

img journal – Issue 05

Imaging peripheries

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Call for paper

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Issue curators

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Over more than a century and a half (but maybe much more), a geographical object has dominated both the scientific discourse and the political debate on territorial development – and more in general the imaginaries of individuals: the city. Even when the main engine of the urban economic growth in the last century – the Fordist industrial concentration – collapsed, many (albeit not all) cities found their way out of the economic and political crises thanks to strategic planning, the promotion of creative industries, financial districts, technopoles, smart-, green-, global- cities, and so on... and the cities continued to triumph, in the words of the celebrated book written by Edward Glaser (2012). This success is also expressed by a plethora of visual manifestations celebrating the city and urban life: architectural designs, movies, cartoons, exhibitions, tv news shows, images on the web and shared in the social networks.

Yet, resources are limited, and demography is brutal: when the majority of people and resources rushed into urban areas, what happened to the places that these people left? During many decades the countryside, mountain regions, nonurbanized coastal areas, rural plains, saw the new generations leaving and consequently experienced a steady decline concerning the number of residents, economic activities and the availability of services of general interest. Recently, even many small and medium-sized towns have experienced the loss of their economic base in traditional industries, resulting in demographic decline and impoverishment of services. In the scientific literature and policymaking, these territories are generally qualified as ‘marginal’, ‘internal’, ‘inner’ – or are more generally referred to as ‘peripheries’.

Peripheral territories are commonly believed to be the ‘losers’ in the competition for people, services and resources and at the same time are persistently underrepresented in academic research and political discussion. This scientific and political neglect goes along with stereotypical forms of representation of peripheral areas in media. Scholars, media and ordinary people imagine peripheral areas frequently through a nostalgic glaze as a lost ancient time of tradition and of living in harmony with mother earth (many avoid remembering that the past carried famine, violence, poor health conditions, short life expectancy, child mortality, illiteracy and so on).

To put it in a simple, but perhaps because of its simplicity, in a widespread way, peripheral areas are associated with traditional practices, and patterns of thought and action, whereas urban areas are related to modern styles of life and thinking. Thus, in many media, artistic, academic and political representations and discussions a dichotomous manner of imagination often emerge in which cities and peripheral areas are thought of to be opposed poles of human development (traditional-modern; backwardness-progress).

But couldn't it be that the value of the poles changes situationally or that the relation between urbanity and periphery is quite more complex, that there are liaisons and fusions or also reversions of the power relations between them? The quiet rural life is bought by the concealment of the known difficult ways of life in peripheral areas and is idealized concerning the stressful everyday life in the city. At the same time, the boredom and lack of economic attractiveness are constructed as a contrast to the creative entrepreneurial and entertaining dynamics of the city. Nevertheless, it seems that the city has a value in itself, occupying the definitional centre, whereas peripheral areas only get their value concerning the city. During the 2020 pandemic, while the restrictions made many people desire the freedom (real or imagined) of living far from urban areas, the non-urban territories suddenly become for a while interesting and became the centre of the discourse. But still, again, this was made by and in function of the needs and desires of the urban population (in particular, we should underline, wealthy urban population).

To sum up, peripheral territories have been frequently represented exclusively with a nostalgic look toward the past and very rarely in their being part of our present time. As we wrote elsewhere, “this is yet an-

other trick played at their expenses” (Ietri & Mastropietro, 2020). After being deprived of people and resources, these territories tend to become a set of naïve representations in the discourse and creative production led by urbanites (individual, businesses, governments): some idyllic palimpsest for remembering a lost childhood, or for radical-chic-like adventures aimed at recovering lost traditional crafts or growing, or farming (there is indeed an extremely large number of cinema and literature products celebrating these representations). In the simplest possible instance, maybe the best option as to economy and employment, many peripheries became tourism destinations and playgrounds, thanks to the preservation of nature and landscape and the scarce anthropization. Besides, it should not be forgotten that the contemporary urban complexity often generates new forms of peripherality inside the city itself, fragile hidden and embedded territories, far from the city / non-city rhetoric, that require new gazes to be understood and represented.

We assume that artistic and everyday forms of representation, together with the experience of our lifeworld, play a decisive role in imagining our lifeworld and living together. Representations and imaginations can consolidate the existing patterns but also change them, whereby the main interest of our thematic issue focuses on changing the described stereotypes concerning peripheral zones. Therefore, we call for contributions of scholars and practitioners engaged in representing and imagining ‘peripheral-’, ‘fragile-’, ‘marginal-’, ‘inner-’ territories – in the present time. We aim at collecting success stories and best practices that produce representation and imaginations that give voice to the peripheral territories of today. This is a call for papers and a call for action, especially for professionals and scholars that work and/or live in these territories, making them the professional and visual scenario of their present time.

Issue05 of **img** journal intends to explore the experience of imaging peripheries, through interventions from every discipline, presenting research carried out in any peripheral territory aimed at investigating, by way of example but not exhaustively:

- stories, ideas etc. of contemporary people in peripheral territories;
- (visionary) representations and imaginations that criticize the described stereotypical narratives;
- new “styles of imagining” (Anderson, 1983/2006) peripheral areas;
- deep mapping, immaterial representation and spatial narratives;
- artistic representations (e.g., of landscapes), theatre and performance, street art, cinema, photography, performing arts, festivals, etc. in peripheral territories;
- analysis of representation produced by others;
- ethnographies on peripheral territories;
- design, architectural, policy projects for transformations and current uses;
- elaboration, analysis and assessment of innovative policies developed in peripheral territories to foster non-stereotypical contemporary representations (e.g., participatory actions, counter-mapping, etc.);
- counter-stereotypical artistic and scientific actions giving voice to peripheral areas;
- concepts and programs breaking through the oppositional thinking of periphery;
- territorial fragility seen by urban visual studies;
- reading the latent peripheries through new urban languages.

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