projects foresee the involvement of public and private actors, but they give a cen-

tral role to citizens and local committees in noticing the main problems and studying potential interventions (Molinari 2016). The activated or completed projects are dozens in many city districts, among which those targeted to the most marginal zones, such as the Arrondissement of Montréal-Nord and of Saint-Léonard, Côte-des-Neiges (Arrondissement de Côte-des-Neiges-Notre-Dame-des-Grâces) and Saint-Michel (Arrondissement de Villeray-Saint-Michel-Parc-Extension) are particularly significant (*Fig. 2*).

The collective consideration of citizenship rights, justice, and collective wellness has produced, so far, remarkable results thanks to the adoption of a global provincial strategy to reduce poverty and social exclusion, based on a variety of interventions, the integration of services and emphasis on education, permanent training and urban discomfort (Crach 2015; Desage 2017). These are the elements that are at the center of attention of the provincial administration, important for access to the job market and aspiration to obtain more qualified positions.



*Figure 2. – Along Avenue Victoria in Montréal, where a significant proportion of visible minorities resides, among the actions against social exclusion there are some projects of community gardens.*

*Source: Molinari 2018.*

#### 4. JOINING SOLIDARITY WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TO RENEW CITIZENSHIP

The new 'urban issue' revolves around the necessity to reconcile the need of the competitive city with that of the inclusive and caring city. It is a challenge aimed at preventing our cities from becoming places of loneliness, as was the case for Moriana, one of Italo Calvino's invisible cities, composed of "a figure on either side, which can neither be separated nor look at each other" (1993, 105).

However, today a country's social cohesion and economic development have become more and more detached objectives (Sassen 1994; Scott 2011). Nonetheless, poverty and social exclusion involve high social costs, because they produce a loss of productivity and an increase in the costs of health, judiciary, safety, and social services (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009; OECD 2015). The analysis of the Italian and the Canadian cases shows that in the urban tissue, the production of injustice is visible in an increasingly manifest way due to the multiplication of marks, limits, and fractures, which confer to spatial inequalities an unprecedented dimension. In the two cases analyzed, the production crisis, unemployment, cost of living increases, persistent immigration, and the decrease of financing towards public services are nourishing more intense insecurity and collective distress. To contrast and prevent this problem, it is necessary to implement common medium-long term strategies coordinated on the national level, as detached as possible from the duration of governments and political changes. Moreover, to make these strategies efficient and optimize resources, it is necessary to coordinate all territorial actors and to resort to public and private partnerships. In this regard, the third sector (civil and religious associations, counseling centers, etc.) plays an important role in complementing institutional interventions, as well as replacement of 'social bodies' (political or religious organizations, trade unions, etc.) that in the last decades.

In several Canadian cases, and especially in Montréal, they bravely opt for the predisposition of action plans inspired by a real global approach, considering the struggle against poverty and social exclusion as an investment in human capital and social cohesion. This comes from the belief that poverty calls for transversal interventions on the job market, incomes, family and immigration policies, as well as social and health services. In this sense, the role of leadership, political willpower, and partnership which federal institutions take on is relevant, also thanks to the high-quality performances that the Canadian administration offers.

Also in Italy, and particularly in the case of Milan, projects for urban regeneration are established. They also provide community development, often by recourse to public and private partnerships. While the recent determination shown by this metropolis in addressing the issue of social insecurity is unmistakable, it is clear that it has been achieved without dealing with the delicate social issues (e.g. unemployment, social inequality and racism) that are connected with it (Castel 2003; Clerval et Fleury 2009). Anyway, this allowed the neighbourhoods with the most immigrants and residential public building to have benefits from renewed attention and urban regeneration initiatives.

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