

## Landing

### How practices of temporary hospitality challenge urban spaces and policies

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**Abstract:** Within the broad issue of migration, the paper discusses the conditions of intersection between the short temporality of the phenomenon and the longer temporality of urban spaces and policies. Along the migrant trajectory, the work particularly focuses on migrants' *landing*, or *first arrival*. The research therefore addresses migrant populations who have a "temporary" perspective in their use of the territory and who cannot access certain urban services and opportunities. The paper considers the case of Milan and assuming the background of existing policies, the work draws on a qualitative observation of Milanese first reception, with specific attention to hospitality "practices", broadly defined as unexpected uses of space, non-institutional actions, and unplanned answers by the Municipality. The observation unveils a general incapacity to structurally deal with the temporariness of migrants' condition, often resulting in "exceptional" reception spaces and emergency-based policies; on the other hand, some actors and practices seem to provide a deeper understanding of certain conditions, suggesting new points of view on first reception issues and highlighting alternative paths. The work argues the urgency of a renewed and more complex definition of the temporary condition of migrant populations, and the relevance of existing practices as a starting point for discussion.

**Keywords:** migration; landing; first reception; Milan

### Introduction

The paper draws on an ongoing PhD research, carried out in the course of Urban Planning Design and Policy at Politecnico di Milano (Italy), that investigates the interaction between migrant populations, territories of arrival and urban policy, with a particular focus on the dimension of first arrival, or *landing*.<sup>1</sup> Assuming as a background this work, the following paper aims at investigating its initial hypothesis.

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<sup>1</sup> The term *landing* is used to refer to the first moment of arrival on a territory (*primo arrivo e prima accoglienza* in Italian), and to differentiate it from the following settlement processes.

The PhD work starts from a broad consideration of how socio-economic changes, spaces and institutions develop at different speeds and how this challenges a lot the ordinary forms of urban governance and planning, which often resist to such changes rather than triggering or supporting them (Balducci, 2019).<sup>2</sup> The research assumes as a fieldwork that of recent migration flows around the Mediterranean Sea and specifically focuses on the phase of migrants' landing, intended as a first moment of arrival in a territory, and on hospitality experiences, intended as the reactions of the city, in its different dimensions, to such phenomenon. Landing of migrants is understood as a complex dimension of encounter between the short temporality of arriving populations and the longer one of the urban environment. Many, and well-known, stories of hospitality reveal the incapacity of city's spaces and institutions to support the presence of migrants, but some experiences represent inverse reactions, able to support the changes brought about by arriving populations. The PhD research therefore questions under which conditions the latter experiences are possible and what they may tell to urban and territorial governance.

Within such framework, the present contribution more deeply discusses the reason why the dimension of landing is chosen, arguing that landing may be regarded as a relevant point of observation, not only to investigate the field of migration studies and hospitality, but also to open up the debate on broader governance and planning issues.

The paper is organized as follows: a first section introduces the literature background on migration and urban studies, pointing out the need to better define the debate on migrants' first arrival as an independent topic; it follows a tentative definition of *landing* from a theoretical and empirical perspective, with reference to some experiences of hospitality in Milan and Europe; the fourth section aims at investigating how the developed observations may challenge some current categories of urban planning and governance, beyond the field of first arrival and reception; finally, some preliminary conclusions are drawn.

## **Urban studies, migration and landing**

### *State of the art*

Whilst the theme of migration and the city has old roots, in the last years its relevance for European and Mediterranean countries has clearly increased (Saunders, 2012); researches have addressed it through diverse fields, among them sociology, anthropology, economics, law and urban studies.

Literature dealing with the relation between migration and the territory identifies two parallel dimensions: on the one hand, global networks, flows and national policies, and on the other, a rather *local* scale, where municipalities, inhabitants and local policies *react*, developing everyday experiences of hospitality. The crucial dimension to understand tools and processes of territorialization appears to be the local one, which looks both at the dynamics occurring in city

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<sup>2</sup> The work is still on-going and was shortly presented in a seminar at Politecnico di Milano, in January 2019.

districts and in smaller towns (Balbo, ed., 2015; Caponio, 2006). Urban studies have further built a rich framework around the territorial dimension of migration, focusing on immigrants and populations who are settling - or already settled - in urban areas. Within this long-term perspective, literature describes the processes of territorialization of immigrants (Tosi, 1998; Lanzani and Vitali, 2003; Blockland and Savage, 2008) and discusses the tools of urban policies towards the multiethnic city (Crosta, 2010; Lo Piccolo, 2013; Briata, 2014).

In a different way, the will to focus on the temporary dimension of landing implies to assume the mentioned studies as a background, and to shift the gaze from the notion of *im*-migrants to that of migrants, who interact with the territory in a clear perspective of mobility (Tarrus, 1993). The theme of landing, regarded as a temporary condition that migrants undergo before settling down, raises diverse questions: the French anthropologist Agier started the ‘Babels Research Program’, revolving around the concept of the city as a border and investigating “what migrants do to the city and what cities do to migrants” (Agier, 2016). More recently, the issue of first arrival has been addressed within studies of social policies related to first reception systems. But, while different research fields (anthropology, sociology, law) on migration start addressing this temporary dimension, urban studies still struggle in considering it as a subject by itself, so that the territorialization processes and tools of first landing still remain a rather unexplored field. The transitory nature of migrants makes more evident the reason of this gap: urban studies and policy are asked to deal with populations who are not - yet - territorialized and settled, but already using intensively urban spaces.

The outlined framework underlines the lack, in the discipline of urban studies, of a structured debate on the dimension of migrant’s first arrival and of a deep investigation on its implications for urban planning. Nevertheless, the nature of the recent migratory flows, the structural character of such phenomenon and its impacts on urban territories, are only some of the reasons why it seems urgent to investigate landing as an independent and relevant topic.

## **Looking for a definition**

### *Methodological notes*

The work presented explores the term *landing* both from a theoretical perspective and through references to empirical cases. The first part aims at exploring the notion of landing, it clarifies some risks and limits of its use and it finally outlines a possible definition to work with. Subsequently, the paper more directly addresses existing experiences of migrants’ first arrival and reception, so to build a more concrete framework of reference. In this case, the work is mainly drawn from a qualitative research developed within a Master Thesis in Architecture (Bovo and Lippi, 2017) on Milanese first reception system, that collects and maps the main reception centers, through official data and interviews, field visits and direct observations; some further references are made to experiences collected through interviews and recent literature on the theme.

The contribution thus reports specific case studies and it is part of a research which will probably include a field work, nevertheless the presented paper is mainly the result of an attempt to build up a theoretical approach and to set the framework for further research activities.

## Landing as a point of observation

### *Defining a theoretical framework*

The choice to assume the perspective of landing poses some questions on its possible implications and requires therefore a better definition of what is meant by *landing* and by assuming this dimension as a point of observation.

The term refers to the moment of first arrival in a certain territory, the use of the word *land-ing*, aims at explicitly addressing the act of reaching land and start interacting with it, before having a clear perspective of future plans and uses. Such notion therefore refers to a limited timeframe which may vary according to the contexts, it addresses populations that start building a relation with lands and territories that start being used by them. As regards the timeframe, it is interesting to notice that migration is defined as a movement (or a series of movements) from a country of usual residence to a different country, for a period of *at least one year*, i.e. 12 months of permanence out of the land of origin, in one or more different places<sup>3</sup>. Although such definition is very general, the question arises how may be addressed those people who live in a foreign land (for less than or) before a whole year passes by. Landing populations instead may be defined as those groups observed in the moment of arrival and orientation, before settlement in a certain territory; with or without a long-term perspective of permanence, they approach land with some initial *competences of use* of the territory, personal networks or knowledge of the place, and they start building a temporary relation with space. A third consideration refers to the landing territories, which may be easily defined as all those places where people arrive, this raises the question how much such territories are - already - usable and able to support the presence of populations who are present but not settled. The relation between landing migrants and the territory may therefore be defined as a *temporary* one, since it refers to an initial moment when migrants don't have a perspective of permanence. Nevertheless, whereas each

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<sup>3</sup> Eurostat: "As stated in Article 2.1(a), (b), (c) of Regulation 862/2007, immigrants who have been residing (or who are expected to reside) in the territory of an EU Member State for a period of at least 12 months are enumerated, as are emigrants living abroad for more than 12 months. Therefore, data collected by Eurostat concern migration for a period of 12 months or longer : migrants therefore include people who have migrated for a period of one year or more as well as persons who have migrated on a permanent basis" available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/1275.pdf>. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: "While there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, most experts agree that an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with a duration between three and 12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more" available at <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>.

individual may relate to space in a temporary perspective, the presence of such populations are for cities more and more structural, as La Cecla writes, migrants are special inhabitants, “dwellers with an individual impermanence and a collective permanence” (La Cecla, 1999).

When talking about landing it is also necessary to take distance from understanding it as a predetermined condition of precariousness and rather define it as a field of observation of trajectories which may differ a lot among them. Although sharing the moment of arrival, people indeed may experience very different conditions: among the migrants recently landed in Europe, some had networks and economic resources to rely on in the arrival country which limited their precariousness soon after arrival, some entered the reception system, some did not, some others after many years are still living in very precarious conditions (Tosi, 2018). Thus, landing may refer to an analytical framework, but cannot be linked to a fixed condition of precariousness, which may not only, and not necessarily, depend on the migratory seniority.

In conclusion, from a theoretical perspective, landing is here regarded as an analytical lens which addresses the relation between temporary populations and the space and aims at investigating how such relation is built, particularly questioning what kind of *capital(s) of use* people shall have to use the territory and how the latter can support their presence.

## **Landing practices**

### *Observing populations, spaces, services and actors*

Within the outlined theoretical approach, the following paragraph explores the term of landing with reference to some existing practices<sup>4</sup>. The cases are mainly drawn from the Milanese reality of first arrival and reception, between 2015 and 2016<sup>5</sup>, and from some other European experiences reported in literature; the observations mainly addresses the theme of migrants as landing populations and the reaction of the city in terms of space, services and actors involved.

The interviews to migrants and social workers around the system of first reception reveal a very diversified mosaic of situations, nevertheless some shared needs may be outlined. Within the first days of arrival, migrants seek very basic services, such as a night shelter, medical and legal assistance, nutrition and acquisition of certain information; the essential nature of such demands makes it easily sharable by a wide target. Even if still deeply uncertain of the possibility to settle in the city, migrants often express some further, and complementary, needs, regarding education and information, recreational activities, worship, food's and clothes' purchase and transport; the consideration of the

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<sup>4</sup> The term *practice* is here used in a broad way, to give account of the variety of the cases and experiences reported.

<sup>5</sup> The city of Milan around 2015 underwent a dramatic change since it rapidly turned from a transit to a destination place. In the years before 2015, less than 1% of the migrants transiting would ask for asylum and spend more than a week in the city; in 2015 this changed and most of the people reaching the city started also asking for asylum there.

complementary needs clearly outlines the complexity of migrants' presence, in a phase which is instead often concerned as merely and continuously "of emergency". It also emerges that in the relation with the territory such needs encounter often strong constraints both in terms of time and space, due to a range of different reasons. The temporal limit is evident in the figure itself of the asylum seeker, a condition which juridically forces the person to undergo a period of wait before getting a status recognized and, in some way, prevents the chance to assume a long-time perspective of permanence. Strong time restrictions are also often imposed by the reception system itself, many facilities indeed have strict opening and closing times, requiring hosts to enter and exit the center according to given timetables. The relation with the urban environment in terms of spaces also presents quite evident limitations. Initially the use of urban spaces is constrained simply because people are new to the city and need orientation to places and services. Often underestimated by institutional reception, this need was broadly addressed in Milan by smaller associations who, especially around 2015, provided a lot of orientation services to support a very first degree of usability of the city for migrants arriving in Milan Central Station. The NPO CambioPasso realized a project of signage in different languages to lead migrants from the Station to information points; similarly, operators of different associations grouped together to provide a *mobile hub* service with the aim to orient newly arrived people to "move throughout the urban tissue, rather than only to first reception facilities" (Spada and Valentino, 2018). The spatial limitation is also linked to the reception centers, which result often very isolated from the rest of the territory; in some cases the isolation is due to a physical distance to urban and central areas, in some others to the lack of any connection to the surroundings because of the concentration of all services within the reception centers, and in most cases the access to such structures is very much controlled. In regards to the spatial constraints in the use of the city, it is interesting to underline the importance for migrants of some *not-mediated* (immediate) urban spaces, as green areas, open sport fields, public libraries and shopping malls, which for their nature overcome the spatial limitations in the use of the city. Thus, the temporary nature of migrants' relation to space leads to certain temporal and spatial constraints; in this sense it seems significant to understand better how this relation is built and how the city opposes to, or supports, the presence of landing populations.

The reaction of the city is here explored starting from the measures put in place by the institutions, in terms of first reception facilities, and they are considered within three main dimensions, the spaces, the services and the actors. As regards the firsts, the system of Milanese first reception between 2015 and 2016 provided 18 facilities scattered within the city, which were supposed to host migrants waiting for their status to be recognized. The spaces were of five typologies: former barracks, disused schools, reception facilities, big-sized structures and small-sized spaces normally devoted to other services; they would host from 50 to 500 people and the space was organized in the attempt to fit the new function to the existing structure, in case of large amount of people sport halls or common spaces were also arranged as dormitories, in some cases tents were placed in the outdoor courts. Especially in big structures, which were the majority, the rigidity of the space was clearly opposing to the flexibility and temporality of the hosts' presence, in other words, far from being a plural kind of space (Crosta, 2010), the reception facilities work as fixed boxes to adapt to. These experiences show how the planned spaces of reception are conceived as merely temporary and precarious solutions, and struggle in dealing with populations who may be individually temporary but represent a collective structural presence. Still within the spatial dimension, the case of the French city of Grande-Synthe suggests an alternative approach, recently discussed by some authors (Agier *et al.*, 2018). At the

entrance of the border city, migrants willing to pass the border to England occupied a tent settlement and reached in the winter of 2015 the amount of 5000 presences; in March 2016, the mayor of the town, opposed by the National government, chose to invest together with some associations in the construction of a humanitarian camp, bettering off as possible the conditions of the previous “jungle”. By doing so, the mayor showed to have recognized and accepted the temporal nature of the settlement, but also imagined for it a project of a rather permanent kind. These are just few examples of spatial answer to reception, but they already reveal some issues that the temporary nature of landing populations poses, and they challenge the more conventional understanding of reception spaces.

The second dimension considered is that of the services and is again addressed starting from the Milanese case. Institutions managing first reception facilities are required to provide basic services, such as dormitories and canteens, and in some cases also legal or medical assistance, language courses or clothes delivery; being conceived as a temporary stage, the system of first reception indeed has much lower management requirements than the ones of the so-called second reception. In most cases the services provided are all delivered within the reception center, so that the host ends up sleeping, eating, following language courses and getting clothes in the same structure, accessing services exclusively targeting migrants; when the reception center only offers a night recovery migrants are forced to use other available facilities as public showers, canteens or daily centers. Such system presents advantages in terms of management and space organization, but it also prevents migrants to start using the urban environment in an autonomous way, it reduces the chances for them to start building a personal social capital out of the center and strongly limits the opportunities of encounter and interaction between local residents and migrants. The question arises whether reception services should all be so concentrated and polarized within the reception facilities, and if reception measures should be addressing in such exclusionary way landing populations and not also other inhabitants of the city. A different reality is that of some services that often play an interesting role, probably mostly unexpected; it is the case of public libraries, which rather belong to more ordinary services of the city but also meet some of those complementary needs of landing migrants, who spend time in these places to access the internet, read or watch movies in their own languages, or learn Italian; public libraries thus are spaces of compresence of ordinary and reception services. With a similar aim, the NPO CambioPasso built a small experimental project of clothes’ delivery within existing second-hand shops in the neighbourhood around the reception facility, so that while getting their clothes, asylum seekers could also start getting in touch with other community of reference, out of the reception center. The latter examples suggest the opportunity to think of more integrated services able to trigger interactions between existing reception activities and other ordinary urban services.

A third aspect worth considering is that of the actors involved in the management and within the planned system of first reception. In Italy the Prefectures and the Municipalities are in charge of the public first reception facilities and through public call they outsource the management to third sector institutions; there are further associations who play a relevant role in the reception, even if not directly involved in the institutional system. What is interesting, and not only characterizing the Milanese case, is that on the side of the mentioned organizations, there are not-formalized figures who played a crucial role in the support of landing migrants. In Milan the clearest example is that of the Eritrean and Ethiopian community of the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia; between 2013 and 2015 resident immigrants provided help and accommodation to a large number of migrants coming from Northern

Africa and arriving at Milan Central Station (Naga, 2016). More recently, some Milanese associations are working on a project to enhance and recognize the crucial role that existing foreign communities might have in supporting the presence of landing migrants in the city. These cases challenge the notion of the actors of reception and the way current policy defines them.

The different experiences showcase some of the well-known obstacles in dealing with temporary migrants populations, but also some of the alternative answers that the city is already giving to better support them; such practices are here divided into the three dimension of spaces, services and actors, but it is worth underlining how much the three are linked to each other and how each of them rises shared issues. Whereas the mentioned cases obviously build a very partial picture of the huge reality of first arrival and reception, in some way they also reveal the specificity of the landing dimension and the importance of considering it as able to challenge some conventional answers currently given to the presence of temporary migrants.

## **Beyond reception**

### *Reflecting on the challenges for urban planning and policy*

The given definition of landing and the observation of the mentioned experiences certainly raise issues on migrants' arrival and reception but may also open up the discussion on themes that more broadly tackle the city and are here introduced as still open questions.

The understanding of migrants as complex temporary populations and with a constrained relation to the city - in space and time-, recalls the presence of other temporary populations already inhabiting certain urban territories. Although undergoing very different conditions, tourists, students, workers, the relatives of hospitalized people (Pasqui, 2008) are other temporary populations who more and more are establishing a structural presence in the contemporary city and who also build a limited relation with the urban environment. Such consideration does not aim at comparing the conditions of these people, but rather at triggering a broader discussion on how the city does and should answer to these temporary and structural populations.

Secondly, the spatial dimension of reception introduces the design theme of the relation between temporary and permanent. As seen, the structures of reception may be defined as “extraterritorial” spaces, that oppose a sort of physical inertia to the quickly changing needs of landing migrants; thus, as seen, the spatial project seems to be incapable to provide a structured answer to temporary populations. On the other hand, there are experiences which try to work within a more elastic notion of temporary and permanent, as a way to effectively respond to landing migrants' presence; these cases underline the need for a broader definition of permanent and temporary. In this sense it is interesting to recall the recent project of Mehrotra on Ephemeral Urbanism, by looking through very different cases of temporary settlements, Mehrotra argues that the arising distinction between permanent and temporary should not be conceived as a binary but should rather activate a broader understanding of permanence. In this sense, one of the clearest example refers to the Hindu festivity of Kumbh Mela, which every three years gathers millions of people - in 2007 they were 16 million - for only 45 days; here what makes such temporary settlement successful is the fact of being

organized, in terms of management and space, as if it were permanent, i.e. by following rules very similar to those of long-term settlements (Mehrotra, 2016).

Some similar considerations may be carried out when considering the dimension of services: whereas most of those addressing landing populations are spatially concentrated and strictly targeted, the cases of public libraries and second-hand shops represent examples of reception services distributed on the territory and integrated to more ordinary facilities. This introduces two main topics, currently debated in literature: the first regards the possibility to conceive integrated spaces of services as open to a wide (and unexpected) target, in particular it is questioned the extremely specialized nature of certain services, as the traditional social services that often end up resulting exclusionary themselves. Secondly, it is raised the issue of the access threshold of many public facilities especially for non-conventional city inhabitants. The case of newly arrived migrants highlights the different degree of recognition required to access a wide range of services, from the zero degree of public showers, to the documents asked to enter sanitary and social structures, to the higher requirements needed to access services like housing. Also in this case the lens of landing triggers questions that seem to go beyond the dimension of migrants' arrival and hospitality.

The fourth theme is that of the actors, in particular underling the presence and relevance of non-formalized actors in the management of reception. As seen, some local associations recognized their role, but the question is whether also institutions would be capable of recognizing it and, in general, enhancing the value of unplanned and unpredictable figures. Such latent capacity of reacting to changes is well described by Lanzara as a *negative capacity*, i.e. the ability of certain people to provide an effective answer to unexpected needs and thus playing the role of *informal* institutions in changing context (Lanzara, 1993). In order to be able to leave some space to the negative capacity of certain actors, policies should probably accept to have, at times, a *looser* attitude, open to possible latent resources, especially when facing unclear and undefined phenomena. Also the notion of policies' *looseness* may be encountered in some current literature on urban governance and public action.

The mentioned issues remain clearly open questions, nevertheless it is meaningful that they are raised starting from the discussion on landing and that they are themes which go beyond the dimension of migrants' arrival and reception. This reveals the relevance of landing as a field of observation on dynamics that more and more structurally are challenging the contemporary city.

### **Conclusive remarks**

Starting from the above arguments some preliminary conclusive remarks may be outlined. The dimension of landing should be conceived as a mere analytical lens to look through, without implying any predetermined definition of arrival as a fixed and unique condition of precariousness among migrants. Assuming such perspective, landing practices not only reveal relevant issues in the debate on migrants' arrival and reception but are also representative for the discussion on broader topics in the field of urban studies. Thus, in order to address the issue of landing in a broad and elastic way, it seems reasonable to work in an in-between space, which chooses as study field that of migration but

also “keep an eye” on other languages, references and tools, which may in some cases provide clearer definitions of shared problems and critical nodes.

To conclude with a representative image of the concept of landing as presented in the paper, going back to its origin might be of use. In the nautical world indeed there is a type of sailing chart, the pilot book, used specifically by sailors in the moment of landing; such tool is representative for two reasons, on the one hand, because the pilot book specifically addresses sailors who are approaching land, on the other since it provides them with useful information on how to successfully make use of the unknown coast, turning it more readable and ready to use. Similarly, the research argues the need for urban studies to recognize and address the dimension of landing populations and to question the current usability of cities, in order to investigate how this challenges some categories of urban planning and policy.

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