TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): AN INTERPLAY OF DESIGN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUES OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
The border that persists even if the wall does not exist

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• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  i. present via skype (with a written paper)

• Abstract (300 words):
There are elements in our cities that take on symbolic meanings for people. Yeung and Savage (1996) identify two types of these elements: tangible ones (e.g. squares, monuments, buildings, etc.), that determine the legibility of the city (Lynch, 1960), and intangible ones, which constitute the urban symbolism and, consequently, the figurability of the city (Lynch, 1960). All these elements acquire a further emblematic meaning when they are ancient, by virtue of their historical significance (Pretto and Battello, 2015), and when they are located in the city centre where the essence of socio-urban identity tends to condense (Stoiculescu, 2012). But cities are constantly transforming and even the meaning and the importance that people attach to these elements can change.
I conducted a research study in Trento, an ‘old city’ in Northern Italy which, over the centuries and in the last decades, has been facing transformations of various nature: architectural, economic, political, social and urban. Given these transformations, the aim of the study was to investigate which elements of the city centre were significant in the perception of the residents and if this perception changed during last decades. My presentation focuses on a particular finding regarding the perception of the borders of the historic centre: through the collection of 421 mental maps and semi-structured interviews, it emerged that the old city walls – broken down over 150 years ago - represent still today the borders of the city centre. Moreover, analysing specific characteristics of the respondents which, according to the literature, can influence the perception of urban elements, it emerged that the perception of this intangible border is transmitted both between generations of residents and between old and new residents. So, a destroyed tangible monument remain still today in the people’s minds as an intangible border. What effect will the walls we build today have in the future?

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Albertina Pretto, PhD, is a researcher in the Department of Sociology and Social Research at the University of Trento (Italy), where she teaches Qualitative Methods and Research Lab. Her main interest lies in the development of qualitative research methods and in their application in different research areas. In particular, she has been working on the feeling of socio-territorial belonging (and related values and tangible and intangible symbols), and some specific issues related to the sociology of the health (e.g. disability). The list of her publications is available at http://webapps.unitn.it/Ugcvp/en/Web/ProdottiAutore/PER0000394