

Naples: Continuity and Disruption

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Continuity and disruption formed the conceptual lens of a study excursion to Naples undertaken by Master's students in architecture and planning at BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg from 2 to 9 October 2023. The excursion was jointly conceived and organised by the Chair of Urban Management at BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg and the Institute for Research on Innovation and Services for Development of the National Research Council in Naples (CNR-IRISS). Naples was approached as a city shaped by the interplay of permanence and transformation, repetition and rupture, inheritance and reinvention.

Change is immanent in the city. It runs through street life, stories, the spectacle of public spaces, the city's architecture, and the landscape, dominated by the silhouette of an active volcano on the horizon and the openness of the sea. The dense urban fabric reveals centuries of adaptation, where spatial forms carry traces of past struggles, desires, and negotiated ways of living. Continuity manifests in morphological layers of the city, in buildings, plot structures, spatial arrangements, street patterns and enduring public spaces. It appears in habitual routines that structure collective life, by normalising spatial and temporal rhythms, from the scale of the individual body to collectively negotiated social orders (Shields, 2013; Viderman and Knierbein, 2018). Daily choreographies of movement, market trade, home-making practices, or the spatial arrangements defining the permeability between home and public space illustrate how repetition structures daily life and reinforces spatial familiarity (Jacobs, 1961). These rhythms enable tacit knowledge to accumulate (Lefebvre, 1991), sedimenting social memory into the city's material and symbolic textures (Viderman *et al.*, 2022). Disruption emerges where these patterns are fractured. It manifests through moments of violence, political rupture, social upheaval, sudden shifts in economic regimes, or cultural reorientation. These moments are not simply erased from the urban fabric. They are absorbed into the city's layers and

continue to shape how space is lived and imagined. Their traces persist – in collapsing structures, displacement, severed accessibility, and socially transmitted postmemories (Mady, 2018). These disruptions reverberate through lived space, intensifying tensions in cities marked by individualisation, de-solidarisation, and the rise of a politics of fear (Ajanovic *et al.*, 2015; Viderman *et al.*, 2022).

Urban form and its horizon of meaning are continuously produced and reproduced through socio-political tensions and materialities of everyday life. They are conceived through expert visions and contested representations, lived through everyday routines and encounters, and experienced and imagined through visual, discursive, and affective registers (Lefebvre, 1991). Individuals and collectives alike are entangled in these dynamics through socio-politically ambivalent relations, which are performative of both visible and invisible structural conditions (Viderman and Knierbein, 2018). The tension between continuity and disruption reflects shifting configurations of power that manifest in urban space materially and discursively (Lehtovuori, 2010).

Naples is imbued with power, the power of nature, of institutions, of organised crime, of people, of everyday life. In recent years, large parts of the city have been reinterpreted and repurposed, shaped by the tension between unfulfilled promises of urban growth promoted by the post-war welfare state and emergent practices of reclaiming and reimagining space. The city's layered morphology reveals how urban space occupies a prominent position in negotiations over the urban condition, channeling the hopes, needs, and claims of multiple institutional and non-institutional actors (Massey, 2005). Continuity and disruption do not appear as opposites but as overlapping temporalities. Each carries political charge. Continuity is associated with temporalities that are perceived as stabilizing, while disruption evokes temporalities in which urban space appears in turmoil, routines break down, time accelerates and change unfolds abruptly (Viderman *et al.*, 2022). Continuity may preserve inequality and conceal structural forms of violence, while disruption may hold transformative potential. It may also open up horizon of anticipation and struggle, in which urban space is reimagined, claimed, appropriated and lived (radically)

differently (*Ibidem*). Neither of these temporalities unfolds linearly. They blur, coexist and intersect (Madanipour, 2017). Whether a moment is experienced as continuity or disruption depends on personal histories and collective agency. This perspective invites reflection on how spatial change affects different groups differently.

This conceptual framing guided the design of the excursion. Students first engaged with narrative representations of Naples by reading Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* (2016), exploring how representations modulate urban experiences and shape both perceptions and expectations of urban space. Narratives not only depict urban life but reflect and shape how cities are emotionally and spatially experienced (de Certeau, 1984). They form interpretative frameworks through which places are imagined and internalised. Building on this preparatory work, students immersed in a week of situated learning in Naples, engaging with the city through curated site visits, guided walks, conversations with local actors, and unscripted urban encounters (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This two-step approach enabled reflection on how urban meaning is shaped through both representation and embodied experience. Students encountered stories and actions that unearthed the city's multiple layers: archaeological excavations beneath residential buildings, the transformation of neighbourhoods, the reuse of properties confiscated from criminal organisations, struggles for public access to the sea, and regeneration initiatives in Bagnoli. These situations exemplified the contested nature of urban futures. Situated learning, understood as a process of acquiring knowledge through immersion in context-specific practices, enabled students to participate in Naples' unfolding urban narratives (*Ibidem*). Through immersion in its urban life and its representations their imaginaries and interpretations were continuously unsettled, revised, and expanded.

Aiming to attend to the contingency of meaning in urban space, the engagement with Naples developed as a multi-layered learning terrain shaped through narrative representations, curated experiences, unscripted moments, and critical reflection. It explored how various modes of perceiving, experiencing, and representing the city generate interconnected expressions of urban life that link past legacies, present

conditions, and futures that are both envisioned and anticipated. This photographic documentation captures selected moments from that collective engagement. It seeks to offer glimpses into atmospheres, gestures, and spatial situations shaped through movement, observation, conversation, and reflection. It reflects the affective and reflective dimensions of the excursion and invites consideration of Naples as a city that is at once inherited, imagined, envisioned, claimed, forged, enacted and contested.

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