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# Daily journeys within the Metropolitan territories. Reflections on the experience lived by the suburban transport network's users in Paris and Milan.

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**Abstract:** The research fits into the study of the contemporary urban realities and aims at creating an interpretation by tensioning two major fields: the metropolitan model and the daily mobility, through the concept of lived space. The theoretical reasoning resonates with the current questionings in two European urban regions, Paris and Milan.

If the notion of metropolis, vast and polysemous, entered by now the common language, its institutionalisation as an administrative territory should be considered. The institutional reform which is made in Paris and in Milan through the definition of new governance's perimeters – the *Métropole du Grand Paris* and the *Città Metropolitana di Milano* – justifies the questioning of the sense attributed to these extended and heterogeneous territorial frames by considering the inhabitants' representations and appropriation of the metropolitan spaces.

Beside, the increased mobility led to question how the users' experience is integrated in the planning of urban transport infrastructure. The *Grand Paris Express* project which would complete the armature of the *Réseau Express Régional* (RER) in the Paris region but also the recent development of the Milanese *Servizio Ferroviario Suburbano* (SFS) are many reasons for questioning the way practices of daily mobility on the existing infrastructures allow the metropolitan territories to make sense for the inhabitants.

The approach of the 'lived space', developed with the emergence of social geography, and reinvested today in new ways in urban planning, represents the base to the study of the relationship the inhabitants form with the horizontal metropolises' fragmented territories, in which they live and daily travel in.

The research therefore propounds exploring the way the daily routes on suburban transport networks – the RER and the SFS –, which are located at the interface between the urban areas and the inhabitants who regularly use these transportation modes participate in the making of Parisian and Milanese metropolises' representations.

Given the exploratory character of this approach, the article offers to develop a methodological reflection – on the elaboration of processes abling to interpret the metropolitan inhabitants' lived space, with a general focus on the Milanese case. The crossing between the theoretical postulates and the analysis' strategies claims to report, through various collection methods and transcription tools, the multi-scalar, procedural and subjective nature of socio-spatial representations.

The research's ambition is to take part in setting up a template for the understanding of the metropolitan phenomenon and the experience of daily mobility. In an operational perspective, it is integrated in the more global objective to foster the citizens' inclusion on the territorial definition processes and in the transportation planning's field.

The research fits into the study of the contemporary urban realities and aims at creating an interpretation by confronting two major fields: the metropolitan model and the daily mobility, through the question of the lived space.

“The secret areas to be discovered, they were there, under his eyes [...]: incomprehensible dislocated spaces of what was not anymore a geography and that it would be necessary to try to rewrite.” (Maspéro, 1990, p.14) It is consistent with the current questionings in two of the main European city-regions, Paris and Milan (DATAR, 2012). Its ambition is to enrich the reflection by offering a reading of the relationship that the inhabitants of these urban regions maintain with the metropolitan territories and to bring to the foreground the representations which result from their daily mobility practices on the suburban transport networks.

Beyond the theoretical questioning, it is also on the methodological dimension – on the construction of collection and transcription tools adapted to analyse the socio-spatial representations – that this article suggests to develop, with a general focus on the Milanese case.

## The metropolitan construction and the daily mobility

The theoretical questioning consists of, on the one hand, examining the metropolitan paradigm, mobilized first by the academics before being used in the operational field and of entering the common language. Indeed, the metropolis' concept being relatively wide and polysemous (Ascher, 1995; Soja, 2000), its institutionalisation needs to be questioned (Lefevre *et al.*, 2013).

The complexity of the definition process for new governance perimeters in Paris – the *Métropole du Grand Paris* – (Gilli, 2014), as in Milan – the *Città Metropolitana di Milano* – (Balducci, 2003), essentially supported by the politico-institutional spheres, demonstrates the difficulty of determining the legitimate territories of the

metropolis (Lévy, 1994). The objective is to examine the sense attributed to these vast and heterogeneous territorial frames, by considering the fact that the administrative limits do not correspond inevitably to the inhabitants' uses and imaginations (Bourdin, 2005).

On the other hand, it is about studying the mobility paradigm (Urry, 2000) by questioning the impact of daily mobility on metropolitan lifestyles (Allemand *et al.*, 2005; Massot, 2010) and on the relationship between people and places (Kaufmann, 2008 ; Veltz, 2007). The interdependence between infrastructural development and metropolisation processes being collectively admitted (Graham, Marvin, 2011; Mangin, 2004; Prelorenzo, Rouillard, 2009), the way daily mobility practices progressively deconstruct the administrative territories' relevance rebuilding new territorial frameworks should be considered (Estebe, 2008).

The topic, updated by the *Grand Paris Express*, incites to reconsider the role of the existing transport infrastructures in the territorial construction of the Paris region and more specifically that of the *Réseau Express Régional* (RER) – backbone of the first regional plan (SDAURP of 1965) (Gérondeau, 2003); whereas in Milan, the recent implementation of the *Servizio Ferroviario Suburbano* (SFS) justifies to wonder about its impact within the Milanese region (Pucci, 2010). The purpose is to overtake the functionalist considerations of mobility spaces as 'non-lieux' (Augé, 1992) by studying to what extent the daily mobility practices can contribute to giving a sense to the metropolitan territories.

### **The understanding of the lived space**

The research question leans on a constructivist conception of the space, appealing to the notion of 'lived space'. Defined as "the space such as it is perceived and practiced by the people living there" (Lévy, Lussault, 2003, p.340), it was conceptualized by Armand Frémont (1976) during the cultural turn of the 1970s. While, the term progressively went out of use, due to the absence of explicit and methodological frame, this attention paid to the individuals' interaction with the space however echoes in diverse geography's streams<sup>1</sup> and urban studies.

The criticism most frequently addressed to this approach is to give way to two major pitfalls by focusing on the abstract representations, "that of the 'psychologism'" which leads to the denial of the material space and "that of the subjective individualism" which means to neglect the strengths which condition the individuals' relationship with the space (Di Méo, 1990, p.360). On the contrary, the pionnering works of Kevin Lynch (1960) were blamed for having granted a dominating place to the material space at the expense of the social and subjective dimensions of the space.

It is thus necessary, not to underestimate the complexity of this concept, not to omit the complementary dimensions which intervene in the formation of the 'lived space'<sup>2</sup>; and to enrich it by various fundamental contributions stemming from other disciplinary fields.

Recently, the topic is revisited in the urban disciplines through the concepts of '*habiter*'<sup>3</sup>– living – and '*ambiances architecturales et urbaines*'<sup>4</sup> – architectural and urban ambiances. If few studies had taken so far as a study object the perception of urban space through the travel (Desportes, 2005; Lynch, 1964), the mobilities increase's led indeed to renew the apprehension of the interrelation modalities between the inhabitants and the territories (Stock, 2006) and to consider the role of urban transports in the experience of the space (Masson, 2009).

### **The journey's experience on suburban transport networks**

The question is to determine how those who live and travel daily in the Parisian and Milanese urban area represent to themselves the metropolitan territories, and to estimate to what extent their daily mobility practices participate in the construction of these representations.

The assumption thus consists of considering that the lived space is situated in the interaction between the spatial object – the territories of the urban area without formal demarcation – and the subject – the inhabitants who live there – through a socio-spatial practice – the daily mobility, so the regular travels which are realised there for varied reasons.

The analysis focuses on the suburban transport networks – infrastructures of public transport, heiresses of the railroads of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century – located at the intermediate level between local and global scales. Today widely used for daily mobility practices, they actually played an important role in the development of the socio-spatial structure of the studied urban regions, and continue to do so [fig.1].

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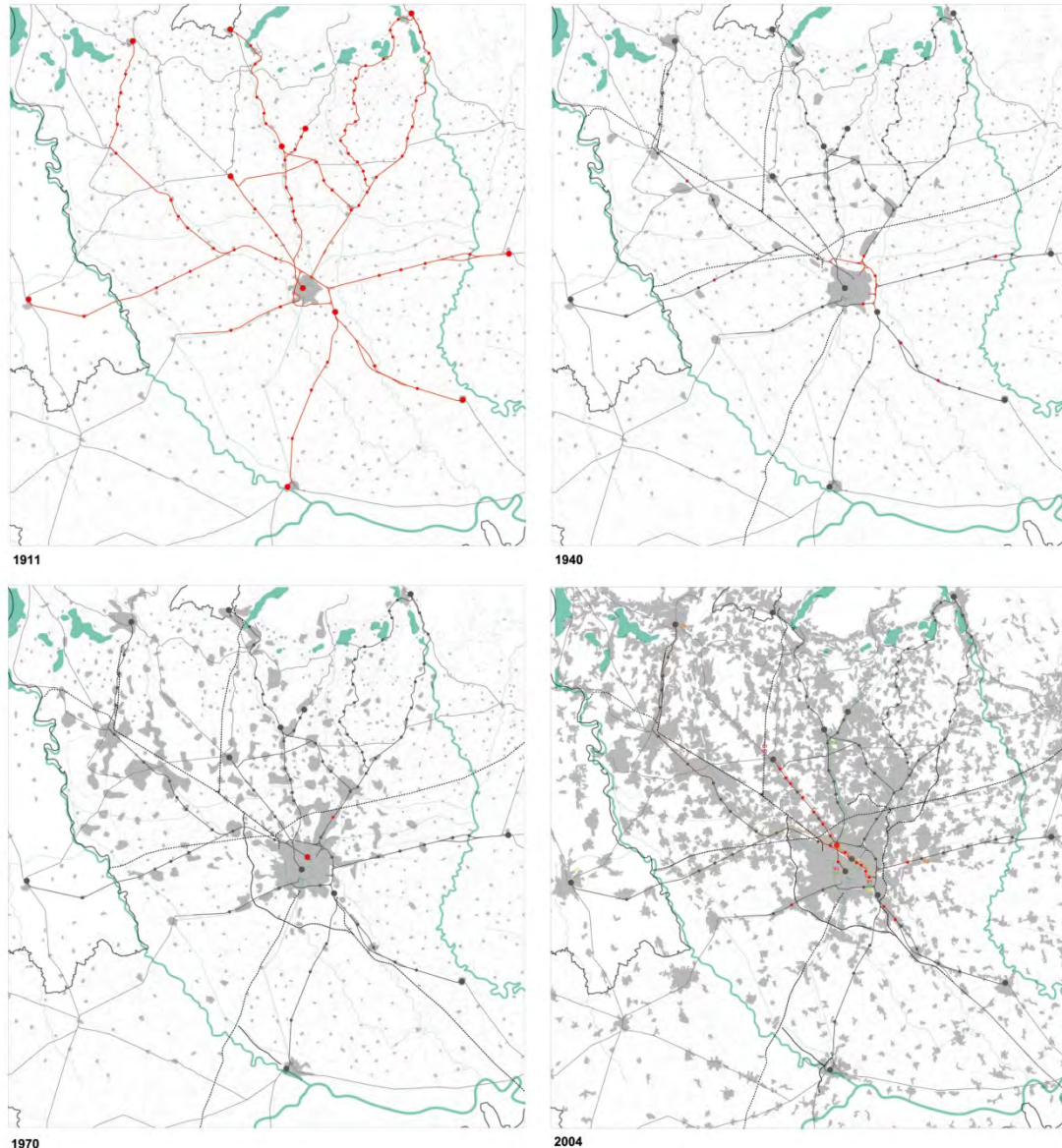
1 This approach gave birth to the Geography of perception whereas some streams developed in parallel assuming more explicitly a kinship with the phenomenological philosophy in France and in Anglo-Saxon countries with the Humanistic geography.

2 According to Armand Frémont, the 'living space' and the 'social space' are part of the 'lived space' (1976). This conceptualization is reminiscent of the space trilogy from Henri Lefebvre (1974), recently resumed by Edward Soja (1996).

3 See the works of Thierry Paquot (Paquot *et al.*, 2007), Olivier Lazarotti (Lazarotti, 2006) and André-Frédéric Hoyaux (Hoyaux, 2002).

4 See the works of the laboratory "Ambiances architecturales et urbaines" in Grenoble (Augoyard, 1995; Amphoux *et al.*, 2004).

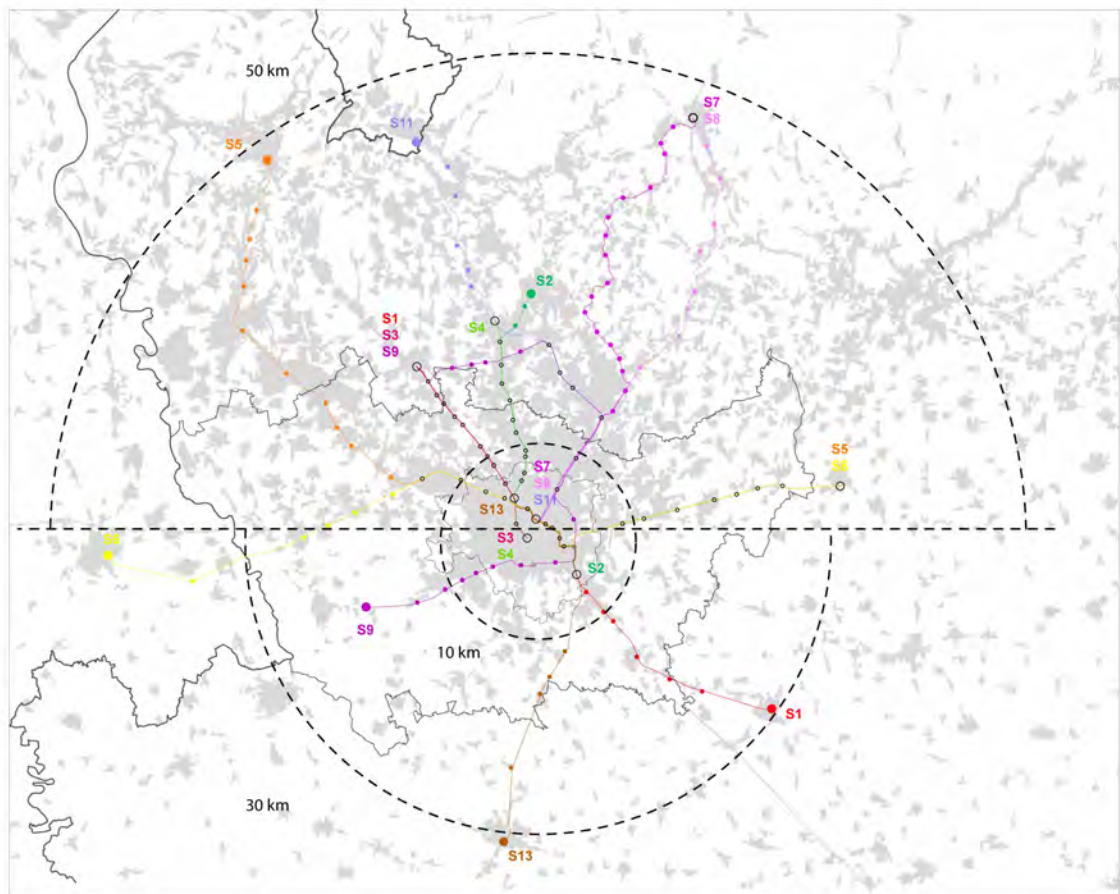
The research is therefore based on the hypothesis that the daily routes on these transport networks constitute particularly powerful vectors in the elaboration of metropolis' representations and thus to its territorial construction.



[fig.1] Growth of the Milanese urban area and development of the railway network. Source : elaborated by the author, from : CORINE Land Cover 2000; Regione Lombardia; Istituto Geografico Militare; Cornolo, 1979; Vermi, 1970.

*The Parisian regional express network and the Milanese suburban railway service*

Whereas the *Réseau Express Régional* of the Paris region, born in the 1960s, includes a set of lines dedicated to the suburban trains traffic, the *Servizio Ferroviario Suburbano*, implemented in Milan after the opening of the *Passante Ferroviario's* galerie in 2004, works as a fast service on railways shared between transport of people and goods, between suburban, regional and national trains –!on the model of the S-Bahn from the German and Swiss agglomerations [fig.2].



[fig. 2] The relationship between the superficie of the Milanese urban region and the Servizio Ferroviario Suburbano in 2015. Source : elaborated by the author, from : CORINE land cover 2006; Regione Lombardia.

*The collective imagination of the suburban transport networks*

Often called 'trains de banlieue' or 'commuter trains', they are generally associated to the image of the urban outskirts and to the commuters' daily life.

The most common objectal representation, the map of the transport operators [fig.3], offers an a-spatial image entirely focused on the functional dimension, "this apparent poverty [...] of the graphical representation of networks [being] all the more disturbing as we often attribute a certain cognitive power to the map." (Offner, 1990, p.62)

For their part, the media often spread information related to the networks' dysfunctions (delay, cancellation, maintenance and saturation), contributing to the reinforcing of these transportation modes' negative image.





[fig. 3] The Milanese *Servizio Ferroviario Suburbano's* map. Source : Regione Lombardia

### How to report the lived space and make the representations emerge?

The research includes an essential methodological dimension because of its exploratory character, the challenge being to report the strongly interiorised socio-spatial representations and thereby the complexity of the inhabitants' relationship to space. The triangulation procedure (Apostolidis, 2005) – induction and materials' multiplication – should allow to express their multi-scalar, procedural and subjective nature.

#### *The landscape, meeting point between the multiple scales*

This relationship is above all conditioned by what Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls! "the machinic set"! (1990, p.31) –!the train and the network –!which establishes the two reference space-time articulating the scales of the closeness and the faraway (Moles, Rhomer, 1972). The interpretation is made by the mobilisation of the classical graphical representation tools of the design disciplines, around which is engaged a reflexive discourse (Söderstrom, 1996).

At the network's space-time's scale, a cartographic analysis highlights each line's own characteristics within the network system. The crossed territories' specificities as well and their various attendance levels induce a differentiated interaction between the traveler and the space. In Milan, the research focuses on two lines, representative, by the diverse situations they allow to observe, of the urban region's dynamics: S5 –! connecting Varese and Treviglio via Milan –!and S13 – connecting Pavia to Milan.

At the compartment's space-time's scale, the spatial analysis underlines the way the physical organisation determines the traveler's relationship with the internal space –!spaces division and seats arrangement –!as well as the outside space –!the multiplicity of viewpoints and the framing operated by the window. Besides, it allows us to study how the space occupation, variable during the day, interferes on the way the inhabitants live the journey (Hall, 1966; Jarrigeon, 2008).

The regular route, in the interface between these two spatio-temporal scales, is situated on the everyday life's domain (De Certeau, 1990). It would allow the traveler, by the movement and the repetitiveness, to make the link between the two worlds, thanks to his immediate perception, his memory and his imagination, through

the landscape's mediation (Berque, 1994). This relation's potential is thus estimated through a landscape analysis, reporting a double perceptive frame (Pailhous, 1970). The perceptive cartography –!on the view maps!–!principles!–!relates to the exo-centered frame –!and the sequential analysis, representative of the movement (Berthoz, 1997) transcribes –!by the chrono-photography –!the travel's experience according to the ego-centered frame<sup>5</sup>.

#### *A process between practices, perceptions and representations*

The social representation is considered to be “the product and the process of a mental activity by which an individual or a group reconstitutes the reality to which he is confronted to and to which he attributes a specific meaning”!(Jodelet, 1989, p. 205). Studied through the individual representations' analysis, it induces besides the consideration of the process which correlates the spatial practice, perception and representation.

To transcribe the metropolitan representations of the inhabitants-travelers, the survey will thus be developed in several stages – evolving from methods more related to the sensibility towards the most pragmatic ones – with a population selected for its expressiveness rather than for its statistical representativeness.

The first stage, realised *in situ* during one of the inhabitant's ordinary journeys, refers to the method of the 'commented routes', aiming “to obtain reports of the perception in movement” (Thibaud, 2001, p.81). It allows to take into account the environmental context and the action while mobilising the reflexive resources of the subject according to the assumption that the language informs about perception structures. The purpose is to identify the landmarks and visual sequences in the traveler's perception.

The second stage is based on the method of 'mental maps', implemented outside of the transport context. First introduced by the psychologists before being used by the geographers (Cauvin, 1999; Gould, White, 1974), mental maps correspond to a material objectification of the cognitive configurations. The interpretation of the drawings made by the inhabitants allows to bring to light the characteristic elements which help to describe their global representations of the metropolitan space, in connection with their daily routes.

The third stage, built around inhabitants' narratives, is realised by means of *in situ* semi-directive interviews, made in the opposite direction of the first stage's journey. The analysis of the speeches allows to qualify the inhabitant's daily mobility practices and the ways they are included in the space and time of his daily life. This method, if it concerns the qualitative and subjective dimension of the space, does not however allow to reach the complexity of spatial representations (Abric, 2005), what justifies to be completed with the other techniques.

#### *The individual representations and the construction of a shared image*

Considering that the social representation is also “a form of knowledge socially elaborated and shared having a practical aim and contributing to the construction of a reality common to a social group”!(Jodelet, 1989, p.36), the issue is finally to develop a method –!on the principle of the 'central core'!theory<sup>6</sup>!–!which will allow us to confront the representations developed by the different inhabitants and to bring to the foreground the recurring elements which attest the existence of shared representations of the metropolitan territories.

It is supposed indeed that the social characteristics that determine a group membership, the standards and values systems and the cultural frame, play an intrinsic role in the construction of the inhabitants' representations, and participate in elaborating a collective image filled by the meaning attributed to the space. The results obtained will then be discussed with Parisian and Milanese agglomerations'!statistical and institutional definitions.

The purpose is to build a reflection on the inhabitant's images of Paris and Milan metropolises, the complexity of which arising from the richness of cognitive and social processes, but also from the inhabitants' diversity and the urban territories' multiplicity.

It should be underlined, as a conclusion, that these theoretical and methodological stakes could participate by being transposed in an operational perspective, to reach the more general objectives to replace the inhabitants in the center of the planning issues at the metropolitan scale and to appreciate the role of the transport infrastructures not only in the material but also social and symbolic construction of the contemporary urban spaces.

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<sup>5</sup>The ego-centered frame corresponds to the spatial conception built around the subject whereas the exo-centered frame corresponds to a codification of the space independent from the subject, placing the spatial elements in relation to a metric conception of the context.

<sup>6</sup>The 'central core' theory (Abric, 2011) establishes that the social representations are structured around a central core which assures their stability participating in the definition of standards and values for the individuals and the groups, and 'peripheral elements' which vary from a person to the other one.

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