

Market/Place: Studies in (Genoa) Italy

This paper examines market influences on higher education, architectural education and place through a consideration of study abroad in Italy, including educational tourism and “edutainment” as (unspoken) components of marketing for study abroad programs which also benefit the home university. But within the attraction that Italy offers and as a complement to the presumed value of its traditional justifications, there is the possibility of relevant contemporary critical inquiry of local and global themes that can meaningfully affect students’ understandings of their home culture and how they approach architectural practices in the 21st century. This is particularly so in the case of architectural study in Genoa, which exploits Italy as the draw but offers unexpected life experiences and learning opportunities on issues of modernity and contemporaneity in complex urban, social and cultural situations.

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE MARKET

From the call for papers: As universities move towards business based models, is there a risk that global programs could become more consumer-oriented and less academic in focus?

The question suggests a fixed inverse relationship between the market and academia, and that this applies only to study abroad programs. The risk of university programs becoming excessively consumer-oriented (and to draw the line at for-profit colleges....) is real, but our challenge is to find how to respond “appropriately” to market forces to is carry on our charge and to constantly critique and redefine our academic aims.

Also present in the call for papers is an assumption that what is needed are “new paradigms” or models. This reflects architects’ ongoing attraction to the new and the desire to reject anything that, in contrast, is perceived as “old”. Along with the attraction of the *tabula rasa*, this may also be a reflection of market influence, of encouraging our desire for new products, upgrading software constantly, etc.

Before discussing this with regard to study abroad, the question of market influence is clearly relevant to the practice of architecture and public higher education. Architecture is market-driven and we need to acknowledge this as well as

critically discuss its values, such as the importance of truly public space, that are not well protected by the “invisible hand” of the free market.

In response to dwindling state financial support for public higher education, universities and colleges in the US are moving by necessity toward market-based models and relying on increased tuition. From *The Economist*:

...(U)niversities have been enrolling more students and jacking up their fees. The average cost of college per student has risen by three times the rate of inflation since 1983. The cost of tuition alone has soared from 23% of median annual earnings in 2001 to 38% in 2010.¹

To compete for market share with other universities and for-profit colleges, universities offer many services and amenities to attract students, such as comfortable residence halls, mall-like food courts and athletic facilities.

Study abroad programs are part of the formula, offering lessons in broadening cultural perspectives for college credit in what may appear as a vacation-like package, and in many cases financial aid is applicable.

The challenge is that study abroad, particularly self-supporting models, must be market responsive (not completely consumer-driven) and academically responsible, and should critically explore the conditions in which it operates.

UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONALIZATION, STUDY ABROAD, AND EDUCATIONAL TOURISM

Many universities have made efforts to encourage students to develop global perspectives. They have “internationalized” their curricula, and also promoted study abroad opportunities. From the Florida International University website:

Global Learning for Global Citizenship is Florida International University’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). This multi-year initiative is the university’s roadmap for enabling students to act as engaged global citizens. Through an integrated global learning curriculum and co-curriculum, all FIU undergraduates have multiple opportunities to develop global awareness, a global perspective, and an attitude of global engagement.²

Overall study abroad growth in 2010-2011 for US institutions was nearly flat with a 1.3% increase. While as a destination United Kingdom is in first place with 12.1% of US students studying abroad, a 1.5% increase from the previous year, Italy is in the number 2 slot with 11.1 %, but with an 8.7% increase over the previous year, the highest increase among the top five destinations.³

In the inter- and intra-university competition to enroll students in study abroad programs, Italy constitutes a “good draw”. It is a highly desirable destination because it is considered “beautiful”, historically and culturally significant, different but not too different from the home culture, and there are many English speakers and established touristic systems for handling foreign visitors in the primary touristic cities.

EDUCATION ABROAD (AND HIGHER EDUCATION) AS EDUTAINMENT

“It’s misleading to suppose there’s any basic difference between education and entertainment. This distinction merely relieves people of the responsibility of looking into the matter.” Marshall McLuhan⁴

We will use this aphorism of McLuhan’s to introduce a potentially unsettling idea: the relationship between education and entertainment. We suggest this is both



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Figure 1: Photograph of typical Genoese *caruggio* or alley, exploring place and the medium of photography / Alessandro Gugliotta, Brenya Martinez, Nicole Thame.

a condition of our times as well as a “problem”, and refers not only to education abroad but also to higher education in general.

“Edutainment” was first used by the Walt Disney Company In 1948 to describe its educational but entertaining films.⁵ Costa Edutainment, a company founded by the family that formerly owned Costa Cruise Lines, manages the Genoa Aquarium and Galata Museum of the Sea. The Genoa Aquarium designed by Renzo Piano is one of the largest in Europe, a major touristic draw, and an important economic catalyst for the renovated port area and city.

From the Costa Edutainment press pack:

The word Edutainment, acronym for Educational and Entertainment, is the best definition of our company’s mission: meet the growing request for a qualitative way to spend leisure time, combining culture, education, entertainment, emotion and fun in unique and meaningful experiences. Costa Edutainment counts today over 3 million visitors a year, managed directly or through its partners.⁶

The concept of “edutainment” is articulated well by the Disney philosophy, and Epcot is a useful bridge to look at how our cities have been altered by the market and how we view cities.

From the Disney World/Epcot website:

Discover exciting attractions, enchanting international pavilions and award-winning fireworks. Celebrating the human spirit, Epcot has 2 distinct realms: Future World, which features technological innovations, and World Showcase, which shares with Guests the culture and cuisine of 11 countries: Mexico, Norway, China, Germany, Italy, the United States, Japan, Morocco, France, United Kingdom and Canada.⁷

Interestingly, five of the top seven destinations for study abroad programs are represented at Epcot World Showcase.

The two worlds of Epcot mirror our two preferences in architectural education: Future World, basically a technologically-delivered utopia, and World Showcase, which promotes culture and history. But at another level Epcot is a form of hyperreality or situation in which the real is confused with the simulated. This condition of simulation affects how we perceive cities and conduct architectural practices. Due to this difficulty of distinguishing between the two, for many visitors Europe is now a full-scale Epcot for touristic consumption.

Rome, Florence, and Venice are the primary destinations in Italy for mass tourism and also educational tourism. In a post-industrial economy Italy must develop and promote its cultural and artistic resources. Not only the art works and significant buildings, but the city centers themselves are assets (or commodities). In the name of promotion and marketing these places must be branded, and then preserved or “heightened” so that they deliver what is advertised. New architecture must often be blocked or relegated to less visible sites so that the “image of the city” (to recontextualize Lynch’s theme in the age of advertising) will not be damaged.

So Italy is a glorious museum, a theme park, a member of the Eurozone’s PIGS (along with Portugal, Greece and Spain). Is this where we want to study?

STUDY IN GENOA: CONTEXT AND PEDAGOGY

Genoa is a complex and “unbranded” city set within a touristically developed and heavily marketed country. Xavier Salomon, Roman born curator of European

paintings for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, maintains, “Most people think of Rome, think of Florence, think of Venice, but as far as I’m concerned they are amusement parks for tourists. Genoa has remained the real thing.”⁸

Florida International University (FIU) has operated a study abroad program in Genoa, Italy since 2005. FIU has a university-level agreement with the University of Genoa (UniGe) and seeks to develop activities between the students and faculties of various disciplines including Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Interior Architecture and Nautical Design, Sociology, and Hospitality and Tourism (with an emphasis on sustainable tourism).

Our architecture students have participated in numerous collaborative projects with the students of the UniGe Faculty of Architecture, and we have had workshops in Miami for UniGe students. Our students take a 3-credit Italian language course, and must use what they learn to do their everyday activities and to engage with the students of the University of Genoa.

There is a course with the curators of the Wolfsonian, a collection made by Mitchell Wolfson Jr. that focuses on the objects and materials that demonstrate the social transformation of Italy between 1880 and 1945. It is a Modern collection of unexpected diversity with relevant material on technology and changing lifestyles, urban transformation, art and political propaganda, and modern architecture.

An advantage to being in a less-developed city is that we can engage with the city without the weight of numerous other students and programs. Our students live in “normal” apartments in various buildings in the rather unrestored medieval city center. There is not a large presence of English-speaking residents, tourists or students in Genoa.

For our Miami-based students, Genoa is topographically and morphologically completely different from home. Miami is flat, gridded, a field of objects. The urban structure of Genoa is enmeshed with a strongly-formed landscape between the sea and mountains, with a variety of urban fabric types ranging from the labyrinthine medieval quarter to the ordered projections of the 19th century. Miami is plan, Genoa is section.

While Genoa has noteworthy historic monuments such as Galeazzo Alessi’s Renaissance villas and the central plan church S. Maria Assunta in Carignano, and urban interventions such as the medieval *sottoripa* (1100s) and the Renaissance *strada nuova* (1500s), it does not have the icons of Rome and Florence. This is an advantage, as the students may be able to experience and study the subjects with less “baggage” and fewer preconceptions getting in the way.

We emphasize acquiring an understanding of the context of ideas and values and the relativism of architectural principles, rather than the history of buildings or styles. The value of Genoa is not in its history *per se*, but instead in how all of its layers, particularly modern and contemporary, are legible in the rich stratification of the present.

Architecturally and urbanistically the modernity of Genoa would include the industrialization of the city port, the Rationalist projects of the 30s and 40s, the post war economic boom and the large-scale housing projects for workers. More recently there are the projects by Ignazio Gardella such as the School of Architecture, and the works of Franco Albini who showed an unusual genius in combining Modernist principles with vernacular infusions, as in the Treasury of the Duomo and the Museum of Sant’Agostino.



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Renzo Piano's redevelopment of the port area is perhaps the most visible sign of Genoa's ongoing transformation, converting the city's edge with the previously inaccessible port into public space, and introducing the Aquarium. His *Bigo* functions as a new symbol to give visual identity to the city, and to replace the *Lanterna* or lighthouse with a more up-to-date sign that is now used on much of the city's promotional literature.

Genoa is not a city "packaged" for touristic consumption. Students arrive with few preconceptions of Genoa itself, but only of what they think Italy is. In contrast to the romantic vision of Italy presented in books and movies such as "Under the Tuscan Sun" and the Sorkinian theme park versions of Rome, Florence and Venice, Genoa has a certain grittiness that makes for a different experience.

Xavier Salomon of the Metropolitan observes, "(Genoa) is also a city of huge contrasts: elegant, refined, but it is also seedy, decadent, falling apart in a way, and I like the contrasts between those things."⁹ The beauty of the city (and the attractions of Liguria such as Portofino and the Cinque Terre) is countered, or complemented, by this "falling apart" quality. Genoa is a city of "complexity and contradiction" and resists simplification. Everything physical bears the traces of multiple events and forces. To come to some kind of understanding of Genoa one must appreciate stratification, layers, the palimpsest quality of being able to discern multiple texts superimposed one upon the other.

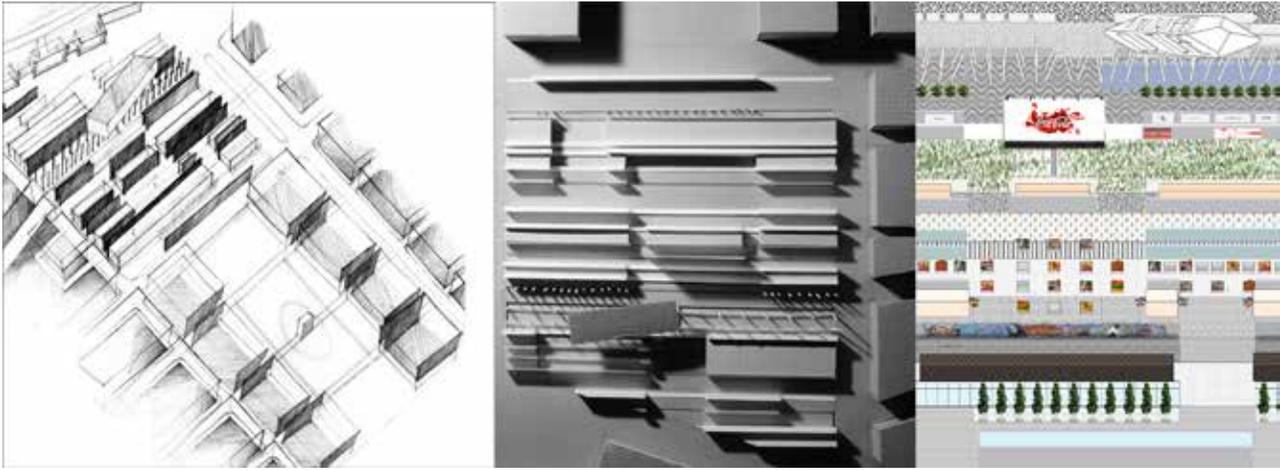
In short, it is an environment well-suited for self-education through critical reflection and architectural exploration because it does not let you leave your habits unchallenged.

Figure 2: Details of student-made maps of a) architecture, industrialization and urban transformation / Emilio Hernandez, Meagan Sacher, Sofia Salvat, Jordan Schwiering; b) flows and attractors for visitors and tourists / Mike Bennett, Ailyn Mendoza, Alex Pina; c) overlapping areas of various ethnic groups in the city center / Alessandro Gugliotta, Brenya Martinez, Nicole Thame.

"ESSENTIAL" ITALIAN LESSONS, THROUGH GENOA'S LENS

URBANISM: The European idea of urbanism is still fundamentally bound up with a concept of public life and urban space. This refers not only to the "famous" spaces such as Piazza Navona, but to the broader network of public spaces, often anonymous, that are the very fabric of the city and the armature of European communal life.

In Italy and Europe there are contemporary urban strategies to increase density and the amount of open space within the city, and limit the spread of the city



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to protect the surrounding agricultural and natural landscape. Disused industrial areas on the periphery are being reclaimed, provided with infrastructure and services, and becoming new mixed-use centers in a pluricentric city.

The networks of public space in Genoa are particular. More than the traditional piazza, the streets themselves constitute the primary systems of space. Our drawing, mapping and photographic exercises emphasize developing an awareness of the public spatial network through figure-ground studies and digital models with a hierarchical reading of spaces.

SPATIAL AND ARCHITECTONIC FIGURES: Another opportunity for architecture students is to live in and study in a rich material and spatial world. Walking through a complex spatial environment is a good antidote for having spent too much time in a car or in studio. While our students are well-versed in digital media and simulation, thoughtful drawing is still a valid exercise to link the experiencing body and the architectural mind to develop spatial awareness.

In this way study in Italy can be an opportunity to interpret the built landscape in terms of (sort of) atemporal and (perhaps) transcultural elements and compositions, working from the scale of the city to the detail.

The schematic drawing approach works to develop a sensitivity to the well-developed dialogue between space and architectonic systems, of compositions and design strategies that are present in the range of notable but not well-known projects in Genoa. The fact that these sources often exist in complex, hybridized or fragmentary states makes the exercise all the more challenging and rewarding.

SHIFTING CONDITIONS FOR CRITICAL EXPLORATION

PLACE: The concept of place is particularly problematic in Italy and Genoa as visitors and students may want an authentic “local” experience that conforms to their media-affected expectations, at the same time that they expect familiar comforts and services.

With reference to “place and placelessness” and acknowledging Edward Relph’s research,¹¹ we might consider the city as a settlement for multiple communities and at the same time as a matrix or passing through place for wanderers, where there is no easy dichotomy of place and space, authentic or inauthentic, permanent or temporary, but more subtle, overlapping definitions that don’t have to operate at the extremes of these dialectical opposites.

Figure 3: Grain as Urban Mediator, Brignole Station
- Piazza della Vittoria / Jeanne Canto, Giovanni
Guadarrama, Tiffany Reyes, 2012.



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The value of Genoa in this regard is that it is a rough mix of the permanent and the changing, of authenticity and artifice (not simulation), of local and global conditions. Being a port, Genoa has always had a diverse population, with a local dialect that is a mix of Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic and English. There is slow food and fast food, and you can find a place selling the local pesto sauce next to a doner kebab shop.

BEING HERE/THERE (AND THE INTERNET): Another aspect of the change in place and distance is what the internet has brought about. Through social media our students seem to be in constant contact with family and friends. In a sense, the students are never very far from home. This is reassuring to them, but it limits the growth they might experience by keeping them in a zone of the familial and familiar.

By constantly posting images of themselves in places visited they communicate the rather natural glee at showing someone else what they are doing (the envy-inducing game of Facebook and Instagram: “Capture and Share the World’s Moments”).

PEOPLES: Italy is a relatively new nation and the political projection of the country in the 19th century only partly unified the multiple groups who still identify themselves with a town or region. This is compounded by the flows of peoples after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the European Union’s treaty on open borders, and most recently by the influx of refugees from Africa landing in Lampedusa.

In the “open” programs for the studio projects there is an emphasis on the inclusion of the needs and desires of the multiple individuals and groups who will engage with the intervention, even those who never go inside. The work belongs to the city and becomes part of the shared environment.

STUDENT WORKS

The preceding reflections relative to the city, the lessons, and the broader issues and conditions have considerable repercussions on the exercises conducted by the students. This further justifies Genoa and its delicate and stratified reality compressed between land and sea as a worthy laboratory in which to investigate an ample range of themes typical of our times and important at the level of disciplinary reflection.

Figure 4: Dialogue of Urban Fabrics and Broken Monuments, Piazza Dante / Mariel Souza, Osman Ramos, 2011.

and architectural practice. The studio investigated the theme of urban and architectural form as means of communication relative to the site between the Rationalist Piazza della Vittoria by Piacentini, classical, symmetrical, self-referential and alien, and Brignole train station.

The project of Jeanne Canto, Giovanni Guadarrama and Tiffany Reyes (Figure 3) proposes a horizontal urban fabric without a center, sensitive and adapted to the context: a type of carpet characterized by a continuous mutability and an alternation between public and private spaces. As a critique of the strong edge and center of the monumental Piazza della Vittoria, this project establishes a texture or field of public and private areas, accommodating multiple user groups as well as both formal and informal markets.

DIALOGUE OF URBAN FABRIC AND MONUMENTS: PIAZZA DANTE

The project addresses the theme of border and threshold by confronting two profoundly different urban conditions. On the one side there is the fissured mass of the medieval center, on the other the regular matrix of the modern city, underlined by the dominating presence of the skyscraper by Piacentini. As well as having a significant grade change between the two areas, in the midst of this confrontation there are juxtaposed significant historical fragments, some of dubious authenticity: the (reputed) house of Christopher Columbus, the (moved and reconstructed) cloister of S. Andrea, and the (heavily restored) medieval gate Porta Soprana.

The project of Mariel Souza and Osman Ramos (Figure 4) recomposes the relationships among all the elements in this interstitial territory by proposing two walls. One is a thick, occupiable wall that reinterprets the old city wall and dialogues with the modern, Rationalist buildings. The second is a folded plane that dialogues with the landscape of so-called monuments and transforms the passage between old and new into a theatrical sequence.

REWRITING THE PALIMPSEST: PALAZZO SAN GIORGIO

This project is an examination of stratification: in the city, in culture, in representation, in identity and in architecture, as indicated in the student's conceptual map of her research. The testing ground is Palazzo San Giorgio, originally a palace of the first Doge of Genoa, then the seat of one of the first banks in Europe, and finally the current headquarters of the Port Authority.

The project by Master of Arts in Architecture student Silvana Herrera (Figure 5) deconstructs the layers of the building and its history and proposes new uses, new layers in the urban plan of Piazza Caricamento and new, translucent facades superimposed on the painted facades of the 16th century addition. In other words, she enters into and continues the architectural rewriting of the palimpsest of the city. An important part of the process was the role of representation, which she examined in the construction of the map, and through the use of layers, translucency and non-perspectival representation in the drawings and models.

MARKET/PLACE, EDUCATION AND STUDY ABROAD

As architects and educators we must enter the marketplace, but without selling our souls. The persistent lessons of Italy and its attraction for educational tourism can be "utilized" to attract students, but for us, Genoa acts as a lens through which to study critical lessons of the present and as a rich laboratory for relevant exploration. While study in Italy remains a valid laboratory—but perhaps for different reasons—Genoa offers possibilities that have not yet been fully explored.

ENDNOTES

1. "College-Cost Calamity", *The Economist*, Aug. 4, 2012.
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3. Institute of International Education, Open Doors Data: US Study Abroad, Leading Destinations: <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Leading-Destinations/2009-11>.
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5. Introduction, Bowdoin Van Piper, 2. Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt: Essays on Disney's Edutainment Films. Ed. A. Bowdoin Van Riper. McFarland, 2011.
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9. Xavier Salomon, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Connections, Genoa: <http://www.metmuseum.org/connections/genoa>
10. Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message", *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, Part I*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
11. Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion Limited, 1976.