

Pilot books: navigating plural urban experiences

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Preface

"The night came when it was my turn to be called to the field manager's room. He said: "You leave tomorrow." [...] Now it was my turn to take on at dawn the responsibility of a cargo of passengers and the African mails. But at the same time I felt very meek. I felt myself ill-prepared for this responsibility. Spain was poor in emergency fields; we had no radio; and I was troubled lest when I got into difficulty I should not know where to hunt a landing place. Staring at the aridity of my maps, I could see no help in them; and so, with a heart full of shyness and pride, I fled to spend this night of vigil with my friend Guillaumet. Guillaumet had been over the route before me. [...] I spread out my maps and asked him hesitantly

if he would mind going over the map with me. And there, bent over in the lamplight, shoulder to shoulder with the veteran, I felt a sort of schoolboy peace." But what a strange lesson in geography I was given! Guillaumet, did not teach Spain to me, he made the country my friend. He did not talk about provinces, or peoples, or livestock. Instead of telling me about Guadix, he spoke of three orange-trees on the edge of the town: "Beware of those trees. Better mark them on the map." [...] He did not talk about Lorca,

Drawing on interdisciplinary research experience, this paper reflects on the kind of knowledge to be deployed to see and represent migration landing processes, among other involving cities today. Cities are facing rapid socio-demographic changes that often introduce new ways of using and signifying urban spaces; often the logics and deployment of these changes cannot be grasped through existing categories and rather claim for new ones to be outlined. It emerges a need to define and redefine the categories through which

space is described and, eventually, governed. The paper discusses the importance of mobilizing a certain type of knowledge in the study of urban spaces and particularly in the production of descriptions and representations of urban uses, populations and spaces, arguing for the transformative potential of these descriptions. To this aim, the paper proposes a parallelism with a non-urban, non-planning object: the pilot book, a handbook for along-shore navigation.

but about a humble farm near Lorca, a living farm with its farmer and the farmer's wife. And this tiny, this remote couple, living a thousand miles from where we sat, took on a universal importance. Settled on the slope of a mountain, they watched like lighthouse-keepers beneath the stars, ever on the lookout to succor men. The details that we drew up from oblivion, from their inconceivable remoteness, no geographer had been concerned to explore. [...] Little by little, under the lamp, the Spain of my map became a sort of fairyland. The crosses marked to indicate safety zones and traps were so many buoys and beacons. I charted the farmer, the thirty sheep, the brook. And, exactly where she stood, I set a buoy to mark the shepherdess forgotten by the geographers."

(Antoine De Saint Exupéry, *Terre des Hommes*, 1939, Excerpt From the English translation *Wind, Sand and Stars*)

1. Introduction

This contribution gathers reflections I have been developing in the past few years, while working on the migration-city nexus, particularly focusing on recent migration trajectories and arrival processes. Since the first gazes on the relationship between arrival experiences and urban spaces, I was surprised of how little the words and categories I had, as an architecture student and later an urban planning researcher, were able to grasp and describe the arrival reality. Architectural proposal for reception facilities focused on temporary structures, preferably open to the city; whereas arrivals are a structural urban fact and newcomers need intimacy, as anybody else, once arrived. To understand all this, I had to change point of view, draw different maps and make up new terms – as many others working on similar issues. In this contribution, I will share some reflections and references that have been crucial in this process of understanding how to study and represent arrival processes, among other socio-demographic processes challenging traditional understandings of urban life today.

In the last decade, arrival and arrival processes have been given a renewed attention in the Mediterranean and in the Western academic and public debate (Meeus et al., 2019).

Triggered by a renewed impact of migration processes to Europe and other so-called 'destination' areas, the debate engaged in unpacking the complexity of such processes. Scholars tried to build a vocabulary of arrival, no more described as a mere punctual moment preceding settlement, but rather part of a non-linear migration process – often produced by migration and border policies themselves. Newcomers' arrival processes are characterized by fragmented temporalities (Fontanari, 2019), circular mobility (Tarrius, 1993) and plural subjectivities (Meeus et al., 2019). Within this debate and looking at the area of Southern Italy, I used the term *landing* to focus both on the qualities of such processes and their relationship to space. The major stream of research that has engaged with arrival processes involved anthropology, geography and sociology, while architecture and urbanism only partially engaged with it. As Awan states (2016), the latter are disciplines that are not only inherently spatial but also incredibly deterministic and rooted in principles of steadiness and sedentariness. In this sense, through the framework of *landing*, I tried to focus on the multiple spatial-temporalities of arrival processes, their spatial agency, the possibilities to represent and address them, even within architecture and urbanism. In this process, there has been an object that represented an insightful reference to me: the pilot book; pilot books are

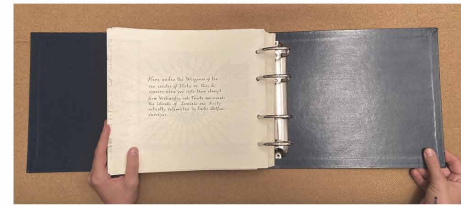
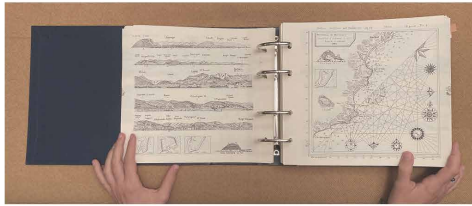
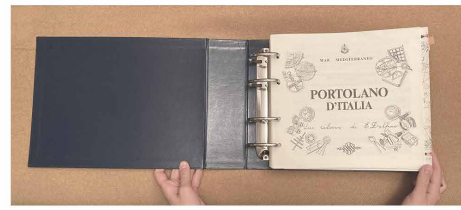
handbooks for along-shore navigation used by sailors to navigate and approach unknown lands. Far from aiming at comparing migration and sailing experiences, I argue that this object provides a visual and concrete metaphor of the kind of knowledge that could be mobilized to see and to approach landing processes, as well as for opening possibilities of imagining futures 'otherwise' (Awan, 2016).

Moving within the literature on diasporic agencies and spatialities (Awan, 2016, 2017; Beeckmans et al., 2022; Meeus et al., 2019; 2020; Fawaz et al., 2018), this contribution reflects upon the tools we have to see, address and imagine urban processes underlying complex spatial-temporalities, through a parallelism to pilot books. Particularly, I will address three main aspects of pilot books that helped me visualizing crucial features of knowledge production: how they are produced, what they focus on and how they support taking action. Along these reflections, mapping is a central question, both as a process and as an artifact of dissemination. Before some concluding remarks, I will show how the reference to pilot books guided me through the study of landing process and spaces. This paper is based on interdisciplinary research experience, mainly on the migration-city nexus, as well on the teaching experiences in an Urban Ethnography course¹ held in the MSc in Architecture, Landscape and Urban Planning at Politecnico di Milano (IT).

Pilot books

In one of the more ancient and renowned stories of travels by sea, Homer describes how Odysseus and his crew land in the territory of the Laestrygonians after six days of navigation (Odyssey, X Book, lines 80-100). Coming from the open sea, they navigate through a narrow passage in the beautiful natural harbor, surrounded by high hills; once close to the shore, Odysseus starts looking around but cannot see people nor animals, only smoke coming up from the ground; thus, he sends three men to explore the unknown land and understand who would live there and how. In these twenty lines, we can really imagine the whole process of landing: after days in the open sea, sailors need water rest and food, and they happen to land in an unknown territory; they slowly approach the coast and then go exploring it, trying to gain some orientation and knowledge about it. Since then, times have changed but landing, in books and in reality, has remained a gradual process of approaching, gaining knowledge about and eventually using land. From the open sea, we start recognizing some shadows and the profile of the coast; the endpoint of our route, which so far has been a simple mark on the nautical chart – or on apps today – starts assuming a real shape. Before being too close, we give a last look to the pilot book, where the land is described and drawn as we are seeing it. Here we can find useful information on perils to

be concerned about, or on the services that near harbors offer. The profile of the coast becomes clearer, we do not only see land, but we start distinguishing landmarks, bays, and harbors. In this process, technical and digital tools need to be constantly compared and related to what we see, smell, feel, all senses awake. Coretti in his *Notebook for Seafarers* (2021), writes “differently from other ways of traveling [...], landing by sea is a tangible experience: while approaching land you recognize landmarks, in the sea you start sighting pieces of plants on the shore, the sky is crossed by sea birds and you begin feeling the good smells of the coast” (*ibidem*, p. 94). Once we recognize the right landmark, we start adjusting the route and plan how to approach the coast; depending on the wind, sea currents, rocks, the type of seabed, or the shape of the harbor. At this point, often we are caught by surprise by unexpected situations – other boats moving, the wind increases, the seabed is not adequate. In these moments, response capacities and experience, more than any other knowledge or book, are crucial. While landing, the pilot book is a key object to check and contains all information needed to approach the coast and set anchor. Pilot books are nautical tools, handbooks, for along-shore navigation used by sailors to approach the coast. If nautical charts – at various scales – guide in the open sea, pilot books give orientation during landing, here indeed sailors may find all kinds of information



Portolano d'Italia

Emilio Delfino 1970s

Fig. 1

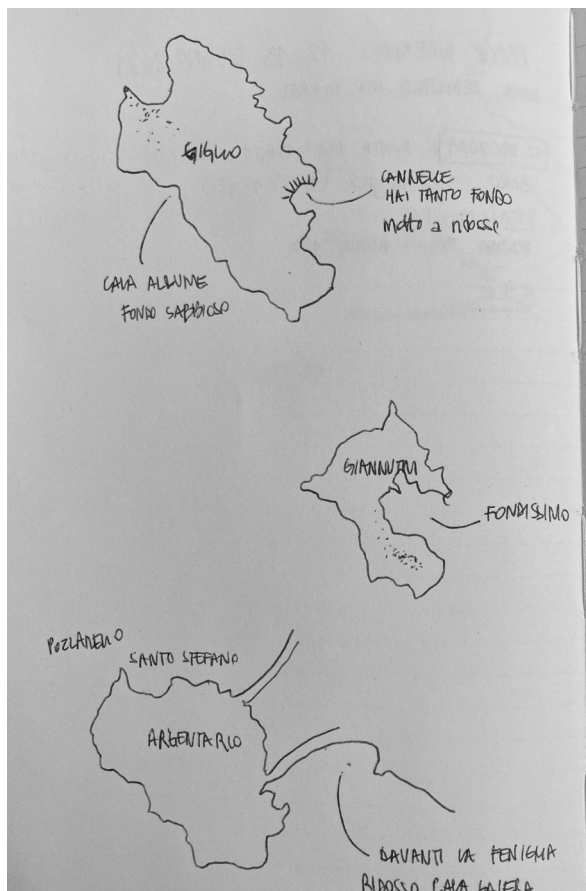
on the coast. For each stretch of coastline, their first pages contain general information, a few historical notes, or curiosities; then, they report pictures, drawings, and increasingly precise indications on bays, sea depths, prevailing winds, shelters, harbors, services, and useful numbers to call.

2. Experience-based knowledge: from topographic to topological understandings of space

Pilot books were originally travel diaries; when sailing mainly happened along coasts, sailors used to report on the boat-diary their experience of navigation along-shores. Sailors would write notes on the more difficult passages or protected bays, as well as facilities available on land. They would draw how the coasts or its landmarks looked like from the sea. Eventually, these collections of written and drawn experiences, passed from hand to hand and got progressively updated by sailors. Slowly, these diaries turned into more structured volumes. The way pilot books are built is strongly linked to direct

experience, as in the case of the last hand-drawn pilot book of the Italian coasts, authored by Emilio Delfino, based on months of sailing and visiting lands along the 1970s (see figure 1). During summer, Delfino and his wife would sail the Mediterranean and draw the coast from the sea, its landmarks and report information about landing for each stretch of the Italian coastline. During winter, they traveled by car, and checked the reported information from land, the drawing of the harbors and the available facilities. Still today such an experience-based knowledge is a key for any sailors, before navigating in an unknown sea and land, it is a good practice to have a chat with a fellow who knows that stretch of coast and note down tips and details that nautical charts don't report - and could only come from experience (see figure 2-3).

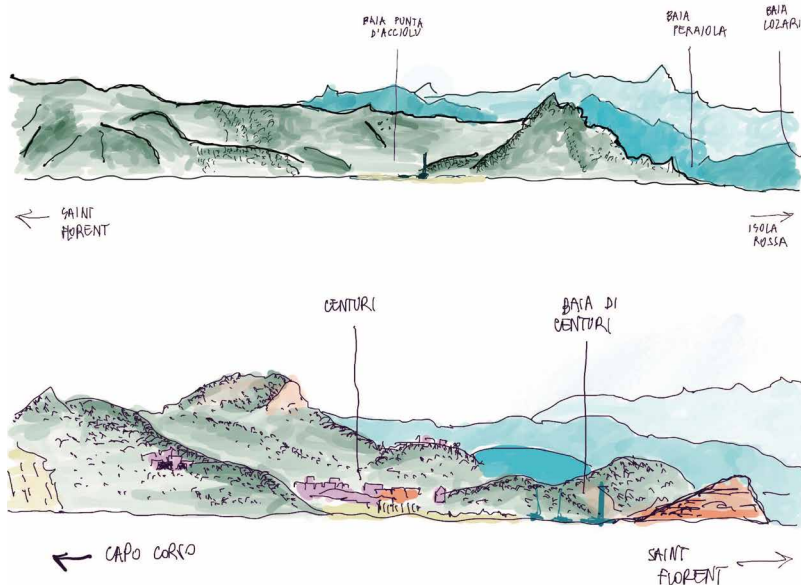
Such insight from pilot books triggers some reflections on how spatial knowledge is produced. Knowledge production in spatial disciplines today strongly relies on desk research and data gathering. When introducing direct observation methods in the Urban Ethnography course at



*Sketches of advice
given before departure
and of the coast seen
from the sea*

Bovo, 2025

Fig. 2-3



Politecnico di Milano, students in Architecture and Urban Planning declare to have rarely spent time in the site of their design project; urban analysis is often a desk operation, assuming often the shape of a 'formal' step before starting the design process itself. When discussing mapping otherwise, Awan (2017) argues that mapping – as an activity of spatial knowledge production – should be able to go back and forth between the 'real' - i.e. an intuitive knowledge resulting from a bodily experience of space, before representation - and an 'abstraction' - i.e. a knowledge related to representation, measurements and symbols. Pilot books, being able to access both registers, are in this sense a useful reference to 'visualize' modes of knowledge production capable of embracing experience. Experience-based knowledge implies giving a renewed attention to *who is directly* making use and experience of a certain space; sailors themselves were originally the 'authors' of pilot books and today such collective knowledge remains the main object of printed pilot books. Moving back to architecture and urbanism, bringing direct experience into knowledge production implies recognizing the value of a sited and 'insider' gaze on urban spaces and processes (Kendon et al., 2010). This implies finding value in the personal – and sometimes bodily – experience; the concept of 'situated knowledges' introduced by Haraway (1998) comes to hand: she argues for a form of knowledge that is deeply grounded on individual – and bodily – experi-

ence, underlining the centrality of biographies, bodies, subjectivities to produce knowledge. Such position can unfold into diverse approaches, ranging from the direct involvement of the subjects experiencing urban space - e.g. involvement of newcomers in the study of arrival processes - and co-production of knowledge, to the need for a 'sited' gaze, even when this is the one of a researcher. An experience-based approach recognizes that knowledge is already held in the field and that our task is that of "learning from, rather than studying people and places" (Cranz, 2016, p. 38). Experience-based knowledge, therefore, requires shifting from an outsider, or *etic*, perspective to an insider, or *emic*, one, as Galen Cranz (2016) explains when arguing for an ethnographic approach to design. In urban planning, a similar suggestion comes from Patrick Geddes, who proposed a view of the city articulated into a 'view from above' and a 'view through'. Walking is a fundamental tool for the 'Geddesian planner' (Ferraro, 1998), wandering through the city, observing while walking. Such a way of producing spatial knowledge has the potential to subvert traditional understandings of space. Back to the practice of map-making, mentioning the concept of *politics of re-presentation*, Awan (2016) discusses conventional descriptions of cities, based on fixed types and typologies and argues that they remain unable - or unwilling - to accommodate any real difference, while keeping hegemonic assumptions on how cities should work. Such

dominant ways of mapmaking not only reproduce fixed and predetermined understandings of urban space, but also leave out much: “scale, colour-coding, longitude, and latitude do not account for temporality, touch, memory, relations, stories and narratives - in fact, it is experience that is altogether removed” (*ibidem*, p. 33). The work of Awan (2016) on maps of Kurdistan in London, describes a street and shows matters of translocality, mobility and belonging against urban planning cartographies showcasing urban plans and previsions for the same area. Such a ‘mapping otherwise’, rooted into an emic and etic perspective, and on the experience of urban dwellers implies a shift to a relational understating of the city, from a topographic to a topological understanding of space (Awan, 2016). In this sense, it serves well Green’s (2012) distinction between *indexical* (“London is south of here”) and *non-indexical* (“London is south of Manchester”) definitions of objects, and particularly borders. Despite prevailing definitions of borders are non-indexical, she argues that “countless ethnographic studies of border areas have demonstrated that in everyday life, borders are always, in one way or another, indexical places” (p. 586). Defining a border starting from how it is experienced and, thus, as an indexical place - and not a line - radically changes the way we understand its agency and power, Green continues “when borders are imagined as an indexical place, borders may not mark or ‘do’ anything, for they are not necessarily imagined or experi-

enced as an entity that marks, but as simply a place, within which, somewhere, different entities overlap” (*ibidem*, p. 587). Diasporas, borders, landings - as we will see later - often embody plural temporalities, circular mobilities, complex and translocal belongings that cannot be grasped, displayed and addressed through dominant understandings - and representations - of cities. Producing spatial knowledge not only through abstraction but also through experience allows to make room for such issues and eventually make them visible. Not differently from what happens in the conversation between Antoine de Saint Exupéry and his fellow, where a map outlined through experience ended up showing elements often forgotten by the geographers.

3. The link between uses and spaces to see all ‘kinds of cities used by people’

Pilot books highlight an important connection between people, activities, and spaces. As we’ve seen, these books are tied to a specific practice—landing by sea—which defines a particular group of people—landing sailors—and describe the territory through this practice. While sailors rely on nautical charts when navigating the open sea, these charts, which are often available in digital formats and at various scales, become less useful when approaching the coast. It’s difficult to identify a bay from just a map, at a distance the coast appears homogenous to the sight and relying only on a top



Approaching land, the sailor's view

Bovo, 2022

Fig. 4

view on the map is not enough to set the bow in a certain direction; alternative perspectives are necessary. This is where drawings and photographs become essential for sailors. Pilot books often mix top views of the coast with drawings of the main recognizable landmarks from the sea, as well as photographs and sketches. They also provide other useful information for those willing to dock in a harbor or set anchor in a bay: sea depths, harbor facilities, the type of seabed for anchoring, and the presence of low bridges or lighthouses. Interestingly, pilot books often leave the land beyond the harbor or coastline blank, sometimes simply shaded in gray. This reflects the focus of these books on the needs of landing sailors. A tourist traveling by car, for instance, would find a pilot book less useful for navigating the same stretch of land.

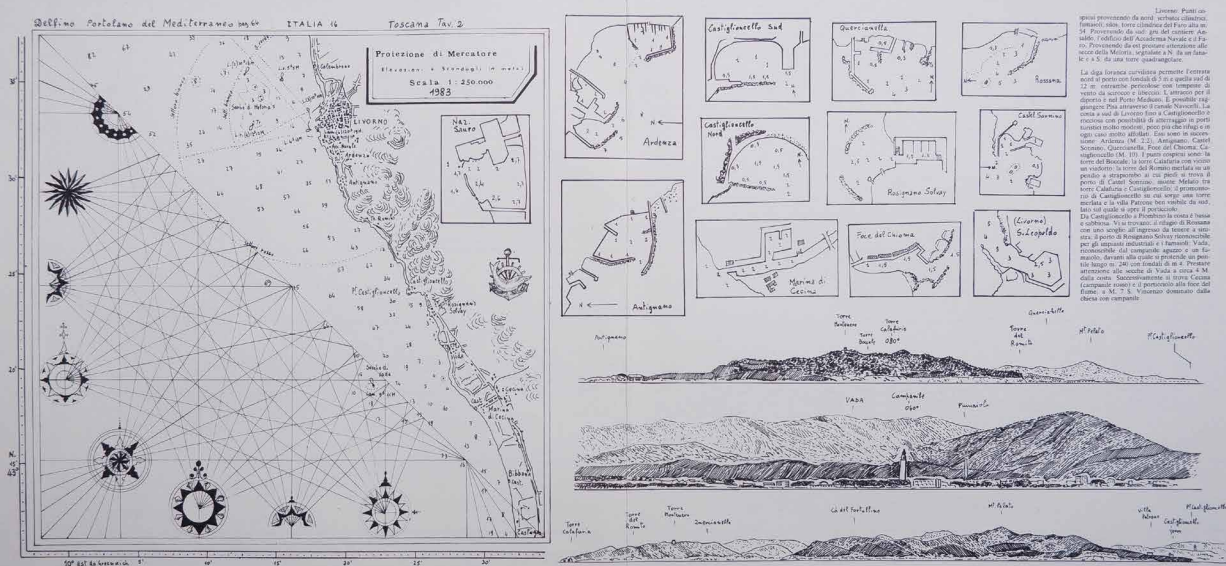
Pilot books help visualizing the link between people, uses and spaces and produce a type of knowledge - and representation of the territory - that is deeply rooted in the interplay between the three. Urban planning and architecture knowledge does not always draw from such

an interplay, often focusing on spaces alone. Here, we argue for an urbanism able to see at the same time space and agencies of those inhabiting it. As Awan (2016) writes, an urbanism understood “not just as the study of building and the spaces around them, but rather as the agencies that are played out in the city; the people that occupy these spaces, their gestures and bodily practices, the networks and objects that are located within different spatio-temporalities” (*ibidem*, p. 2). When introducing the Urban Ethnography class, we often start from this need, that of ‘seeing’ agencies within urban space to understand such space. However, we also realize that it is not as easy as one can image, our gaze needs to be trained for that. Few days ago, in a class of architecture students I showed a picture showing people walking on a pathway in such a way to avoid grids on the floor; the aim was to discuss with the students on how the city works based on the interactions between people's behavior and spaces. To the question *what do you see in the picture?* they mentioned walls, bikes, the street, the pave-



ment, fences and buildings: no one saw people walking on the pathway. Paola Briata and Genaro Postiglione (2023), drawing on Stender et al. (2023)'s work and on teaching experiences, underline the role that an 'ethnographic gaze' applied to architecture and urban planning practice can play, in making us see and focus on the interplay between people, places and practices. Focusing on the interplay between people and spaces, namely on their competences of use and uses of the space, is crucial to build new definitions and meanings of 'populations' and spaces themselves. Pilot books are again a good example of this: people, in pilot books, are not 'classified' based on traditional categories of age, gender, ethnicity, but based on the use they make of land, namely landing people – approaching the coast by sea with boats. On the other hand, the land is described based on such uses: as seen, gas station, residential buildings and squares are not represented in pilot books, where instead we see sea-depths, heights of bridges and lighthouses. The way the knowledge is produced is rooted in the interplay be-

tween people and spaces, i.e. on a specific use of the coast. Back to urban studies, we can better clarify the importance of defining populations and spaces starting from their uses through the help of some scholars. Martinotti (1993) outlines the coexistence of different and conflicting practices in the use of the city and relates it to the notion of urban dwellers that have a different relation to time and space. In this sense, he discusses four types of urban populations: residents, commuters, city users and businessmen; this definition, beyond its limitations, aims at enhancing the presence of a plural set of populations that use the city every day, although in very different manners. Pasqui (2008), drawing from this and other works, broadens this definition and describes populations no more as given analytical categories and identities, but as a point of view. By using the term populations, he suggests we should acknowledge the presence of various and varying populations that share, for a certain time and in a certain space, practices of use of the territory. The belonging of people to one population is always multiple



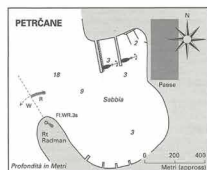
– one person might belong to different populations – and limited in time and space. Populations are defined by ‘families of activities or experiences,’ such as work-study experiences, experiences of care, or of amusement. Researchers, relatives of hospitalized people, commuters, visitors of cultural events are all – for a certain time and in certain spaces – populations, defined as such because they share practices and ways of using the city. “Each of these families of experience is linked to the others, and all are organized around plural forms of dwelling and moving; since we cannot think of dwelling as being exclusively associated with staying” (*ibidem*, p. 92). Ultimately, it emerges the link to the territory, which changes with practices, until we can argue that ‘the territory *is* the use we make of it’ (Crosta, 2010). Crosta (2018) suggests we should think of the relation between populations and the territory, not as an interaction but as a transformation, where different subjects are actors of this mutual determination and constitute what is called ‘local.’ The territory is thus no more a ‘container’ or box where activities happen, but rather a ‘field’ that changes and is continuously redefined

by social practices happening in it. In the preface of his book, Crosta reports about a conversation where the territory was compared to the stick of Charlie Chaplin, always undertaking new meanings based on the way it was used: a stick, a gun, an umbrella. This leads Crosta (2018) to raise an interesting point: we always ask ourselves what kind of people use the city, whereas we should question what kinds of cities are used by people. Thus, we added a second relevant aspect to the knowledge production that pilot books represent: through the link to experience, spatial knowledge is able to make room for modes of inhabitation that may be new to the traditional ones we know and thus making room for different spatial-temporalities. The link to competences of use and uses allows to build new definitions of 'populations' based on competences of use and agencies and to grasp new meanings of spaces, based on the way they are used and the meanings they embody for different populations. This has huge implication in the way we describe and deal with the city, going beyond designed or planned definition of squares, streets, stations, publicness, privateness, accessibility – as we will see later.

4. Non-normative knowledge, planning as sense-making

There is one last feature of pilot book worth discussing: the link between the knowledge provided and the way it is used to take action. Pilot books are open manuals, meant to orientate sailors in an open way. Unlike “Ikea” instruction manuals, guiding step by step their users to the accomplishment of a specific task, the information offered by pilot books, being it a drawing, a thick description of the coast, is never normative. The indications provided by these handbooks always leave space to individual agency and interpretation: in pilot books, sailors gather information on the most protected bays but won't find instructions on how to behave or react to an unexpected change of weather conditions in those bays. This is intertwined with the practice of sailing itself, strongly dependent on external conditions, mostly weather-related, and inevitably implying a certain degree of uncertainty. Good weather forecasts cannot foresee weather conditions for more than three days and sailing routes can only be drafted on the long term, while ‘at sight’ navigation is central. Sailing always implies uncertainties, pre-planning and prediction is hardly applicable, response capacities played out at the right moment are what really matter. Pilot books adapt to such a practice and the knowledge they provide is ‘performative’ rather than ‘normative’: it implies certain degree of interpretation in the way it is applied.

This third aspect represents a point of interest when questioning how spatial knowledge becomes usable, and it implies a reflection on the purpose of such knowledge in relation to the way urban life is changing today, as well as on the degree of prediction and normativity of planning tools and manuals. More and more today, we are becoming aware of the multiple ‘crises’ and deep uncertainty that characterizes the development of cities, the Covid-19 pandemic was only one example that renewed the debate on the crisis of prediction paradigms, paving the way to concepts such as that of ‘preparedness’ also in planning (Armondi et al., 2023). A debate that highlights the limits of rational-comprehensive and strategic forms of urban planning and policy confronted in times of uncertainties, and increasingly shifts the focus from the capacity of planning to predict and foresee to that of planners to develop response capacities (Armondi et al., 2023). This resonates a lot with the long-lasting debate about the normativity of planning practice, categories and tools. Drawing on Foucault's metaphor (1982), Jean Hillier (2011) draws a comparison of strategic planning as strategic navigation. She argues for a form of planning that has to do with sense-making among existing elements of urban life, rather than with normative and prescriptive action. “Spatial planning in this way as an experimental practice working with doubt and uncertainty, engaged with adaptation and creation rather than scientific proof- discov-



Ormeggio

Il lato interno del molo foraneo è orlato da una massicciata che fa repentinamente risalire a 1m i fondali lungo la fiancata. Ormeggiare, oppure prendere una cima (come in un marina) e attraccare al molo interno.

Ridosso

Lo porto vi è ridosso da NW a S passando da N. Con forti venti da W e SW vi entra mare.

Servizi e attrezzature portuali

Non esiste né rubinetto dell'acqua né carburante a portata di mano. Tra i vari negozi in paese, un supermercato e una macelleria. Mercato di frutta e verdura. Ufficio postale vicino al porto. Bar, ristoranti e alberghi. Spese ATM. Servizio di autonole.

Zadar (Zara)

44°07' 2N 15°13' 7E
Carte IHO: 6004 - MC 12. 13 - Invisy M25 - BA 2711 (comprende il piano)

Informazioni generali

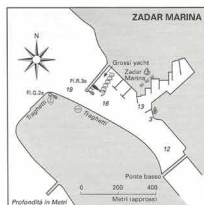
Zara è una città molto dinamica e importante centro regionale con numerosi, interessanti musei ed edifici storici. Eccellenti i servizi per il diporto presso il marina nel vecchio porto che viene utilizzato anche da navi tra-



Il faro su Otari Rat, 1 miglio a NW di Zadar.



L'ingresso del marina all'interno del porto di Zadar.



Zadar Marina può ospitare grandi yacht alla banchina in prossimità dell'ingresso. Una barca traghetto fa spola con la città vecchia dall'estremità del molo del porto.

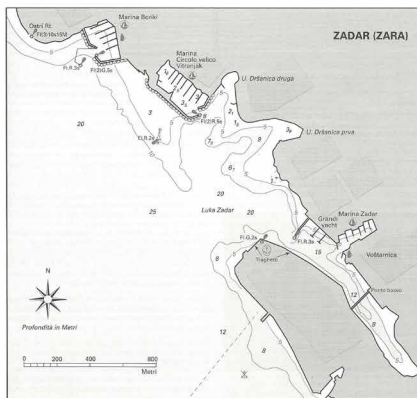


Zadar (Zara).

ghetto e pescherecci. Il porto commerciale, Luka Gaženica, si trova all'interno di Uvala Sv. Jelena a SE della città e del vecchio porto.

Fari e fanali

Otari Rat Fl(3)W(1)4m15M Torre di pietra con scala a chiocciola



ery [...]” (*ibidem*, p.39). In this sense, interestingly “improvisation is important in forms of strategic planning practices which would be performative rather than strictly normative/prescriptive, concerned with strategically navigating “journeys rather than destinations” and with establishing the conditions for the development of alternatives” (*ibidem*, p.39). Whereas such reflections belong to a broader critique to rational-comprehensive forms of urban planning and the deterministic perspective of architectural practices, they become increasingly relevant when applied to urban planning approaches to new populations, such as newcomers – but not only. As seen, the trajectories of newcomers are made increasingly uncertain, in terms of space and time, and such uncertainty clashes with the tools planner and policy makers have to govern and organize urban space. Scholars highlight that an enabling role of plan-

ning action is often prevented by rigid normative frameworks and categories, on which urban planning is structurally grounded - permanency, stability, etc. Meeus et al. (2020) discuss this rigidity in public housing and shelter policies, requiring proof of long-term permanence or willingness for it. Similarly, Schillebeeckx et al. (2019) underline how strict zoning and rules hinder to value the role that places like ethnic shops play for arrival. Along these lines, scholars share a general invitation to think of planning approaches that leave more space for indeterminacy (Saunders, 2011; Mehrotra et al., 2017), up to suggesting the need to include the frame of informality within the urban planning discourse (Fawaz, 2017; Cremaschi et al., 2020). These examples underline the weakness of a solely normative approach towards urban spaces, which becomes more visible when we think of all ‘cities used by people.’

The 'performative' knowledge proposed by pilot books can be framed within this broader reflection. As that of pilot books, and as the 'map of Spain' outlined by the fellow pilot in Antoine de Saint Exupéry story, also experience-based spatial knowledge can hardly be translated into normative indications. In a design perspective, this is well explained by Galen Cranz (2016) when she discusses the translation of an ethnographic research into physical design. She argues that there is a difference between a literal translation of observation into a narrowly defined program of a building and a conceptual translation. Often, informants' solution cannot be applied literally, rather getting the "deep structure" of their solution, the logic behind it, can be an appropriate way of using ethnographic results in a design (*ibidem*, p. 109). In this sense, it resonates with a kind of knowledge that to be translated into action cannot be literally applied but needs to be performed, with a certain degree of discretionary interpretation. Interestingly, both Cranz (2016) and Hillier (2011) use the term 'conversation' to outline the attitude of the designer or planner towards the reality they observe. Ethnographic design is outlined as a conversation with local micro-cultures and strategic navigation is, in Hillier's words, "a conversation that weaves between specific episodes or events and local or micro stories, the networks and coalitions, assemblages and *agencements* of governance processes, and the macro of governance cultures" (*ibidem*, p. 34). Pilot books, in

other words, help us imagining a kind of spatial knowledge that ceases translating into exclusively normative indications and leave space to active listening and individual agencies.

5. Mapping landing spaces in Palermo, the pilot book metaphor at work

The proposed reflections on pilot books derive from my own encounter with such objects and the way I used them as a metaphoric reference in a work on landing processes and spaces in the city of Palermo, in Southern Italy. This section will frame this work and trace its main steps and findings, grounding some of the arguments proposed above and unpacking the parallelism with pilot books. In recent decades, research in the field of migration and urban studies has emphasized the increasing complexity of migratory processes, which can no more be addressed as linear movements from one place to another and are more often characterized by multi-directional trajectories influenced by supra-local and individual factors. The temporality of migration, mobility, and profiles are changing, as well as the conditions and uses of territory; the non-linearity of the migratory experience has been further exacerbated by the combination of new migration drivers around the world and the reception, regulation, and control initiatives regarding so-called refugees and asylum seekers. While broadly addressed in anthropological, geographical and sociological research, the urban planning field remains

The cities of those who land. **Bovo, 2024**

Source: Martina Bovo, *Migration Landing Spaces: Processes and Infrastructures in Italy*, Routledge 2024.
Fig. 7

more focused on settlement dynamics and the related debate on integration, diversity, multiculturalism, and the distribution or concentration of people within space emerges (Vertovec, 2007; Briata, 2019). Often, the experience of the journey, departure, transit, or arrival—and everything that happens before settlement—is defined as “ephemeral,” of low intensity, and thus harder to grasp and address within urban planning and urban policies. However, the experience of migratory processes, particularly recent ones that have affected the Mediterranean, highlights the importance of another dimension: the one that lies between the journey and long-term settlement. This condition maintains the open, processual character of the journey but already implies an intensive use of territory. Experienced-based knowledge focused on the actual life trajectories of refugees and asylum seekers often reveals that people, upon arriving in a location, do not know whether they will be able to stay or will need to depart again, due to political factors, ever-changing policies, or individual issues such as health or employment. On the other hand, as noted by those observing these experiences from a spatial perspective (Cremaschi, 2016), these uncertain presences do not imply a light use of territory but rather an intense one—so much so that the territories themselves change, raising new questions and needs. Spaces and services are used, and often these processes introduce new and different actors to the territory. Public spaces are built or repurposed, as are spac-

es for reception and habitation. In this sense, recent works on the theme of transit and arrival are particularly enlightening, as they seek to challenge prevailing interpretation of migration processes as ‘ephemeral’ ones. Papadopoulou-Kourkula (2008) describes transit in the migratory journey as a condition that can only be defined ex-post, often involving a longer-than-expected use of territory. Meeus et al. (2019) emphasize that each arrival in a new place does not necessarily imply a subsequent stay but remains open to a new departure. These works, in other words, shed light on the condition between journey and long-term settlement that is largely disregarded in urban planning research and knowledge production; not by chance, these contributions revisit the topic of infrastructure and arrival spaces, underlining the distinctly territorial nature of these processes. Building on these contributions, I aimed at exploring this condition, observing its timing, spaces, and uses, with a perspective on the migratory experience that connects to urban studies and space.

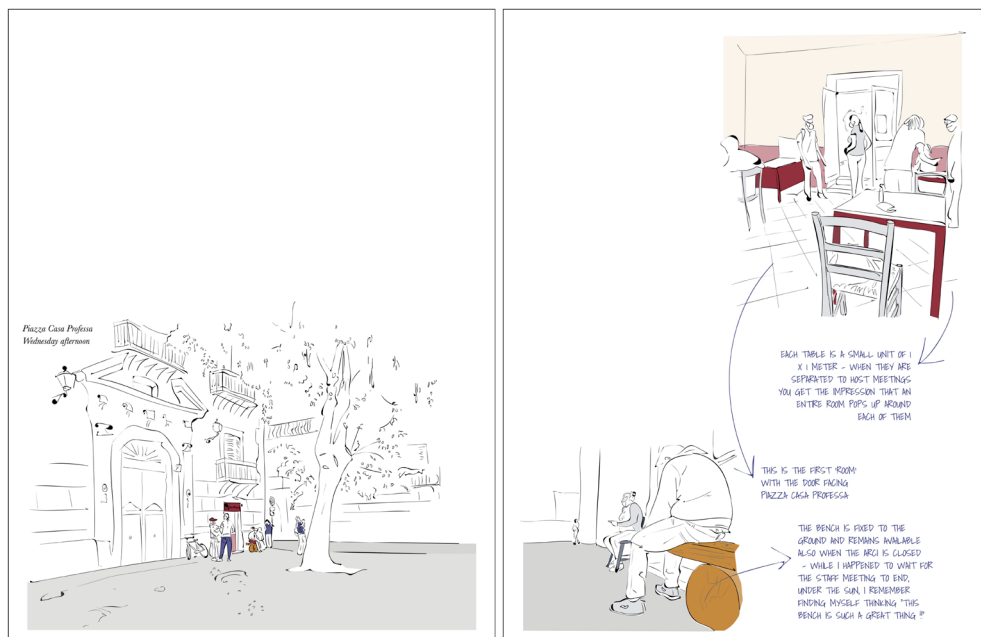
Shedding light on newcomers’ experience, the work outlines the concept of *landing* and its spatialization. The choice of this term stems from the need to think of the arrival experience not as a point-in-time event, but as a process that remains open, and to treat it, even within the field of urban studies, as a distinct subject. The term *landing*, in contrast to *arrival*, is a combination of a verb referring to movement and a noun related to space, with the root land.



Thus, landing encompasses both the openness of the journey and the connection to space and its use—central aspects of the investigation in this work. This conceptual framework defines a starting point and proposes coordinates with which the research engages in empirical fieldwork. To this aim, the research assumed the broader context of the Mediterranean and the central route as a larger scope, with a closer focus Southern Italy. This “meridian” perspective (Cassano, ed. 2007) helps to avoid categories such as “destination, departure, or transit country” and highlights the translocal dimension of migratory processes, which can often only be understood when viewed through the connections between the various places they traverse (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2018).

The fieldwork focused on the city of Palermo, a crossroads for these flows and central to the Mediterranean route today. Here, I used a predominantly qualitative method that combines an ethnographic approach with a spatialized perspective, observing people, practices, and spaces in everyday life (Cranz, 2016). In this per-

spective, fieldwork involved visits to landing spaces, interviews with actors involved in this process—52 with institutional subjects, the third sector, associations, civic networks, and migrants—and prolonged observations in specific spaces. Fieldwork developed progressively combining a ‘top-down’ view with a view ‘through’ (Ferraro, 1998) the city of Palermo. First, I questioned who lands in Palermo and which spaces are used, unpacking the trajectories of who lands based on their different ways of using the city, as a temporary stop-over or as a base-point, revealed a plurality of ‘landing populations’ and a plurality of cities. Some land and leave the city within a few days, some live there only in winter when they do not work in the Southern Italian countryside, while others live there, often outside reception centers. Alongside these populations, different cities emerge. A closer look at the urban spaces with which people interact during the landing process reveals geographies of spaces managed by very different actors who do not follow the logic of urban planning and services (see figure 7).

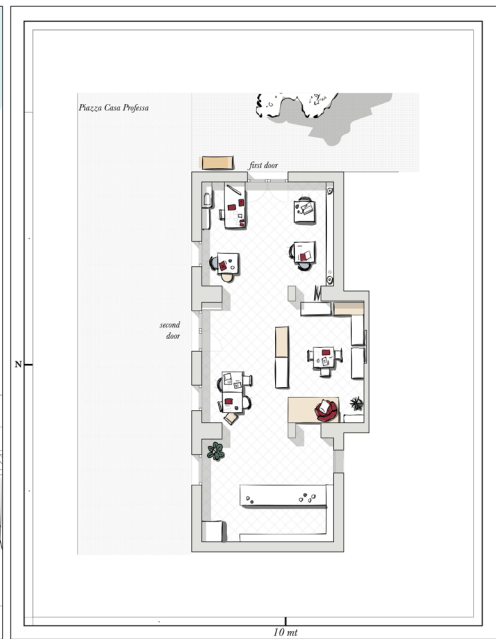


The sans-papier helpdesk. Bovo, 2024

Source: Martina Bovo, *Migration Landing Spaces: Processes and Infrastructures in Italy*, Routledge 2024.
Fig. 8-9

Shifting toward a gaze 'through' these spaces, particularly those mostly used by people who try to stay and spend their everyday life in Palermo, was the second move of the fieldwork. Direct observation, together with interviews, focused on the interplay between spaces and uses. This allowed to shed light on some relevant characteristics of these spaces, often disregarded by conventional understanding and description of urban spaces and services. Namely, some of these spaces emerged as landing infrastructures, rather than simply health clinics or public square, because of the use people would make of them and the resources that there could be found. Interestingly, direct observation of such uses allowed to identify some features that question conventional notions of resourcefulness and are deeply intertwined with the landing condition: the importance of continuity of opening time and permanence in a certain space

proved crucial. A helpdesk in the city center had very regular opening times and tried to keep the space recognizable on the ground floor of the square – even during the pandemic. This proved crucial for people who were new to the city and would navigate it based on others advice. Such a continuity, interestingly, was a key point especially for those only temporary passing by the city. The nexus between permanent infrastructures for temporary populations clearly clashes with the prevailing idea that temporary populations should be provided only temporary infrastructures, that largely governed reception logistics throughout Europe. Direct observation allowed to question also the conventional notion of accessibility: for landing people, experiencing different mobility pattern, such concept was not always tied to locational criteria, but also to their degree of physical and non-physical cross-ability. For those arriving in Palermo with-



out knowing how long they will stay or if they will return, public dormitories, which often have strict access times and rules, are not an option. Religious private dormitories, which represent five times the offer of public ones, are, however, options, in which “the walls are low, and to enter and exit, you just have to jump” (from field interviews), despite the very poor quality of the offer. Finally, empirical research focused on three of these landing spaces: the immigration office, a public clinic, and the space of an association. The fine-grained observation of these spaces highlighted the importance of the organizational dimension of space, both in its physical and management aspects. In the face of changing populations and different conditions of space use, the ability to organize and reorganize in space becomes crucial in channeling and not being overwhelmed by the changes that landing processes bring to the territory (see figure 8, 9).

Building an experience-based understanding of landing processes, although mediated by the researcher’s observation in this case, helped outlining a process that has been described for a long time as a punctual moment, as also interdisciplinary literature has been highlighting (Meeus et al., 2019). The further focus on the interplay between newcomers and urban spaces, namely on their spatial agency, has revealed a geography of spaces and an image of the city, that we rarely see in more conventional descriptions of cities, their spaces and services. Similarly to what pilot books do, I tried to outline the city of Palermo based on the trajectories and everyday uses of newcomers; what emerge is a map that looks much more alike pilot books or that of Antoine de Saint-Exupery, rather than cartographic charts of the city. Following landing refugees and asylum seekers means highlighting landing infrastructures as health clin-

ics, squares, shops, helpdesks, waiting areas in front of public offices where information is informally exchanged. This discloses precise conditions of land use, that raise provoking questions to urban policy and urban planning. New definitions are needed for practices of use and action tools within our disciplines. It is necessary to recognize the demand for the use of spaces beyond binary definitions of temporality/permanence, but also to be aware of which actors, spaces, and services are able to provide responses, and under what conditions. For example, can populations be redefined as no longer merely 'temporary'? Is service accessibility only linked to their location? And should we reflect on the trade-off between quality and access to some services and urban spaces? These questions reveal how poor the tools we have as planners are and how poorly they are able to see and give value to different spatial-temporalities, that characterize the everyday experience of landing. Much of this blindness is rooted in their strict normativity; existing zoning does not allow to recognize the multiple uses and meaning that a public square can have, for some a strolling space, for others a praying space, or a collective cooking setting. Some uses are allowed, some others are not even recognized. On a further level, fixed categories of services, do not include landing infrastructures as an asset

for the city, and struggle in giving value to spaces that instead are extremely resourceful for newcomers, as well as to the competence and actors involved. Finally, requirements to access basic rights, such as residency paper, are still essential and prevent people with complex mobilities and temporalities to access them. Beyond this critique, the parallelism to pilot books serves well to underline, once ore, how an experience-based knowledge can hardly translate into strictly normative indications but rather underlines the value of a dialogue with what is already happening on the ground and claims for a kind of planning able to embrace new and diverse spatial agencies.

6. Concluding remarks

This contribution retraces some steps I have been developing combining empirical research and methodological reflections. In line with the work of Nishat Awan (2016) – among others – on diasporic agencies and the need for a 'mapping otherwise', I argue that certain processes involving cities and their inhabitants today need different gazes, words and modes of representation to be seen and valued. Among them, landing processes are characterized by an experience of time, space and subjectivity that cannot be grasped through conventional understanding of space, nor through conventional

representation methods. Instead, to grasp and make room to such spatial-temporalities, we need to deploy different ways of spatial knowledge production and representation. I further argue that the metaphor of pilot books helps unpacking the kind of knowledge at stake and visualizing its features, even when applied to urbanism. Pilot books help us visualizing at least three features of ethnographic knowledge that appear very relevant when applied to urbanism. First, the link to experience: as pilot books are based on direct experience of sailors' landings, also experience-based knowledge differentiates from other kinds of knowledges because it implies giving value to the subjects who make use of the space as the main source of knowledge. Secondly, we unpacked the link between 'sited' practices, populations and territories; as pilot books that clearly define the land based on the practice of landing and the experience of landing sailors. The awareness of this nexus introduces an understanding of place that is relational and contextual, encompassing multiple roles. Thirds, pilot books, as open handbooks, also introduce a reflection on the non-normative and rather performative nature of such knowledge in times of great uncertainties.

In these concluding remarks, I would like to underline that the metaphor of pilot books allow to make a further reflection on the transform-

ative power of gazes – and representation. Among other scholars, Nishat Awan (2016) describes clearly the 'world-making power' of maps, and the roles that mapping – as activity and artifact – can have in mediating knowledge production processes, making propositions and ultimately triggering change. She argues for the ability of mapping to "to propose a different way of apprehending the world" (*ibidem*, p. 120). When producing 'otherwise' maps of a street in London, she opposes an understanding of that street that encompass the diasporic experiences of its inhabitants to official urban planning maps proposing regeneration plans for the same area. As she writes, "neither of the maps are propositional [...] but in their attempt to map space through other perspectives, they are thought as propositional devices that open up future possibilities" (*ibidem*, p. 38). Training a gaze able to value the experience as a base for knowledge production and to grasp the agencies in space, means making other cities visible and thus (a bit more) possible. Pilot books reveal the land of sailors approaching the coast, similarly, mapping otherwise seeks to make diasporic agencies visible, imaginable and thus more possible. In a recent interview Sharam Khosravi² was asked what the big challenge is we have ahead of us as scholars dealing with migration and the city. He replied that the first

step should be working to foster alternative imaginaries, different political and policy vision of borders and mobilities. Being able to imagine a world otherwise makes this world a bit closer to the present and to reality. Building a knowledge that is rooted and able to represent ways of experiencing the city 'otherwise' – an urbanism able to combine people and spaces, even the most marginalized ones – contributes to eventually imagine and build such an otherwise. It is in this imagination effort that lies the value and operational proposal of pilot books, as a metaphor that can be used by students and practitioners to see and address urban populations and cities today

Note

¹ The course in Urban Ethnography has been held by Professor Paola Briata and Professor Massimo Bricocoli (2016-2024) with the teaching assistant Martina Bovo (2017-2024), and by Professor Massimo Bricocoli and Professor Martina Bovo with the teaching assistant Sara Cosentino (2024-2025). The course has been attended by students of the MSc in Architecture, Architecture and Urban Design, Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning and Policy Design.

² Conducted by the author on January 2015, for the Triennale di Milano Exhibition on Inequalities.

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