

# the italian changing cities

**emerging imbalances and conflicts**

edited by Antonio G. Calafati

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Emerging Imbalances and Conflicts

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# THE UNKNOWN ITALIAN CITIES

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## INTRODUCTION

Neither among policy-makers of any administrative level, nor in the scientific community, does there seem to be the knowledge required to govern the development trajectories of Italian cities. No encompassing reports on the state of the Italian urban system have been drafted in recent decades to support the formulation of an effective national urban agenda. The knowledge content of cities' strategic plans concerning cities' structures is generally very poor, and the 'development potential' of the Italian cities is not a question that the scientific community has addressed systematically. There is an evident 'knowledge deficit' on the Italian urban system.

In Italy – as in most European countries – cities are required to implement profound structural changes in order to meet the challenges raised by the economic, social and environmental questions. Differently from other European countries, Italy has not embraced the new urban policy paradigm that emerged in the late 1990s in response to the internationalisation of the European economy. The European Commission was already then calling attention to the necessity of a paradigm shift – implying an effort to improve the knowledge on the state and development potential of cities (Commission of the European Communities, 2006; European Commission, 1997; European Commission, 1998). Italy has not accomplished this change of perspective, and the 'knowledge deficit' that has accumulated on the state of its cities and their development potential is now hampering the



design of effective national and local (urban) policies.

The lack of interest in cities' development performances that has manifested in Italy can be traced back to the emergence and consolidation of the 'territorial paradigm' (Calafati, 2009a, 2009b). This paper addresses the general issue of 'Why is knowledge about the *structure* of Italian cities so unsatisfactory?' focusing on a specific question, and namely the political mechanisms that have blocked the learning process *locally*.

The paper suggests that public discourse – and the collective learning processes – on the Italian cities have been locked into questions – basically, management of property rights on land and real estate – that as a matter of fact are irrelevant to the understanding of cities' development trajectories. These questions have been regarded as central by the political-administrative elites, and they have shaped the policy discourse on the Italian urban system in recent decades. In Italy the policy discourse on cities continues to revolve around questions of scant significance as to the threat posed to cities' long-term development performances by the current phase of European capitalism.

## THE RESILIENCE OF EUROPEAN CITIES

One of the most profound institutional changes that have occurred in Europe in the past two decades is the considerable increase in cities' strategic sovereignty. Cities are increasingly acting – and are expected to do so by both the local society and the state – to 'regulate' their development trajectories. To compensate for changes in their 'environment' and changes in local firms' strategies – given the evolution of meta-preferences in local society – they design and implement policies aimed at promoting *economic development*. The 'resilient city' – the city that meets the challenges of internal and external shocks through structural adjustments – has become a key concept in the urban policy discourse in Europe (European Commission-Directorate General for Regional Policy, 2011; OECD, 2013).

The profound changes that the globalisation of the European economy has brought about have turned cities' structural adjustment capacity into a key question. In order to regulate the city's development trajectory, accurate knowledge about the structure of the city is needed on the part of policy-makers. The question therefore arises of how much knowledge is available to the political-administrative elites, and to local society as a whole, about cities' structures at time  $t=0$ , when the 'adjustment process' should be set in motion by appropriate policies. Indeed, the shift

of the focus to cities' resilience – having conceptualised 'resilience' as an artificial feature of a human system (city), produced by collective action (OECD, 2013; Waddington, 1977) – has made apparent a 'lack of relevant knowledge' on the part of the local political-administrative elites as to the locally specific configuration of factors determining the adjustment capacity and development potential of the cities they govern.<sup>1</sup>

'Strategic planning' – *and the learning processes associated with it* – has become the dominant urban policy paradigm in recent years in Europe. There has been an upsurge of strategic plans and 'learning processes' conducted at local level and fostered by the local political administrative bodies in order to understand the 'structure' of their cities. There has also been an upsurge of comparative studies on the 'state of cities' in many European countries – studies also directly promoted by the European Union.<sup>2</sup> The 'European urban agenda' – and the national urban agendas of the member states – currently in preparation is a further step towards improving the knowledge basis for effective urban development policies.

Whilst in Europe the policy discourse on cities and on cities' resilience has become thicker, in Italy it has remained trapped in a 'cognitive lock-in'. Cities have been practically ignored in the policy discourse that has unfolded since 1950s. In the first three decades (1950-1980) the focus was on macro-regional (and regional) performances and when 'local development' became an issue in the late 1980s, it remained confined to the 'industrial districts question' – without acknowledgement that it had to be understood as part of the 'Italian urban question' (Calafati, 2009b; Pichierri, 2002) – and this has not changed in the past two decades.<sup>3</sup>

The Italian urban system – the structures and the development potentials of the cities composing it – has not been researched comprehensively and systematically in the past decades. Moreover, strategic planning – which has been extensively implemented in recent times – has often been based on fanciful representations of the effects of the proposed policies, unconstrained by the empirical evidence that would have been generated by appropriate collective learning processes.

A critical-historical reflection on the roots of the current 'knowledge deficit' on Italian cities may contribute to setting in motion an appropriate scientific research programme on Italian cities. An issue that should be explored – and to which the paper now turns to – is how and why *spatial planning* has come to be dominant in the urban policy discourse in Italy. Indeed, why is proving so difficult to shift to an urban policy paradigm

more appropriate to 'govern' the profound changes in the cities' economic base and in the meta-preferences of local societies?<sup>4</sup>

### URBAN GROWTH AND THE MANAGEMENT OF PROPERTY RIGHTS IN ITALY

The position of cities in the contemporary Italian society (and economy) has been marked by the fact that 'economic growth' in the period 1950-1990 was very strong and spatially highly diffused, and it was manifest in most Italian cities.<sup>5</sup> There were striking differences among the performances of Italian cities in the period 1950-1990 in terms of employment and population growth, yet most of the cities with more than 50,000 residents in the early 1950s recorded 'good', 'very good', or even 'exceptional' performances (see Fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> Cities were 'places' where national growth was manifest, and as long as the Italian economy was growing there was no need to understand why cities were growing. This was not a methodologically sound perspective. Indeed, the striking differences among cities' economic performances should have been a warning as to the importance of understanding the origins of cities' economic performances.

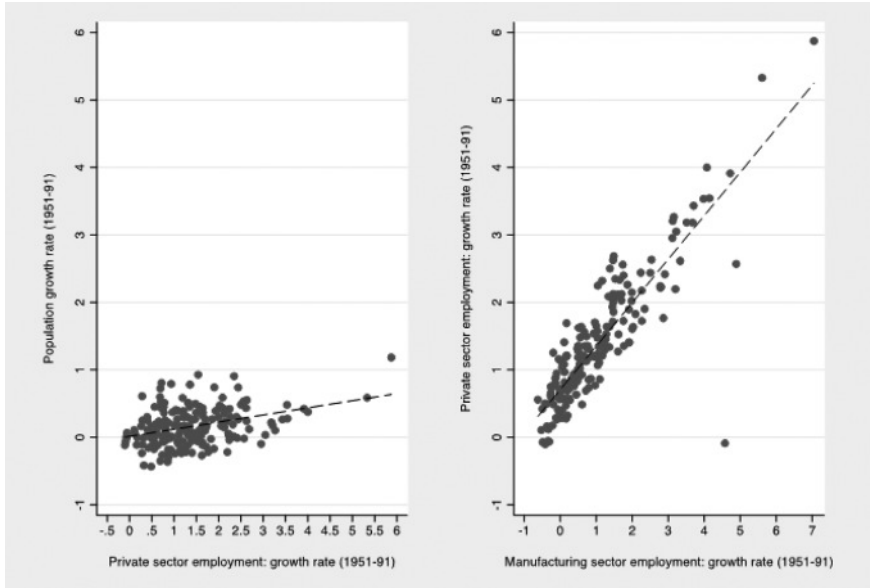


Fig. 1. Population and employment in the Italian urban system: growth rate 1951-91. Source: own calculations based on data from ISTAT ([www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)).

Notwithstanding the empirical evidence available, Italian cities' growth trajectories remained unexplored, and the theoretical implications of their large differences were not discussed.

It was the *expansion of the manufacturing sector* that generated the growth trajectories of Italian cities. It took place in a territorially diffused manner, and it was also manifest in small and medium-sized cities after the early 1950s (vedi Calafati, 2012a).<sup>7</sup> A further channel through which employment growth spread through most of the centres of the highly polycentric Italian urban system was the expansion of the public sector brought about by national economic development – against the background of the 'welfare state consensus' predominant in Italy (and in Europe) until the 1990s. The public sector expanded in every city in order to deliver an increasing amount of services *per capita*. In particular, and independently from the dynamics of the manufacturing sector, it expanded in cities that had the status of 'administrative cities' (provincial and regional capitals), whose activities rapidly increased after the late 1970s as a consequence of political-administrative devolution.

Population growth, employment growth – and the rise in the *per capita* endowment of physical capital – led to an extraordinary expansion in the 'built environment' in practically every Italian city.<sup>8</sup> As direct consequence, a gigantic process of generation and re-allocation of property rights on land and real estate was set in motion. After the failure to introduce a change in land use legislation in the early 1960s – a critical failure that has marked recent Italian history (Crainz, 2005) and continues to be underrated in its long-term social and economic negative implications – the local political-administrative elites *could manage land and real estate property rights without constraints*. And they used the generation, re-allocation and valorisation of property rights as an instrument with which to achieve political consensus. The Italian urban political-administrative bodies, whatever their political orientation, shaped themselves around the management of property rights on land and real estate – accomplishing the task in a more or less democratic way, with different political objectives, and following dissimilar ethical standards (and with a variable 'degree of corruption'). Yet the focus of the political-administrative process was on 'governing' spatial planning. Fostering capital accumulation – and, in particular, preoccupations with up-grading the economic base – was not an issue on the policy agenda. The economic growth of cities was the *natural* spatial manifestation of national growth. Spatial planning was the decision process on which cities

focused and, consequently, to which the learning processes were directed. Spatial planning came to dominate the urban discourse in Italy and shape the 'regulation mode' of Italian cities (Calafati, 2014b).<sup>9</sup>

The scientific and policy interest in the roots of cities' development trajectories was extremely feeble. Moreover, the misplaced stress on 'self-organisation' – which *de facto* promoted the thesis that resilience was a natural attribute of local systems and cities – diverted attention from the deficiency of the prevailing 'regulation mode'. It led to a metaphorical approach to the performances of localities, which were assumed to be by definition systems with a high degree of 'resistance' and 'resilience'. Only rarely was some attention paid to the 'stylized facts' concerning Italian cities' development trajectories which could have raised why-questions different from those which were being addressed in the received interpretation of local development trajectories (Calafati, 2012a, 2012b; Sforzi, 1990) and leading to an over-optimistic assessment of cities' adjustment capacity.

At the beginning of the 1990s – when the 'European project' was entering its phase with straightforward (and acknowledged) implications on 'cities' and 'territories' (Calafati, 2014a) – Italian cities were 'black boxes': their performances were being observed, but not researched in their causes. No knowledge about the roots of their past performances and current development potentials had been built. The management of property rights on land and real estate was the field in which the political-administrative elite had acquired 'sound' knowledge – but regulating cities' development trajectories was a task that could not be performed.

## **THE POLITICS OF TERTIARISATION**

The social and economic context of the Italian economy changed radically in the 1990s when Italy, by promoting and signing the Maastricht Treaty (1992), decided to participate in the globalisation process. The ground had already been prepared in the late 1980s by the introduction of fundamental institutional changes at national level – whose long-term implications are yet to be understood in the political discourse – which opened the way to the integration of the Italian economy into the international financial markets.

The manufacturing sector – marked by a large segment operating with low 'productivity' (value added) per worker – began to exploit the possibility offered by the economic and financial integration to de-localise, partly or entirely, the production process – which was highly vertically

dis-integrated and, therefore, 'ready' to be de-localised. At the same time it also exploited the possibility of employing non-EU citizens: strong demand for immigrant workers by the private sector consolidated – a turning point in the history of the Italian labour market (and society). Indeed, non-EU residents grew at a spectacular rate in Italy after the mid-1990s.

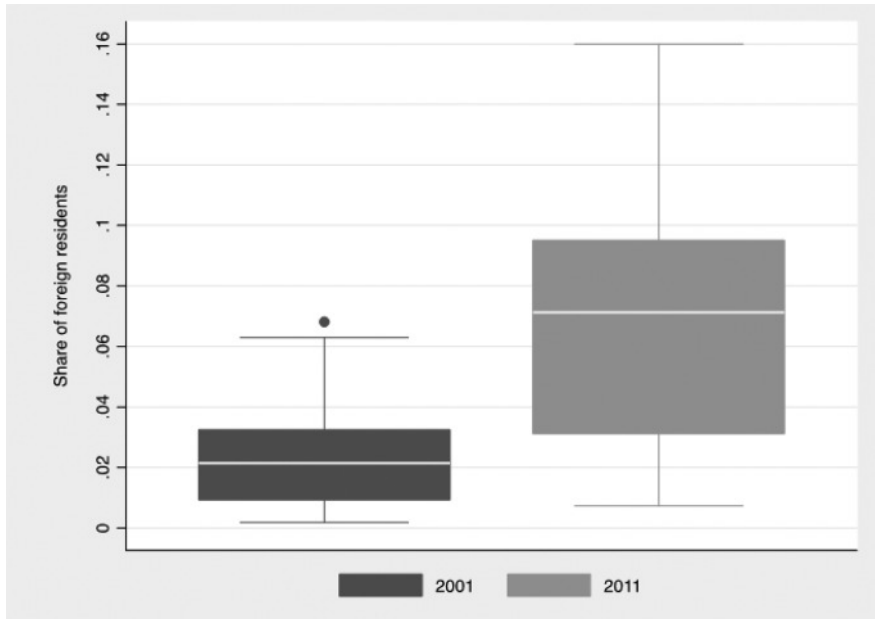


Fig. 2. Foreign residents in the Italian urban system (2001,2011). Source: own calculations based on data from ISTAT ([www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)).

Until the mid-2000s the globalisation of Italian cities apparently proceeded smoothly. The reduction in the demand for native labour by the manufacturing sector, due to de-localisation and the increasing share of non-EU residents in the total labour force, was largely counterbalanced by the *over-expansion* of the 'pension sector' (a significant share of the native labour class was reaching retirement age – often taking early retirement) and of the service sector.<sup>10</sup>

In the late 2000s youth unemployment began to rise steadily. The further fall in the growth rate of the Italian economy after the 2008 world crisis turned youth unemployment into a very severe and persistent imbalance.

Moreover, the attempt to put a halt to the over-expansion of the pension sector – which was evidently unsustainable – by raising the retirement age made youth unemployment spiral – against the background of stagnation of the average *per capita* income brought about by both stagnation of productivity and a decrease in labour demand.

Local political-administrative elites were unprepared to cope with the above-mentioned structural transformations – to the point of not being even able to frame the question. Yet the neo-liberal urban policy paradigm seemed to have a solution for the emerging imbalances. There was a rapid shift from ‘endogenous’ to ‘exogenous’ growth in the local policy discourse in Italy – and ‘city attractiveness’ soon became a key intermediate policy objective following the ‘new wave’ (Florida, 2002, 2008). Tertiariation driven by increased attractiveness rapidly became a key policy concept in the 2000s, being proposed as an easy response to de-industrialisation. There were early critical analysis ((Harvey, 2001), without much impact on the diffusion of the emerging urban policy paradigm. In Italy it was discussed – and it was understood by local political-administrative elites – as a way out of the economic impasse for *practically any type of city*.

In fact, tertiariation is a multi-faceted phenomenon that needs to be qualified in order to understand its dynamics and socio-economic implications. Drawing a distinction – as has to be done – between ‘advanced tertiariation’ and ‘functional tertiariation’ evidences how important the size and structure of cities are in explaining the kind of tertiariation that a city may actually attain. ‘Advanced tertiariation’ refers to the increasing capacity to export locally-produced services; ‘functional tertiariation’ refers to an increase in the production of standard services required to perform transactions that take place in a city. As ‘transaction costs theory’ has shown the ‘functional tertiary sector’ accounts for a significant share of the economy – yet it is certainly not a primary source of economic development (North, 1990).

Focusing on services like those provided by the banking and financial sector, the extreme polarisation in the production of ‘advanced services’ emerging on a global scale was easily conceptualised, giving rise to the notion of ‘global cities’ (Sassen, 2001; The World Bank, 2009). But what often goes unnoticed is that the tendency to spatial polarisation of the ‘advanced services’ is not confined to the bank and financial ones, but is manifest for other kinds of services as well – even though to a less spectacular extent. Moreover, the polarisation of the ‘advanced service

sector' is also important in explaining the dynamics of medium-sized cities, and not only of large or very large ones. This is particularly true in a highly polycentric urban system – like the Italian one, for example – in which distance between urban centres of different sizes may be very low. Most of the tertiarisation processes experienced – often planned – in Italian cities should be conceptualised as 'functional tertiarisation'. In the medium run 'functional tertiarisation' depends on the overall level of activity in the city's economy – it is not a component of its economic base. What should be reflected upon is the impossibility of expanding the non-base sectors – hence, the 'functional service sector' – above a given threshold in terms of value-added. It can happen in terms of employment (as it has in most Italian cities in recent years), but this would imply entering a phase of 'regressive tertiarisation'.<sup>11</sup> It follows that a large number of Italian small- and medium-sized cities now face the problem of finding a position in the new national – and not only international – division of labour as a consequence of the increasing spatial polarisation of the 'advanced service sector'.

## THE ECONOMICS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

The regulation mode of Italian cities has significantly changed as a consequence of the shift of the focus to 'tertiarisation.' 'Urban regeneration projects' have become the key technical and political topics. The building sector and the management of property rights have remained at centre stage, but a significant shift to *spatially circumscribed interventions* has taken place. The notion of 'urban development' has been interpreted as improvements in the quality of specific parts of the city, functional to the expansion of the service sector by increasing city's attractiveness.<sup>12</sup>

'Master plans' and 'projects evaluations' have become the two key dimensions of the new urban policy paradigm that has become dominant in almost every Italian city. These are new policy fields – largely different from the management of property rights on land and real estate – for which local political systems lacked the most elementary administrative (and political) skills. By way of example, the direct negotiation of property rights creation associated with large urban regeneration projects requires technical and moral standards more demanding than the traditional regulatory policies. Likewise, forecasting the medium- and long-term economic and social impact of 'urban regeneration projects' needs advanced skills and knowledge.



The new urban policy paradigm raises a further question: the link between the single project and the overall effect on the city, i.e. on per-capita well-being and on the interpersonal distribution of well-being in the city. 'Strategic planning' has been the 'process' whereby the link between urban regeneration projects and overall cities' performances has been framed. 'Amenities theory', in one of its many variants (Florida, 2008; Storper, 2013), has been extensively used to justify the positive social effects of urban transformation projects and downgrade their negative local spatial consequences (eviction, gentrification, privatisation of public space, overproduction of private spaces), understood as minor side-effects. Causal effects and synergies boosting the effects of regeneration projects have been posited – although often without any attempt to model the underlying theories or corroborate them empirically.<sup>13</sup>

Rather than being based on consensus stemming from the generation and re-distribution of property rights, the new regulation mode associated with strategic planning aims to gain consensus through *persuasion*.<sup>14</sup> Persuasion about the general positive effects of the proposed urban development projects has become the means with which to obtain political consensus. Strategic planning has been the instrument used to frame the policy discourse, invariably suggesting the existence of a *direct* and *strong* relationship between urban development projects and the overall long-term development of cities – a relationship that in most cases has proved to be without any rational foundation (Calafati, 2014b).

The implications for the learning process of the new urban policy paradigm have proved socially disturbing. The 'knowledge deficit' has remained, but it is being obscured by a continuous flow of 'visions' of the Italian cities' future. These visions are often 'exercises in wishful thinking'. A rhetoric of urban development has consolidated, shaping private and collective decisions and interpretations of the state of the Italian cities.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE 'STATE AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF ITALIAN CITIES'**

The Italian urban system has entered the most difficult phase of its recent history. As a consequence of the spatial distribution of the 'national base sector' that consolidated in the 1990s, the structural crisis of the Italian economy is manifest in small, medium and large cities. The economic base of all cities is under stress. Decreasing labour demand and unemployment (youth and long-term unemployment), stagnating productivity per worker

in the manufacturing and service sectors, decreasing *per capita* income, decreasing *per capita* supply of public services and (very) high income and welfare inequalities are imbalances – ‘first-order imbalances’ – that have a straightforward urban dimension (although they are mostly presented and discussed as macro-economic phenomena).

In regard to cities’ ‘second-order imbalances’ – those generated by the intersection of the causal effects of the ‘first-order imbalances’ – the following are apparent: local authorities’ fiscal crises, increasing spatial segregation and exclusion, deterioration of the built environment, decreasing supply and quality of public spaces, and disruption of individuals’ learning processes. Indeed, the spatial (urban) manifestation of the Italian current economic crisis is much more complex than one might think when considering only the standard categorical system used to describe macro-economic performances.

Of the three dimensions of the European urban question – the economic, social and environmental ones – the economic dimension is becoming manifest in Italy with a special severity. The adverse consequences of almost two decades of macro-economic stagnation on cities state and development potential are becoming apparent. Possibly more than any other European country, Italy is in need of an upgrading of its urban policy paradigm. Both local and national authorities should revise their approach to the regulation of cities’ development trajectories.

The ‘knowledge deficit’ about the state and development potential of Italian cities should be urgently addressed. What should no longer be postponed is an encompassing empirical exploration of the ‘structure’ and on-going ‘structural changes’ of Italian cities. This research programme should unfold by traversing disciplinary boundaries; it should develop by relying on the results produced by different methodologies and epistemologies; it should be based on intense discussion among social scientists; it should be strongly policy-oriented; and it should be aimed at producing ‘usable knowledge’ (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979).

The prospect of being forced by the European Union to undertake the task of preparing a ‘national urban agenda’ – and the increased importance that the urban question has been given in the ‘programming period 2014-2020’ of the EU’s structural funds – may prove an incentive to set in motion a learning process on the state and development potential of Italian cities – and to shift to a more appropriate urban policy paradigm.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> It has also made apparent a '*democratic deficit*': the capacity of the political-administrative elites to take societal meta-preferences into account in the governance of change.

<sup>2</sup> See, among other studies, the following: European Commission (Regional Policy) (2007); Deutscher Bundestag (2013); British Government-Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Urban Task Force) (2005); British Government (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) (2006); Deutscher Bundestag (2013).

<sup>3</sup> A recent and innovative exploration of the development potential of (some) Italian cities' was conducted in Casavola and Trigilia (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Spatial planning can be conducted – and has been conducted – according to different paradigms (and different technical competence), with noticeable differences in its social effects. A profound change of paradigm has been proposed as necessary to respond to the impact of the current economic crisis (see among others: Bianchetti, 2008; 2013; Viganò, 2014). Yet it to stress that for decades in Italy spatial planning seemed to be the only field on which to focus with regard to the regulation of cities' development trajectories.

<sup>5</sup> The social and political roots of the spatial diffusion of Italian industrial growth are addressed in two well-known contributions: Bagnasco (1977) and Fuà (1983).

<sup>6</sup> The 'urban system' is here defined as composed of the set of 'cities *de facto*' – i.e. local labour systems as calculated by ISTAT – whose pivot municipalities had populations of more than 50,000 inhabitants in 1951.

<sup>7</sup> This was because the manufacturing sector – especially the sub-sectors in which Italy was specialising – does not necessarily need large agglomerations *in terms of total employment* in order to make agglomeration economies arise. The number of business firms making up the agglomeration was apparently more important – at least in that phase of the Italian capitalism.

<sup>8</sup> For a critical analysis of the territorial dimension of Italy's industrial take-off and economic development see: Lanzani (2011), Lanzani and Pasqui (2011).

<sup>9</sup> More than adjusting the regulation mode to the new challenges, attention concentrated on the issue of expanding the territorial scale of the planning process and property rights management: 'large scale planning' was the fundamental category proposed (Fregolent, 2006). This would have had direct and positive implications on the 'quality' of the allocation of property rights – certainly functional to economic development – but 'large scale (trans-communal) planning' had no significant implementations.

<sup>10</sup> The 'over-expansion' of the service sector is signalled by the striking stagnation (and in some cases reduction) of value-added per worker in this segment of the economy.

<sup>11</sup> Simultaneous processes of increasing employment and decreasing value-added per worker in the service sector are here termed 'regressive tertiarisation'. It is the urban form of 'disguised unemployment'.

<sup>12</sup> One of the most striking consequences of the shift of the focus from spatial planning to urban regeneration has been the loss of control over the aggregate scale of the growth of the built city – making cities much more exposed to over-production in the building sector.

<sup>13</sup> The currently predominant urban policy paradigm suggests focusing on regeneration processes and, by implication, on the 'smart parts' of the Italian cities. Reinterpreting cities in terms of their symbolic places, narrowing the focus of the perspective, is certainly a tactic that urban elites are using to conceal the ensuing urban crises and maintain their position (Secchi, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Property rights are still massively created and redistributed, but in a highly polarised way and, consequently, without the potential to create large political consensus on the basis of a 'direct exchange of mutual benefit' as it happened in the previous phase marked by industrialisation and extensive growth.

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# **GENTRIFICATION AND PUBLIC POLICIES IN ITALY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

'Gentrification' is a term that describes a process of relative re-urbanization in declining urban neighborhoods. It is a process that testifies to the increase of socio-spatial inequalities in urban areas and that well describes the injustice of the neoliberal urban restructuring process that is re-shaping many post-industrial cities.

In Italy the phenomenon, linked with the vicious circle of rent accumulation, has not received proper recognition for its effects on Italian urban metropolitan cores, and it has been under-evaluated for several reasons: because of its historical roots - that see the phenomenon as a complementary and a necessary evil of modernity; or one that is welcomed - for its positive effects in terms of the rehabilitation of building stock and a zero cost regeneration effect.

The paper seeks to contextualize the phenomenon in Italy and to underline the contextual variables that mitigate/worsen the process.

A contextually adjusted gentrification perspective might contribute to the re-framing of a post-crisis housing policy agenda. With this objective in mind, short notes on a possible anti-gentrification policy agenda conclude the paper.

## **GENTRIFICATION**

Gentrification studies have long incorporated critical analysis of contemporary urban changes. Gentrification is a sort of 'relative re-



urbanization' (Piccolomini, 1990) which implies the substitution/displacement of low-income populations and the formation of selective residential enclaves.

Despite its positive interpretation, gentrification is inseparable from its critical core: the denouncement of socio-spatial inequalities resulting from a counter-distributive project (Harvey, 2005) based on exploitation of land values, property revenues and, last but not least, different rates of accessibility to positional goods.<sup>1</sup>

Because of its multidimensional nature, gentrification implies the building stock's rehabilitation and the economic revival of a place. However, it also comes at a high cost for the city: residents are displaced and dislocated (forced or not, directly or indirectly); it is associated with local services and retail substitution; it comes with the increase in housing costs; and, last but not least, encompasses the loss of social diversity. Since its first coinage<sup>2</sup>, 'gentrification' has gone global and can be seen in cities around the world (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005; Lees, 2012 for a critique). However, it is also locally adjusting to contextual variables (Maloutas, 2012), and it is assuming different connotations according to different land regimes and regulatory landscapes.

The convergence with urban regeneration objectives has shifted the attention to gentrification's positive outcomes rather than its negative ones, considering gentrification as an unavoidable/sometimes necessary outcome of urban transformation. For this reason, gentrification has been positively interpreted as a zero cost regeneration process where side-effects are embedded in mixed-income strategies (Shaw, 2008). This positive interpretation is problematic because it erases all alternatives to this neoliberal vision of city life, neutralizing and diverting criticism, as well as the 'political importance of capturing a process of class transformation in the urban context' (Slater, 2006: 744).

In recent years, gentrification scholars have called for a critical repositioning of gentrification studies, as well as for a systematic investigation of strategies to counter the process of gentrification (Lees *et al.*, 2008). This critical repositioning makes it possible to locate gentrification debates in what can be called the post-crisis urban agenda.

## **GENTRIFICATION IN ITALY**

The term 'gentrification' has been used in Italy since the 1990s (Piccolomini, 1993; Bellicini, 1991; Bagnasco, 1990) to describe urban changes that occur

in relation with urban revival and neighborhood regeneration. For example, the waterfront and historic center regeneration of Genoa (Gastaldi, 2003); the regeneration of urban periphery (Annunziata, in press; 2008) and the renaissance of the city centre of Rome (Herzfeld, 2009). Something similar has occurred with the undisputed success of the urban and cultural revitalization of Barcelona where, after years of regeneration enthusiasm, social costs have become manifest (Arbaci and Tapada, 2012).

The term, however, seems to be used in Italy mainly as a descriptive label able to explain the revival of urban areas, softened and disjointed from its critical content.

Italian scholars have described the phenomenon as a 'soft process of social change' (Diappi *et al.*, 2008; Diappi, Bolchi and Gaeta, 2006), arguing that is occurring without displacement. This seems to be evident in Milan, where the phenomenon is also seen as a 'vector of cultural and creative local economy' (Bovone and Mazzette, 2005). However, Manzo argues that, even if displacement does not occur as in Britain and the USA, due to the specificity of housing tenure, the aestheticization of a place resulting from gentrification produces a sort of moral displacement: 'residents feel they do not belong anymore to (their neighborhoods)' (2012b: 23). The absence of displacement, however, does not protect the city from the risk of becoming a sort of selective enclave (Annunziata, 2008). This is the case of the Milanese neighborhood of Sarpi, where the attempt to expel the Chinese population, politically justified in the name of Sarpi's ancient Italian cultural heritage, would deny the history of those who helped transform and create the neighborhood, 'engendering a change of skin and soul' (Manzo, 2012a: 435). In this respect Turin, with the cases of San Salvario and Quadrilatero, provides a more complex and picture where gentrification interweaves with ethnic and immigration issues, as is occurring in many southern European neighborhoods with high ethnic connotations. These types of gentrification seem to occur in relation to cultural and symbolic aspects of consumerism (Semi, 2004) that partially exploit ethnicity as a part of a cosmopolitan allure devoid of real signs of integration (Annunziata, 2011).

Gentrification in Rome, though never called as such since recently, allows a critical repositioning of gentrification in Italy. It must be related with historical development and with the cultural habitus of the roman, the so called '*romanità*' (Scarpelli and Cingolani 2013; Herzfeld, 2009).

In Rome, the gentrification process originated with the development of

the Capital City in the post-Unitarian era when the social physiognomy of the administrative city center became clear. For this reason, we should consider that Rome underwent forms of ante litteram gentrification as a complementary and necessary evil of modernity. Furthermore, in the 1980s the so-called 'heritage paradox' was already manifest: while preserved in its materiality, the city center had lost its social fabric (Babonaux, 2009). This was occurring in spite of an enlightened law for historic city center rehabilitation, which provides incentives for building rehabilitation but also requires that a certain amount of public housing be located in there.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the case of rehabilitation of Bologna's city center has been pivotal and a paradigmatic example of the law's virtuous implementation, with a high involvement of public control and subsidies (Cervellati, 1974), however it has not prevented the Bologna city center from being gentrified in recent decades.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1990s Rome became the stage of a neoliberal economic restructuring process that re-shaped the social geography of the city. The liberalization of the housing market with the abolition of rent control and the alienation of public property, residential and otherwise were enforced by national legislation.<sup>5</sup> These national policies in combination with the refuse of rent control in consolidated urban areas resulted in a generalized 'gentrification of the city'.<sup>6</sup>

Within this nation-wide framework, the city of Rome has undergone a generalized process of gentrification that is state-led and relies on a conservative patrimonialism based on rent accumulation<sup>7</sup>. The city, whose economy largely relies on the real estate market, uncritically took pro-gentrification policies on board<sup>8</sup> considering that the positive effect of gentrification will contribute to releasing the city (and the regional housing managing authority) from its public debt and to boosting its economy. However, contrary to what was expected, this attitude toward unregulated rent accumulation did not result in greater competitiveness. Rather, it produced an increase of private property revenue in central areas, a skyrocketing of real estate markets in the whole city, and the growth of social malaise. Recently, also due to the crisis, the term *gentrification* entered the lexicon of the groups campaigning against evictions and the privatization of the public housing stock.<sup>9</sup>

It is a term that indicates the unaffordability of the housing market in spite of the social housing rhetoric, with a consequent increase of vulnerable citizens and their expulsion from the city. The housing issue is

also worrying the international community, which sees it in relation to a generalized process of gentrification.<sup>10</sup>

Beside, the structural housing shortage in Rome has worsened during the crisis, by austerity measures enacted by the government to face the economic crisis, which has taken the form of a public debt crisis.<sup>11</sup>

Today we can empirically recognize three main geographies of gentrification in Rome: the historic districts of the city center (e.g. Monti, Trastevere); the neighborhoods built in post-Unitarian development of the city (e.g. San Lorenzo, Testaccio, San Saba); and the former working-class periphery (e.g. Pigneto, Garbatella). Each case requires a dense narrative<sup>12</sup> to be explored, and it delineates a different physiognomy of gentrification in Rome where different rates of involvement in the historical development of the city, active public policies, and practices of resistance are manifest.

Each case is different and tells a different story, however, we can recognize some recurring components of the process: gentrification implies the combination of material, immaterial, spatial and cultural capital. It occurs when vacant housing (decaying or not) is available at rental tenure; in well-connected and accessible neighbourhoods with easy access to services; in places that have strong narrative potential related to collective representations that can be re-called as a place making practices and with an high level of sociability. The phenomenon testifies to a plurality of agents that share certain aspirations (desire for urbanity [Annunziata, 2008]) but also engage in conflicting actions.

Furthermore, gentrification in Rome testifies to the indulgence as well as the shortcomings of the public administration in critically understanding the phenomena, with an unquestioned implicit neoliberal project behind the current housing regime.

## **A TAXONOMY OF CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES OF GENTRIFICATION**

Nevertheless the evidence of change in the social physiognomy of the city of Rome and the above-mentioned recurring components of gentrification, the phenomena in Italian cities accounts for contextual adjustment. According to Theodore and Brenner, gentrification can be seen as a practice of neoliberalism embodied by urban area through contextual factors that 'reflect the modes of enforced regulations' (and informality) regarding private property and taxation regimes, rent regulation and housing policies (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Brenner and Theodore, 2005; Brenner, Peck and Theodore, 2010).

| DOMAINS                     | CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES AND CONSEQUENCES ON GENTRIFICATION   | GEOGRAPHY OF GENTRIFICATION IN ITALY   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Land regime</i>          | Land revenues issue, the lack of a land law reform / Housing tenure based on home-ownership as a tool for low-middle class reproduction or safe-haven assets / Low incidence of public housing in the housing market (5%) / Prevalence of small business and commercial activities        | Post-Unitarian Neighbourhood (e.g. San Lorenzo, Rome; Isola, Milan)  |
|                             | Home-ownership prevents displacement / Lack of neighbourhood decline in metropolitan cores / Easy retail substitution   |  |
| <i>Social relations</i>     | A complex social stratification with a large lower-middle class block as a result of: the second world war social contracts; the consensus machine built around the issue of housing property ( <i>blocco edilizio</i> ) / Power of social movements, rise of advocacy for housing rights | Urban periphery - Borgate (e.g. San Lorenzo, Pigneto, Rome; Quadrilatero, Turin)                               |
|                             | High rate of urban and neighbourhood <i>mixité</i> / High rate of neighbourhood sociability / Increasing squatting practices and local claims   |  |
| <i>Cultural disposition</i> | A less linear correlation between class belongings, class reproduction and cultural disposition   | Ethnically diverse neighbourhood as an in-between case (e.g. Pigneto, Rome; Sarpi, Milan; San Salvario, Turin) |
|                             | A complex socio cultural representation of the neighbourhood relying on political affiliation more than class belonging ( <i>the red belt peripheries</i> )   |  |

| DOMAINS              | CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES AND CONSEQUENCES ON GENTRIFICATION  | GEOGRAPHY OF GENTRIFICATION IN ITALY   |
|----------------------|--|--|
| <i>Institutional</i> | Weak role of the state in dealing with rent issues, tax regime and private property rights (e.g. lack of supremacy in the case of vacancies) / Strong connivance between informal and formal practices in housing issues; sale of public housing stock; indulgency towards informal practices as a way to compensate the lack of housing | The case of housing sales in prestigious locations (e.g. Garbatella and Rione Monti, Rome). The cases of squatting in public/private abandoned property for residential purposes |
| <i>Heritage</i>      | Large amount of vacant historical residential housing stock  | Medium and small historic centres registering depopulation, aging and relative re-urbanization. Rural gentrification (e.g. Sassi di Matera, Basilicata)                          |
|                      | The availability of the historical housing stock makes the real estate market more accustomed to gentrification.<br>The availability of 'positive' narratives makes Italian territories accustomed to investment in local development as well as in tourism (e.g. increase in rural gentrification cases)                                |  |

Table 1. Contextual variables in shaping gentrification in Italy.

Several contextual variables, as listed in Table 1, are shaping gentrification in Italian cities and should be considered when we explore the phenomena. Some are mitigating the effect of the process, such as the high rate of homeownership and the level of social mobilization; others are increasing the possibility for a gentrification anchoring phase, such as the high vacancy rate of the historic residential patrimony and the re-calling of narrative potential of places. However, even if contextually adjusted, the generalized outcome of gentrification, namely a counter-redistributive process, remains a point at issue also in Italy.

## AN ANTI-GENTRIFICATION POLICY AGENDA?

A policy agenda that seeks to counter the gentrification effect is needed to guarantee social diversity in urban areas. The effects of gentrification today combine with – and are emphasized by – the economic crisis and the consequent austerity behaviours of nation-states. Due to the crisis, cities are deprived of the financial resources needed to phase the re-framing of the housing question and to counter the socio-spatial inequalities produced by the neoliberal urban restructuring process.

Anti-gentrification practices might be the responses. They are not new, they were explored by Marcuse for their juridical implications already in 1985. Examples of anti-gentrification practices come from New York, San Francisco, Vancouver, Amsterdam and Berlin. These practices vary from acts of solidarity and awareness campaigns regarding the effects of gentrification (e.g. the campaigns of neighbourhood activist) to more structured forms of resistance intended to inform urban policies (e.g. policies that encourage the self-repair and re-use of publicly-owned unused property or the seizure of unoccupied private property for public purposes). They suggest the opportunity to re-use unoccupied houses in vacant urban areas and implies the implementation of active public policies. However, only in recent years has anti-gentrification become a political discourse.<sup>13</sup>

Among the social practices that deal with anti-gentrification policies, or in other terms with affordability of housing and habitability of the city by the less affluent social strata, we can recognize three main families:

- *political*: understating of the evolution and assessment of social movements and collective organizations that advocate housing via squatting and political campaigns (main goal: the universalization of housing rights);
- *procedural*: assessment by local active groups and local institutions that participate in the design of neighborhood plans able to reproduce common goods (such as housing) as well as to nurture alternative visions of urban development (main goal: alternatives to current modes of transformation);
- *juridical and regulatory*: preventing evictions (legitimation of squatting action/ anti-displacement zones); challenging the institution of private property in the case of vacancy; challenging property taxation regimes/de-taxation regimes in the case of affordable rentals (main

goal: reform of housing policies).

Those practices require recognition and systematic investigation of their potential to the re-framing of a post-crisis housing policy reform; one that fully addresses the complex housing demand that characterize the housing question today.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In 1990 Piccolomini introduced the term in Italy with a critical formulation of the notion of positional good: 'Quello che conta nel meccanismo di produzione del capitale non è la rendita potenziale in sé, ma i redditi e le rendite già presenti e già in possesso che, mediante un meccanismo di feedback positivo, rinforzano ad ogni passaggio la posizione gerarchica di alcuni a vantaggio di altri' (Hirsh in Piccolomini, 1993: 78).

<sup>2</sup> The term 'gentrification' was coined in London in 1964 to describe the displacement from inner city neighborhoods of working-class residents who were replaced by new middle- and upper-class residents (Ruth, 1964). For better understanding of the critical core of gentrification see Smith and Williams (1986), Lees *et. al.* (2008; 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Law 5 Agosto 1978, n. 457, *Norme per l'edilizia residenziale*. Art. 32: "[...] i comuni sono tenuti a stimare la quota presumibile degli interventi di recupero del patrimonio edilizio esistente e a valutarne la incidenza ai fini della determinazione delle nuove costruzioni previste nei programmi stessi [...] i proprietari assumono l'impegno di dare in locazione una quota delle abitazioni recuperate a soggetti appartenenti a categorie indicate dal comune, concordando il canone con il comune medesimo ed assicurando la priorità ai precedenti occupanti".

<sup>4</sup> See the video on gentrification of Pratello, Bologna available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwXR78AM6oQ>.

<sup>5</sup> Law 24 Dicembre 1993, n. 560, *Norme in materia di alienazione degli alloggi di edilizia residenziale pubblica*. This legislation defines the framework in which the privatization of public estate should be achieved. It establishes that the regional government will administer the alienation plan for a minimum of 50% and a maximum of 75% of the total property.

<sup>6</sup> The reference is to *Gentrification of the city* and the rent gap theory elaborated by Neil Smith: the sale of housing owned by the city was subject to a rent gap exploitation resulting from the gap between the Cadastral rent, at which the sale price was set, and the potential re-sale at market value. A problem partially addressed in 2013 by a cadastral reform (Catasto, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> This attitude has almost constantly characterized the Italian urban land regime since the unification. See Salzano (1998) and Oliva (1997). The rental income issue has been recently re-proposed by Tocci (2009).

<sup>8</sup> This attitude finds its equivalent in other European cities. In 2008 a special issue of *Urban Studies* was devoted to gentrification policies. The issue showed how gentrification has become an active part of public policy based on a gentrification blueprint that is contextually adjusted (Lees and Ley, 2008).



<sup>9</sup> The first chapter of *In prima persona. Lotte e vertenze dei comitati territoriali del Lazio* edited by journalists Nalbone and Sina, Alegre, 2010, is devoted to gentrification. The term has been extensively used by the *Comitato di Quartiere Pigneto* (CdQP) during an anti-eviction campaign in favor of the Senegalese community. They also organized a public debate discussing the book *Paesaggi dell'esclusione: politiche degli spazi, re-indigenizzazione e altre malattie del territorio romano*, Pompeo (Eds.). UTET, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> 'From 1991 to 2011 the process of gentrification has forced more than 300.000 resident to leave the core of the city toward the metropolitan area'. From a Report of the International Advisory Group on Forced Evictions established by the UN-HABITAT in 2004 (available at <http://www.unhabitat.org/campaigns/tenure/articles/>).

<sup>11</sup> Austerity measures are policy of draconian budget cuts taken by national governments and the city to reduce expenditures in an attempt to shrink their growing budget deficits. Behind the austerity measure the assumption that the economic crisis is linked with a crisis of debt. See Blyth (2013).

<sup>12</sup> Detailed narratives can be found in Annunziata (in press; 2011) and Cremaschi, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> I refer to the current work of Loretta Lees *An Anti-Gentrification Toolkit for London* (with Just Space, SNAG and The London Tenants Federation) part of her Antipode Activist Scholar Award.

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# **NEW SKILLS, JOBS CHANGE, AND URBAN INNOVATION. BEYOND URBAN HIERARCHIES IN LOMBARDY'S CITIES**

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## **TOPICS: THE CITIES' GEOGRAPHY AND SPACES OF SKILLS**

This paper is devoted to a preliminary investigation of the forms of human capital that characterize cities at different levels of the urban hierarchy in Lombardy, the most economically dynamic region in Italy.

A first analytical exercise on human capital (Excelsior survey 2013, Italian Union of the Chambers of Commerce Unioncamere) shows that, for Italy as a whole, recruitment expected for 2013 concerns nearly 97,000 high-skilled jobs (managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals), which correspond to 17% of total recruitment. The highest share in the total is taken by service workers and shop and sales workers, with over 194,000 units (34%).

Alongside the tertiarisation of the Italian economy, and the crisis of the traditional manufacturing sector, over recent years labor demand has become increasingly concentrated in tertiary activities, amid a general decline of labor demand after the 2008 credit crunch.

A large part of the international literature – in particular that focused on the creative talents approach (Florida, 2002) – over the last two decades suggests that significant shares of total employment in major metropolitan areas are concentrated in high-level service and cultural activities; in smaller metropolitan areas, by contrast, overall employment profiles seem to be dominated by manufacturing, though small metropolitan areas also display variation in regard to their individual forms of economic specialization. Is this true also of the Italian urban economy?

This paper examines this hypothesis by exploring the geography of skills/urban change nexus through the variations in different types of skills across a regional urbanization hierarchy and beyond a metropolitan one. Following Scott (2009; 2012) the paper deals with several questions on the relationship between human capital and cities. How do workers' cognitive and physical human capital endowments change in relation to urban size? What exceptions, if any, can be found, and what can they tell us about the logic and dynamics of urban economic development and/or shrinkage? Is urban size a useful lens? These questions are all the more urgent in view of the circumstance that our knowledge about the geography of skills and local labor market structures in medium and small cities remains much more limited than our knowledge about the urban economy as a system of sectorally and occupationally differentiated production. Frequently, the literature and analyses tend to concentrate on rather narrow categories – white-collar versus blue-collar, or high-wage versus low-wage workers, or core versus periphery (Pompili, 1992) – in a static scalar trap in which “existing scalar vocabulary is poorly equipped to grasp the complex, changing interconnections and interdependencies among geographical scales” (Brenner, 2009: 69) and labor markets.

These categorizations are not completely wrong, but they mask a variation in employment patterns in cities and territories. In the same way, much of the literature has previously focused to a marked extent on rather one-dimensional measures of human capital in cities, which is understandable given the limited amount of data available on this topic. Human capital is most often identified in the empirical literature simply in terms of educational attainments linked with the fixed province levels. Nonetheless these reassuring geo-historical stabilities help very little in understanding the contemporary urban conditions and the space/skills nexus. Can we move beyond these limitations to achieve levels of descriptive complexity that shed new light on urban change and urban labor markets? In Table 1, for instance, the Excelsior survey focuses on non-job specific technical skills, skills that are shared by a wide range of jobs and that are required by employers when recruiting new employees.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

It is widely recognized that a shift occurred in basic technologies and industrial organization in the Western countries after the third quarter of the twentieth century. Scholars have identified the new order that began

to emerge at that time in many different terms, including post-Fordism, flexible specialization or the new economy; but almost all agree on the central point that it can be understood, at least in part, as a turn toward relatively de-standardized forms of production and more flexible labor markets compared with the Fordist economic system of earlier decades. Recent studies have suggested that much of this turn can be accounted for in terms of the rise of a new division of labor consequent on the progressive substitution of digital technologies for routinized work tasks. A complementary perspective argues that we are moving rapidly into an era of cognitive capitalism, cognitive-cultural economy (Scott, 2012), and furthermore of a 'new industrial revolution' (Marsh, 2012).

Recent works on urban studies have a) proposed that the new economy and innovation that have come into being in this manner are concentrated in large cities or city-regions; b) tried to explain why some cities do better in attracting skilled labor than others and what triggers the divide between more and less skilled cities (Storper, 2013).

Thrift (2000) reminds us that 'one size does not fit all': cities are not standardized entities. In what follows, I shall explore this background by focusing on the multidimensional human-capital attributes that characterize work activities in the economy of Lombardy's cities at the present time, and the ways in which these attributes vary relative to city size. Starting from human capital, the aim of the paper is to detect the different scales of the urban, but also to analyze the pitfalls in which databases and statistical analysis can fall.

The paper deals with five main questions. First, what is the precise human-capital content of the cognitive and cultural labor of Lombardy's cities at the present time? Second, how can we characterize physical and manual varieties of human capital in today's society? Third, what is the expression of these human capital variables in the Lombardy urban system, and above all, in relation to the hierarchical structure of that system (Milan versus other small metropolitan areas)? Fourth, what is the changing profile of these phenomena over time, how (and why) is the human capital content of work in Lombardy's cities shifting? Fifth, is a focus on human capital an additional substantial subject that what has been occurring to Italian cities is best described as a shift from a typically 'metropolitan style' of urban development and change to a basically regional urbanization process (Soja, 2011)? Answers to these questions will likely drive our understanding of urban economic dynamics significantly

forward, and they should help to enhance the current debate on the role of human capital in urban development and in future urban studies.

The suggestion, both conceptual and empirical, that innovation is closely linked with cities – indeed, that it stems from cities – seems dominant. And it is well known that new industries tend to emerge in the urban field (Shearmur, 2012). However, there is also a growing body of arguments suggesting that the hierarchies of cities' sizes is somewhat overestimated. In the next section, the paper will therefore cover some of the theses and empirical results that examine this narrative, in particular in the Italian area.

### **PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS FROM THE SURVEY: WHAT DO FIRMS WANT?**

Robinson's (2002) discussion of cities 'off the map' underlines an urban theory that not only accounts for a wider variety of cities but also raises a broader variety of research topics, questions and policy concerns and initiatives to be considered. While awaiting the Istat database (it will be published in 2014), I will draw on the Excelsior Survey 2013, which is a small and limited, but interesting starting point. Every year (since 1997) the Excelsior survey covers a sample of over 100,000 private enterprises operating in Italy (180,000 private enterprises per quarterly survey) and provides detailed information on the characteristics of the labor demand in the country. The data available cover several qualitative aspects, among which:

- the specific occupations that employers are looking for;
- the educational level and the field of studies required;
- the preferred age of candidates;
- the experience;
- the need to provide post-entry training;
- the difficulty of enterprises in recruiting the profiles required.

The field of observation is the private enterprises registered in the Chambers of Commerce Register of Companies that, on average in 2010, had at least one employee, with the exception of:

- the operational units of the public administration;
- public companies in the health sector (hospitals, ASL, etc.);
- public primary and secondary schools;
- public universities;

- the membership organizations.

In the following tables there is a preliminary brief focus on skills in Lombardy's provinces according to the Excelsior survey. The tables show, also in the traditional middle-size cities, the high demand for high-skilled workers (for seasonal profile) that challenges the traditional interpretations. It is an undeniable fact that research on urban and regional change is saturated with statements formulated with numbers and databases. Sometimes these types of exercise provide only a raw picture of the multifaceted systems. In particular, there is a feasible mismatch between firms' expectations and the actual labor market.

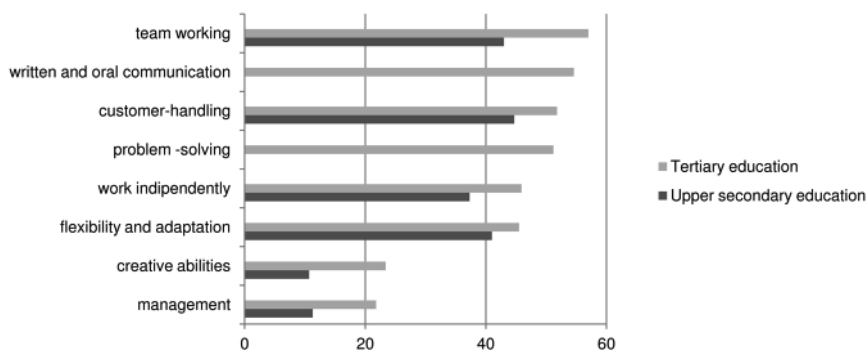


Table 1. Generic skills that enterprises consider 'very important' for candidates with tertiary and upper secondary education (as % of total), national level, 2013.

|                   | Managers, senior officials | Professionals | Technicians and associate professionals | Clerk workers |
|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------|---|---------------|
| Bergamo           | 260                        | 740           | 860                                     | 180           |
| Brescia           | 140                        | 2320          | 740                                     | 610           |
| Monza and Brianza | 120                        | 530           | 190                                     | 130           |
| Milan             | 790                        | 2950          | 1320                                    | 750           |

Table 2. Recruitments of seasonal and professional profiles, ISTAT, 2013. Total hired by city and for groups.



## FUTURE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

The paper has sought to show how certain crucial kinds of human capital assets are differentially distributed among Lombardy's cities.

Starting from the insights of databases, we can evoke a key argument framed by Peter Taylor (2004) and recalled by Saskia Sassen (2008) concerning cities that derive their location from global networks (which comprise multiple, specialized networks) rather than only from their position in the hierarchy. This opens up a research agenda in urban studies beyond city hierarchies. It also focuses a contribution of urban studies on social innovation research.

In a next phase of investigation, a wider range of explanatory variables should be considered (e.g. the Istat Census 2011 on Population, but also on Industry and Services). In spite of these difficulties, the analysis confirms that the urban hierarchy, as such, is a place of systematic and heterogeneous variations in economic activity, and that we can trace these variations in terms of the occurrence of different types of human capital that may contest the inherited scalar hierarchies entrenched in the vast majority of databases.

Scales have a descriptive and interpretative function in relationship with spatial phenomena (Secchi, 2002). Nonetheless, we may ask, are not also transcalarity, multiscalarity, transcalarity, interscalarity (such terms above all articulate different processes) keys to interpreting urban and job change? One emergent issue is, rather than searching for a particular geographical pattern that produces innovations (Shearmur 2012), we should try to understand how a variety of (urban, non-urban, post-urban, sub-urban) spaces contribute to the formation of social innovation.

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# **SMALL CITIES OF DIFFERENCE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

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This paper is set against the background of the increasing cultural and ethnic pluralisation of Italian society. In the past, migration in Italy was considered a phenomenon mainly regarding large cities, particularly Milan and Rome. Since the 1990s, however, a growing number of migrants have settled in smaller cities, induced to do so by Italy's scattered urbanization. The latest population census (ISTAT, 2011) revealed that the percentage of migrants residing in municipalities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants is very significant (61.4%). Furthermore, the 20th Statistical Dossier on Immigration (Caritas/Migrantes, 2010) highlights that, among the 25 municipalities with the highest percentages of migrants, no large cities were included in the list. If we consider not only the overall number but the flows of migrants, we see that from 2002 to 2011 there has been a greater increase of migrants in cities with a population from 5,000 to 50,000 inhabitants (262.2%) than in large cities with more than 250,000 inhabitants (189.6%).<sup>1</sup>

The flows of international migrants to small-size cities are not just an Italian phenomenon (Cancellieri, 2014). They are also occurring in other Western countries, such as Greece (Kasimis, 2008), UK (Rogaly, 2004), Spain (Morén-Alegret, 2008), Canada and the USA (Fennelly, 2008). We can say that the emergent geographies of ethnic diversity are becoming increasingly dispersed, with a movement away from the inner city areas in which migrant settlement have been long established.

Despite this emerging trend, the large majority of scholars consider only

large cities as places of 'living with difference' (Valentine, 2008) and see small cities as folk societies (Redfield, 1947) isolated from the dynamics of globalization (this presumed condition in some cases creates an idealization, in others a 'stigmatization', of small cities).

As a result, little attention has been paid to the challenges that small-size cities face given the increasing social, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity of their populations.

### **WHAT IS A SMALL CITY?**

Thresholds for defining small-size cities vary from country to country: in Italy, the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) refers to small-size cities as places with no more than 5,000 inhabitants; according to the 2001 Spanish Population Census, small cities are municipalities with between 10,001 and 25,000 inhabitants (Morén-Alegret, 2008); in the USA, the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) speaks of 'micropolitan areas' referring to the territories centred on a core town with a population of 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. In this regard, Lorentzen and van Heur (2011: 15) emphasize the need to understand 'smallness in a relational as well as contextual sense', moving from a size to a scale perspective.

This paper refers to *relatively* small urban territories vis-à-vis their regional and Italian context. Moreover, in Italy, major differences exist among small cities, and we do not use the concept of 'small city' as an essence but as a heuristic concept in Kantian terms: it 'does not give us any information respecting the constitution of an object, it merely indicates how, under the guidance of this idea, we ought to *investigate* the constitution and the relations of objects in the world of experience' (Kant, 1855: 411). Indeed, there are many different kinds of small cities consisting of various dimensions: territorial (e.g. proximity to a big city), economic (e.g. industrial district/agriculture-based economy), political (e.g. leftist/Catholic-conservative subculture), cultural (e.g. a historical/new small city) and those related to transport infrastructures (e.g. proximity to the train station). Evidently we must consider these various dimensions if we are to fully understand the concept of 'small city'.

### **THE PRIN PROJECT**

Small cities in central and north-eastern Italy have been the core of the second wave of Italian growth based on industrial districts: a social and

economic model of which the social capital of the territory has been the primary development factor (the so-called NEC model [Storper, 1997]). The percentage of migrants within the entire resident population is, on average, higher in these cities because they carry out the jobs normally refused by Italian workers due to the low wages and poor working conditions (Murat and Paba, 2004). Today, the overall decline of district-based firms and the consequent growth of unemployment are generating a dangerous downward spiral for small cities and their populations (ESPON, 2006). Small cities with large percentages of migrants face a number of unique and difficult challenges that have remained largely hidden and neglected by research and policy.

This paper focuses on these specific risks and opportunities, starting from the assumption that the governance of migration can be a litmus test for the ability of cities to address some challenges of this socio-economic crisis. The paper springs from a newly established PRIN project (Italian Research Programs of Relevant National Interest), called *Small-size Cities and Social Cohesion: Policies and Practices for the Social and Spatial Inclusion Of International Migrants*. This is an interdisciplinary project which involves urban planners (University IUAV of Venice, University of Reggio Calabria, University of 'Roma 3'), demographers (Marche Polytechnic University of Ancona), anthropologists (University of Ferrara) and sociologists. The project examines how the 'smallness' of many urban contexts affects the social and spatial inclusion of migrants.

## **CONVERTING RISKS INTO OPPORTUNITIES?**

Many small cities with a large presence of migrants have seen a growing social and institutional opposition to the trend. In many cases, migrants are perceived as illegitimate members of 'homogeneous' communities (Neal *et. al.*, 2013), resulting in strong exclusionary mechanisms. It is no coincidence that small cities are usually the main territories where anti-migrant parties like the Northern League have built their strongholds. Furthermore, the mayors of small cities approved the majority of the exclusionary ordinances allowed by the security package created by the center-right government in 2008 (Ambrosini, 2012) to increase urban security. The reference is in particular to the mayors' ordinances against the presumed inappropriate uses of public spaces, many of which can be considered as explicitly targeting migrants.

At the same time, small cities attempt to avoid being marginalized on the

global stage. In recent years, with the emergence of an economy based on knowledge and culture and with the ubiquitous presence of new means of communication, some scholars have highlighted the cultural and relational potential of the migrant presence in small cities. Migrants have international connections and easy access to their homelands, as well as their homelands' markets. Young migrants are especially advantaged because they can often speak several languages and have familiarity with a plurality of international spaces. These competences and global networks are usually disregarded by research and policy. Considering the increasing role of knowledge, culture and interconnections, could migrants be an asset in SCD not just as workers in 3D jobs? Could migrants' linguistic, social and spatial capital be latent resources for small cities that could be analyzed, harnessed and empowered?

In addition, Italian small cities are generally characterized by a strong place-attachment. As mentioned before, this traditionally involves a closed localism, conservatism and traditionalism that tend to mobilise and incorporate a nostalgic vision of an imagined homogenous society.

Small cities' identities are considered to be 'under attack' by the increasing presence in everyday life spaces of migrants who are considered 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996) and are accused of 'socio-geographical transgression' (Cancellieri and Ostanel, 2014). Indeed, through their mapping and remapping of urban spaces, migrants transform the urban fabric of small cities of which they are a part: they are spatial actors in that they try continuously to use and give new significance to urban spaces in order to search out symbolic as well as material resources. By doing so, they reaffirm a meaningful relationship with their environment (Brown *et al.*, 2003) and create new place attachments.

Migrants are often the 'adaptive capacity' of a city in the sense that the resources and energies invested by the migrant population can contribute to making spaces more alive both physically and economically. As recently underlined by Jentsch and Simard (2009), migrants can often bring determination and other assets able to breathe new life into small cities. Policies and regulations should thus consider the social and spatial needs of the migrant population.

A local identity does not imply a static attitude and closure to newness (Lazzeroni *et al.*, 2012). Rather, it can be explicitly referred to a place attachment 'stretched' by populations that are partly shifting and diverse: a new place attachment inserted in the local history but not based on

a pure community with a presumed single and closed identity (Massey, 1995). In this regard, some scholars invite us to recognize ‘unpanicked’ everyday encounters in multicultural local environments – the so-called everyday multiculturalism (Amin, 2002; Wise and Velayutham, 2009) that could be supported to build a new intercultural narrative and image of small cities (of difference).

In conclusion, small cities of difference face more threats than large cities and metropolitan areas because they have more exclusionary potential, have some limits of scale, and are traditionally more marginal.

Nevertheless, in many ways, with their liveability, geographical embeddedness and historical character, small cities may also be more manageable and thus better able to identify and reinterpret their multicultural potential (van Heur, 2011).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> ISTAT data elaborated by ANCI-IFEL.

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# RELEVANCE AND EVOLUTION OF MUSLIM SPATIALITIES IN CHANGING ITALIAN CITIES

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## IMMIGRATION AND RELIGION IN ITALY

When analysing the evolutionary trajectories of Italian cities, it is essential to consider the impact of migration on the urban context. However, immigration in Italy is usually studied as a unitary process or it is disaggregated by its ethnic characteristics; seldom, if ever, is it analysed with reference to religion. However, a large proportion of migrants in Italy bring with them a religion different from the majority Catholic religion; in many cases, this different religion has a *specific* and *significant* impact on the urban space. This is the case of Islam.

In 2012, there were about 1,650,000 Muslims in Italy (about 33% of all foreigners) (Caritas & Migrantes, 2012) – in 2001 there were about 500,000 (hence, in a decade, their numbers increased by 230%). Today, the largest Muslim communities in Italy are Moroccans (510,000), Albanians (500,000), Egyptians (120,000), Tunisians (120,000) and Bangladeshis (110,000) (ISTAT, 2011). The number of Muslims in Italy will increase in the coming years as a result of further migration flows from Muslim countries as well as natural growth: in 2030 there will probably be more than 3 million Muslims in Italy.

As a consequence, we can state that today Islam is the second most important religion in the country. The great majority of these Muslims are not in Italy temporarily, but rather have come with the intention of staying for the rest of their lives: the Muslim presence must now be considered an

internal and enduring element of the Italian socio-cultural setting (Allievi, 2000a, 2000b).

### THE SPECIFICITY OF ISLAMIC SPATIALITY

People from Muslim countries are certainly not the only migrants who bring with them a religion different from the majority Catholic religion. Nevertheless, the relationship of Muslim migrants with urban space is different from that of migrants of other religions (e.g., Sikhs and Hindus). There are three main reasons for this fact:

Firstly, for Muslims, religion (not only ethnicity) is an important pillar on which they build their identity as migrants. There are many reasons for this: for instance, the aspiration to *Ummah* and the hostility of the hosting countries, which generates defensive reactions and reinforces Muslim identity (Nielsen, 2000).

Secondly, unlike other ethnic minorities, the Muslim pattern of residence is sprawling rather than concentrated. Muslims do not tend to create religious neighbourhoods. The main reason is that they come from a variety of countries (i.e. from countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, and the Balkans); they are a *set of communities* rather than a single community (Peach, 2006). But, like other ethnic minorities, each single Muslim community also tends to settle in the urban space according to its origin, language, or familial ties. However, the sum of the different localisations of each single Muslim community produces an overall scattered pattern of localisation for Muslims taken as a whole. In Italy, specific studies on the residential patterns of Muslim migrants are lacking, but a preliminary analysis of the case of Milan seems to confirm this idea (Figure 1).

Thirdly, also in the cases in which the Muslim presence is residentially concentrated in certain areas of a city, the relationship of Islam with the urban space is branched, spilling out of ethnic neighbourhoods (Dassetto, 1996). The reason is not only that Muslim places are scattered all around the city (sometimes regardless of the residential pattern of the Muslim population), but also the fact that Muslim spatiality does not express itself in a spatially or temporally confined manner: it also consists of forms of public life (e.g. behaviours and ways of dressing) that may be encountered everywhere, in popular neighbourhoods as well as in the historic city centre or in commercial or touristic areas.

These facts have major impacts on urban spaces. For instance, as a

consequence, some religious spaces have become central spaces for all the (sprawling) Muslim communities of a city (or metropolitan area), exerting a centripetal force on them. Very often, these spaces trigger an 'Islamic threshold effect' (Allievi, 1999b): they make visible the presence of Muslims in a city and therefore tend to generate opposition and protests by local residents and authorities.

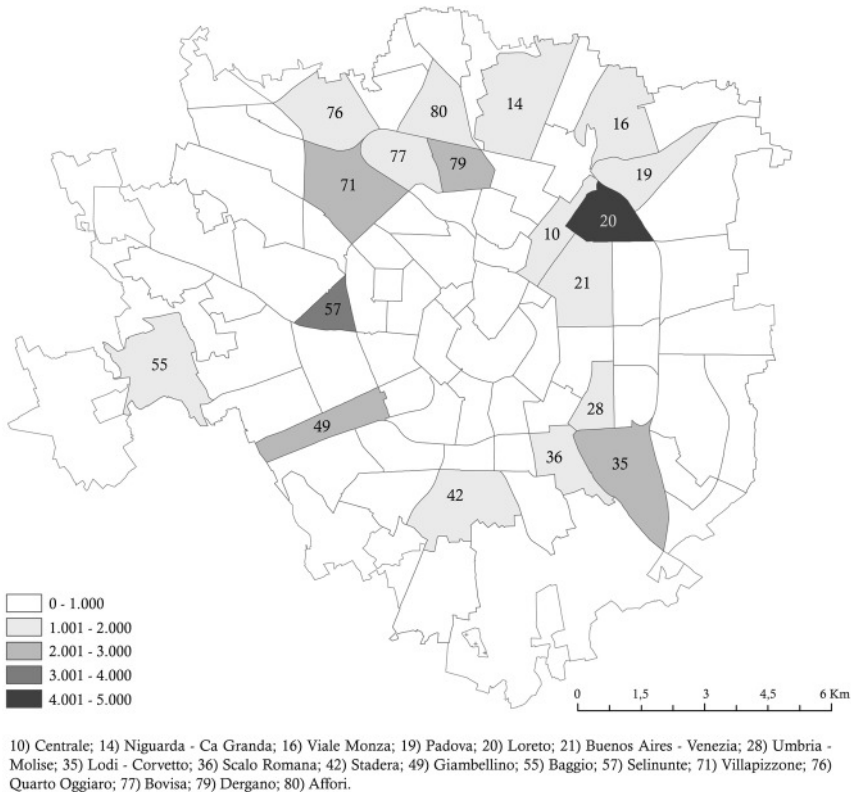


Fig. 1. Distribution of Muslims in Milan (absolute numbers). Source: elaboration by the author from Comune di Milano.

### THE SPATIALITIES OF ISLAM IN ITALY

We can identify four main landmarks of Islamic spatiality in Italy: places of worship, halal butcheries, graveyards, and forms of public life.

*Places of worship.* In Italy, there are three kinds of Islamic places of worship: *musallas* (small prayer rooms, sometimes temporary, usually located in former apartments, shops, or warehouses; they often have no recognisable external signs), purpose-built mosques (*ad hoc* mosques, usually with visible signs such as domes or minarets), and Islamic centres (places created with declared functions other than prayer). All these places perform a variety of functions: religious as well as social, cultural and recreational. Moreover, they provide a welcome and social assistance to newcomers and deprived people (Germain & Gagnon, 2003; Kong, 2010). Also for this reason, they are often places that, at the same time, *attract* and *irradiate* the surrounding urban area with Islam: different people for different reasons attend these places of worship at different times; therefore, small retail stores are situated around the places of worship (for instances, halal butcheries and religious goods stores) (Dassetto, 1996).

In Italy, there are around 900-1,000 Islamic places of worship (one for every 1,500-1,700 Muslims). This figure is roughly comparable to that of other European countries and to that of places of worship of the dominant Christian religion in these countries: thus, we can state that, from a merely quantitative point of view, there is no problem regarding a lack of religious freedom for Muslims in Italy (Allievi, 2009). However, a qualitative problem exists, as testified by the fact that *musallas* represent almost the entirety of Muslim places of worship in Italy – while there are only three purpose-built mosques in Italy, there are around 200 of them in France (over 2,100 Muslim places of worship in total) and 100 (over 432) in the Netherlands (Allievi, 2010). Even if *musallas* satisfy the everyday needs of Muslims, they do not achieve their objectives of public recognition, visibility and dignity of Islam in the cities (Metcalf, 1996).

The case of Milan is paradigmatic. In 2012, there were 60,000 (registered) Muslims living in the city, but there is not yet one single purpose-built mosque – according to some research, there are 15 *musallas*. Consequently, Muslims must pray in inappropriate places, in particular during specific occasions (sidewalks, parking lots, or, when allowed, the PalaSharp and the Civic Arena during Ramadan).

*Islamic Butcheries.* Halal (or Islamic) butcheries are another important landmark of Islam in non-Muslim countries. Their existence is related to specific ritual needs regarding meat consumption in Western countries. They can be considered an outright invention of contemporary Islam in countries where it is a minority religion (Benkheira, 1995): the butcher,

who has just an ordinary job like many others in the Islamic countries, becomes in the migration countries a symbol of religious identity in the food sphere (Barberis, 2004). Today, Islamic butcheries are an enduring presence in the urban environment of many European cities (Bergeaud-Blacker, 2005). In Italy, they have settled and spread since the 1990s and nowadays exist in the vast majority of Italian cities (there are no precise data on their numbers).

*Islamic graveyards.* Islamic graveyards are another significant landmark of Islamic spatiality. Today, Muslims in Italy still prefer to return the body of a deceased person to his/her native country. However, the need for Muslim graveyards will certainly increase in the coming years due to the stabilising of the Islamic presence in Italy, and in particular as a consequence of the growth of the second and third generations of Muslims. In many Italian cities, Muslim graveyards already exist – in the majority of cases they constitute a specific area within a pre-existing Catholic graveyard (Bombardieri, 2011). Their number and capacity are just barely sufficient for present needs, but this may not be the case in the future, particularly if specific policies are not adopted focusing on the creation of Muslim graveyards.

*Forms of Muslim public life.* Islam in the urban space is also expressed through a particular appearance or behaviour. 'The body is the site of inscription of religious and social values' (Kong, 2010, p. 757). The Islamic headscarf is the best known, most problematic, and most discussed example. But it is not the only one. Consider, for instance, the long beards and shaved heads of some worshippers or the long tunics of some men. Or consider certain signs of respect and greeting, certain ways of walking through public space (e.g. first men, then women), and certain behaviours related to religious feasts (e.g. prayers and fasting during Ramadan) (Dassetto, 1996). A major role is also played by written and spoken language (e.g. particular expressions such as *insha'Allah* or *salam aleikum*); the Arabic language has been historically considered a perceivable symbol of Islam (Metcalf, 1996).

## **PERSPECTIVES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The Muslim presence in Italy is not static; on the contrary, it is changing rapidly. As a consequence, Muslim spatiality is changing rapidly as well. The main phenomenon in this regard is probably the growth of the



second and third generations of Muslims in Italy. They are still not very significant from a quantitative point of view (they represent only 1% of the overall population, compared to 13.5% in France and 8.8% in the UK). But they are bound to increase in numbers and importance. In 2002, 33,000 children were born from foreign parents in Italy; in 2011, the figure was 80,000 (Caritas & Migrantes, 2012). The second and third generations of Muslims will contribute to fostering a process of Europeanisation and normalisation of Islam in Italy (Allievi, 1999a, 2000a). Furthermore, with increasing intensity they will demand integration and legitimisation of the Muslim spaces in Italian cities.

With regard to this phenomenon, we may state that we are today in a transition period in the relationship between Islam and the Italian city. This relationship is moving from a previous phase of 'mimetic and peripheral settlement' (characterised by the building of Muslim places that are rather invisible, and usually informal and peripheral) to a subsequent phase: Islam is looking for visibility, recognition and dignity in the public space, in particular through the visibility of mosques (we could name this phase 'contested visibility', because it is characterised by harsh conflicts with local authorities and inhabitants). It is worth stressing that this movement from a previous to a subsequent phase is not irrevocable; a backward movement could happen – it is actually happening in some European countries: see Eade (1996); Isin and Siemiatycki (2002); Jonker (2005); Landman and Wessels (2005); Manço and Kanmaz (2005); and McLoughlin (2005).

In any case, we should not imagine a limitless expansion of the Islamic urban presence in Italian cities. The Europeanisation of Islam, its gradual integration, and the evolution of the Italian urban context will probably lead to a twofold process: on the one hand, the expansion of certain Muslim spatialities (e.g., mosques, graveyards, schools, some forms of public life) and, on the other hand, the contraction of other Muslim places (e.g., halal butcher shops). It will then be interesting to focus also on the geographical dynamic of these places – for instance, will they follow the suburbanisation process undertaken in United Kingdom (Peach & Gale, 2003)?

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# EVOLUTIONS AND PERMANENCE IN THE POLITICS (AND POLICY) OF INFORMALITY: NOTES ON THE ROMAN CASE<sup>1</sup>

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In this brief article I intend to discuss evolutions and permanence in the field of the 'politics and policy of informality' in the Roman context. Others have already and extensively discussed the historical roots of the phenomena. In the economy of this short essay suffice it to recall how, according to the literature, the actual development of *borgate* in the post-war era mostly followed a pattern in which landowners excluded from development opportunities by urban planning decisions made their land available, through the establishment of a somehow 'parallel' land market, to lower-class internal migrants and natives who could not access formal housing given the shortage of affordable options in both the private and the public sectors. Once in control of the land, these individuals would develop it mostly in the form of self-built and self-designed single-family homes in the context of village-like spatial configurations – the *borgate* – serviced by some self-built basic infrastructures (Berlinguer and Della Seta, 1976 and 1988; Clemente and Perego, 1983, Cremaschi, 1994; Zanfi, 2008). Over time, this parallel land and real-estate market increased both in scope and sophistication with the involvement of a wide range of mediators and professionals and the inclusion of a middle-class demand (Clemente and Perego, 1983). The 'informal' nature of *borgate* was therefore manifold: it implied the illegal subdivision and marketization of land that was not planned for private development, the actual building of homes with no involvement of city planning and with no respect for housing regulations, recourse to labor and design services on the 'black market', and last but

not least, the lack of security of tenure on behalf of the inhabitants. Soon, informal housing and urbanism became a major issue at the local level, coming to play a very important role in the shaping of post-war social and political identities in the city.

### **POLITICIZING INFORMALITY**

In the 1950s, *borgate* became the scene of political activism by the left, and especially the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Through a complex and innovative set of newly-founded urban actors – the most important among which was “Unione borgate” – the PCI was able to establish its political and electoral hegemony over the informal settlements, leading to the formation of a ‘red belt’ ‘besieging’ the middle-upper class and conservative neighborhoods located in the ‘formal’ city (Coppola, 2008). The Roman left – with a leading role of the PCI and its wider organizational milieu – framed its increasingly influential local campaigns by resorting to sociological interpretations that saw informality as the outcome of a backward economic and social structure based on the extraction of urban rent more than on the making of industrial profits. The entrenchment of a dualistic organization of the city between, on the one hand, a middle/upper class and relatively serviced centre, and on the other, a lower-class, deprived, and very often informal periphery was seen as the most striking spatial outcome of the hegemony of the ‘Blocco Edilizio’ over city politics (Violante, 2008).

The goal of the PCI was therefore to build a new urban coalition as an alternative to the ‘Blocco Edilizio’ and its policies. At the core of the agenda proposed by this coalition in-the-making was the solution of the ‘housing question’ through a new strategy consisting of increased control on private production, the repression of illegal land subdivisions, and large investments in public housing. Policies aimed at including *borgate* in the city structural plan – as already done for some of them by a Democrazia Cristiana (DC) led administration in the mid-1960s – and at bringing infrastructures and services to them were included in this strategy as well (Coppola, 2008). This agenda gained momentum in the mid-1970s when the PCI – thanks, in particular, to an electoral landslide in the *borgate* – was able to form a new progressive majority in the city council. Once it assumed power, coherently with its agenda, the left put in place a set of spatially and socially redistributive policies aimed at making available – to the *borgate* residents and to other underprivileged social

groups – those ‘urban rights’ in the form of opportunities for ‘collective consumption’ (Castells, 1977; Katznelson, 1992) that, according to the progressive narrative, had previously been denied to them. In the context of a corporatist agreement with private developers – an agreement that was presented as being alternative to the previously dominant mechanism of production of the urban presided over by the ‘Blocco Edilizio’ – this goal was achieved primarily through the provision of basic physical and social infrastructure in the existing informal areas and through the realization of new public housing schemes (Coppola, 2008).

### **A NOT SO SMALL DESOTIAN EXPERIMENT**

Besides enabling disadvantaged urban groups to access a better quality of life through public intervention, the new power could not ignore the issues of tenure and planning legitimacy raised by informality. Following previous limited interventions, the left reformed the structural plan of the city to include informal settlements. Later, in 1980, a regional law promoted by a PCI-led administration addressed for the first time the problem of tenure by envisaging the issue of property titles to the residents of *borgate*. The law was also meant to give a more stable legal basis to the aforementioned planning choices implemented by the city administration. This provision became fully effective only in 1985 with the approval of new national legislation, the so-called ‘*Condono edilizio*’, that gave individuals the possibility to fully legalize their properties in exchange for a fee (Berdini, 2010; Zanfi, 2013). On their part, as already experienced in Rome under PCI rule, city administrations had to implement regeneration plans aimed at realizing basic infrastructures and services according to established national planning regulations.

The *condono* represented a fundamental juncture in the history of planning and housing policy in Rome as a measure whose effects on the social and economic structure of the city have probably been under-estimated. The ‘*condono*’ undoubtedly became one of the main channels – in 1985, over 400,000 *condono* applications were filed in the city (Berdini, 2010) – through which the lower classes could access home-ownership. At a micro-scale, in the social trajectory of many ‘informals’ with little or no economic and cultural capital, the *condono* played a dramatic role by allowing the almost instant creation of significant financial wealth. Through the granting of property titles – that were acquired on exceptionally favorable conditions – hundreds of thousands of Roman families came into possession of a

'fungible asset' usable as 'collateral' in any financial transaction. They entered the real-estate market as suppliers of assets whose values were steadily and consistently appreciating over the years, and they established flourishing family economies built around the inter-generational transmission of housing or of capital created through the commodification of housing (Coppola, 2012).

We can safely state that the *condono* and the just-mentioned effects on the social trajectories of its beneficiaries deeply changed the *politics of informality*. Among urban critics, some saw it as the source of wide even if 'distorted' democratization in access to urban rent well beyond the perimeters of the traditional actors participating in the 'Blocco Edilizio'. Others saw it as the origin of a further entrenchment in the privatization of urban rent and as a deadly *vulnus* to hopes of reform in the field of land regulation and urban planning. Besides these value judgments, critics also underscored how, in the world of the now former *informals*, representations of social integration and mobility – and related patterns of collective action – became less centred around the rights of social reproduction in the form of collective consumption opportunities that had been at the core of the progressive agenda and more centered around opportunities related to the accumulation of wealth through integration into the circuits of real estate capitalism. Accordingly, in the field of socio-spatial representation, the borgata ceased to be a 'space of exception' – a dystopian condition that was also the ground for the successful organization of those subjected to this same dystopian condition – to become a gradually 'normalized' space integrated into the 'ordinary city' and its political and economic workings.

### **PLAYING WITH PROPERTY-BASED URBAN CITIZENSHIP**

If all this is true, we can state that the experience of the progressive hegemony over the politics of informality ended in a (at least apparent) paradox. The *condono*, in fact, made the city of Rome the site for mass experimentation of the theories regarding formalization of informal assets propounded by the neo-liberal thinker Hernando De Soto (De Soto, 1989 and 2002). De Soto saw formal titling as a key opportunity to convert what he would famously define 'dead capital' – properties and economic activities placed on informal markets – into 'living capital' – assets that, having accessed formality, could in turn generate capital. Overall, for De Soto, urban marginality could be turned around through the expansion of individual property and the formalization of informal assets.

Even if not explicitly, the *condono* – and the regeneration policies it implied – pursued such a vision with remarkable consistence. In the context of the very dynamic political climate of the 1990s, with a ‘modernized’ and now post-communist left back in power at city hall, the former ‘informal’ homeowner – the *condonato* – therefore became the key actor in a new round of policy and planning experimentations regarding the *borgate*. This new round of policy was based on acknowledgment of the fact that the previous one had obtained only limited success: while the *condono* procedures – even if slow and cumbersome – were successfully granting ownership to the informals, closing the controversy with the state, the local regeneration plans had proved to be very slow and somehow ineffective in upgrading the overall ‘urban quality’ of the *borgate*.

The central idea became to fix the problem by investing in innovative governance solutions aimed at directly mobilizing owners in urban regeneration processes. In 1997, a city ordinance gave *borgate* property owners the opportunity to deposit the fees related to the ‘*condono*’ directly in the coffers of newly-founded associations – named ‘*ConSORZI di auto-recupero*’ – rather than in the city’s central budget (Cellamare, 2010). *ConSORZI* had to be formed by the owners who wished to join them within a specific area – defined on the basis of previous zoning decisions – and they had to be guided by a democratically elected leadership. With the proceedings of the fees, *consorzi* had to design and implement projects aimed at remedying the lack of basic urban infrastructures and services that still affected many *borgate*, taking this responsibility away from the city government. This new device was presented as having a participative rationale – to involve residents in the ideation and construction of infrastructures – as well as a ‘localist’ and efficientist one – residents could be sure that their resources were actually funding projects in their areas in a way that eluded the weight of bureaucratic procedures.

According to critics, the results of this new policy have been mixed: the implementation of projects has often been relatively slow despite its efficientist rhetoric, while participation levels have often been negligible (Cellamare, 2010; Coppola, 2013). Moreover, the actual workings of this new governance device have caused significant controversy also on a legal level: some *consorzi* did not limit themselves to ‘harvesting’ the *condono* fees within their assigned perimeters and went after them in other areas of the city, while, at the same time, they also raised fees from new developments both inside and outside their areas (Coppola, 2013).



## BEYOND (AND BEFORE) NEOLIBERALISM

Almost fifty years after the first zoning ordinance that acknowledged the existence of informally urbanized areas within city limits, *borgate* – as in the case of the *asientamientos informales* in Hernando De Soto's Lima – have the highest home-ownership rates recorded in the city; but at the same time they are still subject to a very consistent gap in terms of overall 'urban quality' (AIC and Unione Borgate, 2010). From this point of view, whilst it is difficult to deny the effects that the *politics (and policy) of informality* – and more specifically of the *Desotian* experiment of the *condono* – had in the creation and expansion of economic capital among the formerly underprivileged groups involved in it, it is also difficult to ignore its limits in the creation of sufficient levels of 'urban-based' social and cultural capital among the same groups. The persistent condition of multidimensional urban deprivation suffered by *borgate* is a sign that those localized social capital networks that, especially in neo-liberal accounts, are often associated with the rise of individual property and more specifically with homeownership have only partially – if at all – developed (Coppola, 2008).

This is particularly important given the city administration's choice of mobilizing homeowners as the key constituency in the implementation of urban regeneration initiatives; a choice that, building on the foundations of the *Desotian* experiment of the *condono*, is at the origin of a governance device that seems to be a distinctive case – at least on theoretical grounds – of *neoliberal* urbanism. Many of the characteristics of the *consorzi* in fact recall a neoliberal 'policy morphology': they are based on a 'propertarian' conceptualization of citizenship that leads to the creation of a local polity that is explicitly based on ownership (Balibar, 2012); they activate a process of governance rescaling associated with the goals of 'responsibilizing' citizens through their mobilization in the provision of formerly government-planned urban services (Brenner, 2005); and they operate the restructuring public action through a strategic use of contractual forms (Perulli, 2010). At the same time, what can be deemed a conscious neoliberal project is more probably the outcome of long-standing internal changes in the highly localized context of the *politics (and policy) of informality* that, since 1950s, has been the locus of intense conflicts and experimentations, both in theoretical and concrete terms, in the field of *urban citizenship*. After initial attempts to mobilize the *politics (and policy) of informality* in order to challenge the role that the access to urban rent played in the actual

definition of urban citizenship, the *Desotian* experiment of the *condono* and its successive policy evolution have represented a decisive reaffirmation of the inherited pattern. Beneath the surface of policy innovations that seem to connect the Roman context with the global policy mobilities in the field of urbanism, lies the long-term vitality and adaptability of a local political system that sees the creation and distribution of the urban rent as the key stake for the building of political consensus: what, in the Roman case, may resemble *neo-liberalism* is instead *vetero-liberalism*.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this paper has been published in *Quaderni di Urbanistica Tre*, 2, pp. 35-41.

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# **WORLDING, WORLDLY OR ORDINARY? REPOSITIONING ROME**

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‘For some time now, I have been plagued, perhaps blessed,  
by dreams of rivers and seas, dreams of water’,

Tim Parks

The paper questions the urban narrative of the divided and underdeveloped city that is usually applied to Rome. Rome has always been considered a backward metropolis, a divided and dependent city, suspended between the modern and industrial North and the (comparatively) rural and traditional South. Since it became the capital of Italy in 1870, the small population that used to live around the Pope’s court has been replaced by those attending to the needs of the civil servants in government jobs, since Rome has in fact a comparatively weak industrial base. However, the administration pushed for the growth of the city, creating the need for a very large inflow of poor immigrants from the Southern countryside.

Besides being limited and empirically inadequate, this raises a crucial theoretical question: how can we describe and understand the change of cities in an age of global rescaling? For instance, the two main narratives of globalization and competition, and the critique of the resulting social and spatial division, though opposed, share the same epistemological concern with generalization and explication. But the process of globalization confuses geographical scales, weaves together local and global dimensions, and erases physical and social boundaries.

At the turn of modernity, the city is as solid as ever, though neoliberal developments tend to jeopardize all certainties. The same cannot be said of its representations, that are increasingly less coherent and productive, though encroaching on the imagery of the city and of cities' policies. Thus, walking on water is somehow required in order to match new social forms and their narratives. Marc Augé calls *ville-monde* such new urban environments, as opposed to the global city<sup>1</sup>, based upon heterogeneity and juxtaposition. Urban space is socially fragmented, and a strict social zoning articulates society and opportunities. Cities change in diverging directions. This calls for a theoretical repositioning, and a paradigmatic turn in urban studies, as claimed recently by a number of scholars from the Global South. A turn that seems able to capture also some of the distinctive features of cities from a more local, European South.

## **POSITIONING URBAN THEORY**

Why, then, deal with a city that makes the not minor claim of being 'eternal'? Why study a profoundly worldly city, with an introverted social life, a stupendous yet miserable city (Rhodes, 2007) desperately struggling for its everyday survival? This is not a local concern: 'a theorist can hardly garner attention with a city that is less than "global"... With globalization ...a place that falls outside its reach is, by definition, marginal' (Beauregard, 2003).

Recapturing ordinary cities (Robinson, 2013) in the research perspective is a paradigmatic turn in urban studies. The aim is to revise the position of Rome and the position of urban theory at the same time. And in particular, to revise how to conceptualize the process of worlding cities (Roy, 2010) caught by the process of globalization in a subordinate position.

Reconsidering the way we produce theories has been a recent theoretical concern for some scholars in the area of urban studies (Roy, 2009). The task of positioning goes further than the merely descriptive and analytical concern to calibrate the coordinate system. Repositioning Rome requires 'an expansive understanding' of cities as a theory (borrowing from Rao, 2006), and Rome among them.

One of the potential conclusions is that overwhelming generalizations fail to account for the increasing diversity in the models of spatial organization of cities, of Southern cities in particular. At stake is the capacity to explain not only the functional coherence, but also the juxtaposing and coexistence of diverse arrangements. In this sense, the paper aims to set the stage for

eventual research on the hybrid development of 'the worlding of cities' (Roy 2009).

## **THE THEORY OF ROME**

Rome has been treated in theoretical terms, and this overt theorization has been indebted to large, explanatory frameworks constructed 'elsewhere', this elsewhere being the theoretical context of the functional development of cities. Understanding Rome as a theory has meant using it as a model composed of objects, associated properties, and parameters. As such, Rome has been used to predict the future position of its components.

Viewed from this theoretical 'elsewhere', Rome appears to be the failure of the normal process of constitution of a metropolitan space. Most of the critical researchers posited a connection between socio-economic processes and urban space; mass culture, social organization, and local politics being the functional determinants of space. The prevalent narrative of the city has been elaborated using this approach.

Alternatively, a critical neo-marxist critique has successfully overturned this view, somehow sustaining a progressive and redistributive agenda for most of the postwar period. Although through a tortuous theoretical and political debate, the dysfunctions that plagued the city (housing and labor informality, social marginalization and widespread corruption) have been seen as the actual normative standard as opposed to the pathological 'endpoint of modernity' (Rao 2010). The state of the city has been seen as an exception in Agamben's terms: a space of normative suspension of citizenship and civil rights due to the claim of extended power by the government.

Scholars influenced by postcolonial concerns (Roy 2010) have recently advanced a similar claim. The slum, a generic 'dysfunctional space', is conceived as either the leftover of modernisation or its fearsome accomplishment (Rao 2006). Although both views have consistently advanced our understanding of Southern cities, Rao argues that the slum is 'not merely an empirical object or a spatial container of social processes and effects. Instead, it is a discursive object, at once material and imaginary, that has significant theoretic effects' (Rao 2010, 14).

Tackling Rome as a theory aims at localizing urban theory, grounding models on the specificity of local assemblages. The task is to connect space, politics and culture together, with the ultimate aim of exploring change from a combination of material and imaginary representations of the city.

## FROM THE SOUTH OF EUROPE

Like many other old cities, Rome has not been built to fit to a form of production. Rome is not a functional city; it is not entirely at ease either with the mainstream functional theory or with the critical approaches.

Just a 'rational dream' tried to match the urban environment with a mode of production, generating a demand for a normative rule of planning. Over time, cities have been progressively restructured to match an ever-evolving form of production. However, the traditional urban structure resisted and opposed the process of restructuring. A similar resistance has occurred in the historical cities of Europe and the colonial cities in the global South, one of the major differences with American and US cities. Finally, also international 'events' and occasional catastrophes contributed to the process of change, cities having been exposed to the long list of humanitarian disasters, calamities, wars, flooding and migration waves. The adaption process is thus sometimes delayed, and sometimes accelerated.

But modernity does not unfold equally at the core and at the periphery of world systems. Where power and money concentrate, the logic of development seems easier to retrieve. Elsewhere, development and modernity seem to lose some of their features. Two equally disappointing logics have tried to justify these cases: modernity has been delayed, as if it were a train; or exceptions have been made, as if modernization were a one-fit-all set of rules.

The same can be said of the cities in the (local, European) South. They represent 'a set of conditions with social, political and cultural effects' that have to be investigated on the ground avoiding the double risk of excessive generalizations and the blurred superimposition of normative models elaborated elsewhere.

There are analogies between the views of the scholars concerned with cities in the global South and the closer South of the Mediterranean cities, equally neglected by urban theories. Some researchers have in fact investigated the condition of being Southern in Europe, Italy being equally suspended between North and South Europe.

The Mediterranean city has notoriously escaped the fate of Fordism, partially contrasted the modernist neglect of the past, and somehow preserved traditional features of local culture and societies. Oddly enough, features that modernism had condemned as both residual and retrograde have been re-evaluated by postmodernism as key tenets of

competitive development (Leontidou 1993). Which again opens the way to a reconsideration of the neoliberal mix (Parnell and Robinson, 2012) and the features of the emerging new urban question (Cremaschi, 2008).

### **THE FATIGUE OF URBAN POLICIES**

In the first half of the twentieth century, Rome consolidated within the ring of the urban railways. Rural workers moved to the city from all the southern regions. New neighbourhoods were built informally, around unplanned settlements (the *'borgate'*) often originated by the evictions forced by the fascist regime upon the urban working class. The cultural movement of neorealism characterized Italian movies and literature during the 1950s, providing a worldwide celebrated narrative of that extraordinary process of change.

The outcome of this extraordinary growth was a new social geography. Instead of the historical social mix that had characterized the city until the beginning of the twentieth century, a new pattern emerged: working households were offered locations in the emerging belt of peripheral, high-density urban districts; while the upper class occupied the central and most valued historical neighbourhoods, however slowly encroached upon by a less permanent population of tourists and visitors.

In the post-war years many informal settlements were built by Italian immigrants in the city's first belt, where eventually half a million people came to live.

Most of these neighbourhoods were started as informal hamlets or small townships (the *'borgate'*) where the fascist regime had relocated some of the poor living in the city centre. Thus, the location was peripheral, the intention being to segregate the potentially dangerous working class, while the central area had been sanitized and cleansed. Though the first constructions were precarious and were basically shacks, most of these areas were progressively consolidated and improved. A twisted interplay between informal networks and regulatory powers allowed the exploitation of market opportunities and flaws in planning regulations. Most of these areas lacked basic urban services and infrastructures.

### **THE NARRATIVE OF SPATIAL DIVISION**

As in nineteenth-century London, the narrative seeking to capture the process of city change in the case of Rome has been based upon the image of the two cities, the first corresponding to a bourgeoisie which was



central in both spatial and political terms, and was able to influence in particular the flow of public resources; the second, to a populace relegated to the physical and political margins. This narrative has had two major consequences.

The first has been a solid representation of Rome as a backward metropolis, a socially divided and economically hetero-dependent agglomeration (Maciotti and Ferrarotti 2008). The novelist and director Pasolini contributed to the shaping of this vision, which has been rarely questioned. Over the past forty years, since the first leftist government of 1975, Rome has changed radically. Today the city is no longer 'poor and magnificent' as Pasolini wanted. The divide between the city centre and the peripheral districts was the grand narrative of the 1970s, a spatial metaphor that has ever since oriented the leftist understanding and policies of the city. At the same time, the metropolitan area of Rome occupies a prominent place in the regional hierarchy in terms of both population and employment, in particular the service sector (public sector, white collar, business services). The second consequence has been the inclusion of informality in the political agenda. Urban informality has influenced politics and policies in Rome. For instance, the political priorities of the main left party, the Italian Communist Party, were reoriented towards urban issues and a concern for the quality of life. Eventually, both leftists and Christian-social activists coalesced in a civil rights movement that required an agenda for urban rehabilitation. Thereafter, informal neighbourhoods became the object of consistent policies of regularisation and upgrading since the 1970s, when the first progressive coalition came to power. Urban claims (housing, schools and transport) reframed the political agenda to some extent.

However, both consequences are no longer viable and have to be questioned, from both an empirical and a theoretical point of view. The capital is no longer central, as far as state politics is concerned, because of the specific process of national statehood-restructuring experienced in the case of Italy, torn between the rising regions and the consolidating EU. The city is no longer geographically central since the North-South divide has been reframed by the process of economic internationalization and cultural homogenization. Finally, Rome is no longer the agglomerative core of the region, since urban development has structured a vast urban field almost coincidental with the region.

On the other hand, policies dealing with informality have not been successful. The implementation of such a vast program of upgrading

policies took more time than expected and was hampered by a lack of public investments. In the meantime, the post-war economic boom had brought about a new sense of wellbeing and optimism. Eventually, the expectations of people went well beyond the administration's capacity, and it was unable to fulfil even the original strategy. Even more importantly, the political space was restructured on the pattern of informal organization. Since then, the history of the Roman periphery has been the history of a divorce between the declining commitment to collective policies and growing claims for individual wellbeing.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Augé opposes the city-world of global business, tourists and architects to the 'ville-monde', the megacity where all differences become apparent - social, ethnic, cultural and economic - and a space where 'misery and opulence rub each other'.

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# A MULTICULTURAL CITY? HOW TO PLAN NOT KNOWING THE OUTSKIRTS OF BOLOGNA

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The anthropologist Ferdinando Fava, who has conducted extensive ethnographic research on the Zen neighbourhood in Palermo (Fava, 2008), wrote an interesting essay titled *Tra iperghetti e banlieues, la nuova marginalità urbana* (*Hyperghettoes and banlieues, new urban marginality*).

Chicago's ghettos, Paris's banlieues, Barcelona's Poligono, Amsterdam's Problemestandwijken, Moscow's Hrushebi, Los Angeles' hoods. All Western cities have their own words to describe their marginal, cursed neighborhoods (Fava, 2008a).

At the heart of this essay lies a question that most authors, researchers in different disciplines, have sought to answer: how did Italian suburbs change because of the end of a production mode - the 'world factory' - and the arrival of massive migration flows?

We will try to give an answer to this question through a comparison (Fava, 2012) between two so called 'marginal' neighbourhoods (Fava, 2012a): Bolognina in Bologna and Zen in Palermo. We will compare these urban areas in relation to the same global dynamics (social-economical, political-juridical as well as symbolic) that have produced the American *hyperghetto* and the declining French *banlieue* (Sotgia, 2012). Through this exercise we shall illustrate the complexity of local responses to macro-social global changes (Bolognina and Zen are two peripheral neighbourhoods of two middle-sized Italian cities). If the transformation of a globalized world traverses national borders, local environments make it possible to grasp in a more particular way the changes of the contemporary city and of Italian

cities in particular.

After a short methodological introduction, in which we illustrate how we will use the comparative tool, we show how our research in Bolognina (Callari Galli and Scandurra, 2009; Antonelli and Scandurra, 2010) and in Zen (Fava, 2008) dialogues with a body of literature produced in Italy and abroad.

In the past twenty years, diverse fields of cultural anthropology, such as those relating to urban studies and urban marginality, have often connected with each other in what we might call 'street ethnographies' (Wacquant, 2002). In Italy, when it comes to urban marginality, we can mention only a few studies conducted through ethnographic practice (Bonadonna, 2001; Barnao, 2004; Tosi Cambini, 2005; Scandurra, 2005). When it comes to urban ethnography, the scenario changes: many anthropologists have defined the discipline's boundaries and methodology, many have reconstructed the history of this field of study (Sobrero, 1992; Signorelli, 1996; Callari Galli, 2007; Barberi, 2010; Cancellieri and Scandurra 2012), but there are few studies that actually practice urban ethnography. Among the most recent, for example, is the work of Asher Colombo in Milan (Colombo, 1998), that of Giovanni Semi in Turin (Semi, 2004), those of Luca Queirolo Palmas and Alessandro Dal Lago and Emilio Quadrelli in Genoa (Dal Lago and Quadrelli, 2003; Queirolo Palmas, 2006), the work of Adriano Cancellieri in Porto Recanati (Cancellieri, 2009, 2012), by Francesco Federico Scarpelli and Francesco Pompeo in Rome (Pompeo, 2011, 2012; Scarpelli, 2012) and Maurizio Bressan and Sabrina Tosi Cambini in Florence (Bressan and Tosi Cambini, 2011). Although these ethnographies cannot compete with those produced in other countries (Bourgois, 2003 and 2011; Wacquant, 2002), all of them have been published in recent years, with new elements to which, we believe, not much thought has yet been given.

We began to wonder: how Italian suburbs had changed in recent years and how to call these suburbs characterized by the presence of citizens of foreign origin and unemployed.

Between February 2004 and February 2010, one of the authors of this paper conducted three studies in a suburb north of Bologna – Bolognina – characterized by the largest presence of immigrants in the city: according to statistics the number of citizens of foreign origin in some areas of this urban neighborhood has reached almost 25% of the residents. Scandurra (2005) conducted the research between February 2004 and February 2006, investigating the practices and representations of a group of homeless

residents in a communal shelter located behind the Central Station. He revealed how Bolognina has for many years been radically redesigned from an urban point of view. The dormitory was demolished in December 2005 for construction of a high-speed railway, a new central station, and administrative decentralization which occurred in late 2008. This was a collateral result of an extensive process of urban regeneration in an area sandwiched between the trade fair and the station, and is therefore of great commercial interest.

Later, between February 2006 and February 2007, together with other colleagues, Scandurra conducted research on a metalworking factory closed in the late 1980s (Piano b, 2008). He had the opportunity to see the end of a process started at the end of the 1970s: the dissolution of an entire mode of production related to metalworking factories whose presence used to mark the identity of the area, especially in the perception of those who lived outside it, since it had always been considered a working-class neighborhood. Factory closures took place at the end of the 1980s, when massive migration flows exacerbated the sense of disorientation felt by many residents. Together with the end of this production model, he also studied the end of certain places and social spaces within the area (Piano b, 2008).

Finally, a place that emerged as significant from Scandurra's fieldwork was a boxing gym in Bolognina, where between February 2007 and February 2010 he conducted, jointly with Fulvia Antonelli, a study on a group of amateur boxers. The majority of them were of foreign origin, mostly Moroccans. By studying their everyday life practices, they were able to investigate the problems, needs, and hopes of a 'second generation' of immigrants: almost all of them male youngsters arrived in Italy as children, and who attended school in Bologna (Antonelli and Scandurra, 2010).

Bolognina is not a ghetto or a suburb (Fava, 2008a). This zone was created with the decentralization of factories from the historic centre to the suburbs. In Bolognina, however, we had the opportunity to observe a process similar to that found in other areas of Italy mentioned above: advanced marginalization resulting from transformation of the industrial sector. With the closure of the factories, the local labor market today is increasingly isolating many young immigrants, relegating them to the margins of the service economy. Their stories highlighted the existence of niches in the unskilled service sector, where they worked but were treated

as 'servants' – this was the word that many of them used. We also had the opportunity to observe how vocational schools attended, among others, by foreign teenagers were turning into outright school ghettos (Antonelli and Scandurra, 2010).

A neighbourhood in the northern outskirts of Palermo, in the past forty years Zen has become the national mass media emblem of the Italian degraded periphery where, in a dominant narrative (*koiné*), destroyed apartment walls become icons and indexes of a pathological social universe. Ethnographic research from 'within and below' highlights a far more complex and articulated socio-spatial configuration within the framework of an already transforming city, Palermo. Indeed, Zen appears to be separated and excluded from the rest of the city, thus forming a social enclave. Poor individual agency, overdetermined gender relationships, and social hierarchy in Gregotti's *insulae* mark an urban area that cannot possibly be described as an ethno-racial ghetto or a decayed? working-class neighborhood. The structural informality of the neighborhood is to be connected to the political and economic machine of Palermo, which since WWII has been producing services without industries and urban proletarians without factories. This feature, when connected to the local and global urban transformation, acquires a new meaning, so that this area, far from being the residual one it used to be, is an anticipation of social and urban features spreading through the other parts of the city (Fava 2008).

How is citizenship practiced in these 'new territories' and how, consequently, should they be designed, redesigned and governed?

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# JUST A PHYSICAL MATTER? DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND URBAN PLANNING AFTER POST-FORDIST TRANSITION IN TURIN

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During the past three decades Turin's urban system has been undergoing a broad and massive process of reorganization. This process of change was entrenched in the early 1980s, when the 'company town model' started to collapse and was first called into question (Bagnasco, 1990). Accompanied by a long-term – sometimes controversial – debate on the city's development trajectories, this process involved local society on many different levels, implicating a variety of policy areas<sup>1</sup> in the endeavor to define new shared metaphors and ideas for the future Turin. It was a fortunate period, experienced during a crucial moment of change for Italy's national political system<sup>2</sup>, supported by the newborn European policies, and characterized by a number of place-specific peculiarities:

- the public sector played an important role in promoting the *policy-making* process, expressing its ability to generate urban innovation (Dente *et. al.*, 2005), acting as a financial promoter and as a coordinator of programs and projects, fostering new tools (i.e. The Strategic Plan) and new planning practices (Progetti Speciali), and aggregating social, relational and cultural resources. The strong role played by the public facilitated the strengthening of a coalition (a rather broad group of non-institutional actors) that for a certain amount of time was able to work with the city government on the public agenda (Belligni, 2008; Belligni and Ravazzi, 2013), 'tuning' its action on common and shared issues – such as the physical renovation of the city, the interest in knowledge-society-oriented interventions, the city's promotion through

large-scale events;

- work on the built environment and physical renovation of the urban system played a key and multifaceted role, affecting the big deindustrialized urban plots as much as the central districts, and giving rise to almost ten million square meters of new gross floor area. Though raising many questions from architectural and urban design perspectives (Bianchetti, 2008), the strategy of 'urbanizing the urban' helped the city economically at a time of uncertainty and need for growth. In some cases, it offered a stage for the development of integrated policies: urban changeover strategies, in particular during the first phases, represented a complex set of actions for the city, where big market-oriented programs were accompanied by urban regeneration policies;

- a complex (and sometimes contradictory) concern for the discourse on the built environment emerged during this period. Here work on the urban space showed an attitude towards subsidiarity and a concern to involve local actors in making-sense of the changing urban condition. In many situations, space and its transformation were instrumentally used as means to generate new sociability and empowerment<sup>3</sup>, to connect to local society, to attract financial, relational and social resources, and finally to perform new ways of framing collective issues. Talking about urban changeover became in some cases a multilayered way to foster dialogue between the local authority and citizens, offering a new governance arena for the urban political process, and proving to be a field for common goods production (Lucchini, 2013).

For the first time an operational and political idea of a 'metropolitan system' was expressed, and preliminary discussion directed attention to the supra-municipal scale of some key issues concerning urban structuring and spatial organization. In this sense some attempts were made in particular by the strategic planning program<sup>4</sup>, while over time there accumulated a long list of cooperative ventures (IRES Piemonte, 2013) involving the municipalities in initiatives characterized by variable geometry and larger-scale efforts. Nevertheless, 'metropolitanism' remained more a general principle than a proper strategy specifically concerning the spatial dimension. The most significant issues – land management, real estate values, and more in general priority building and physical restructuring – continued to be constrained within the municipal borders, representing the main field of

competition (for opportunities, investors, European, national and regional financing) among the various local authorities. More in general, and from the start of this discourse, the metropolitan issue was inflected – in both its constructive and critical dimensions – as a matter of ‘Turin-centrism’ much more than as a necessary shift in the scale, range and incisiveness of problems, solutions and decision-making processes.

The critical turning point represented by the global financial crisis has helped to make the ongoing exhaustion of this period clearer. If, from an economic point of view, there is no longer the same availability of resources and opportunities, on the other hand the public has been losing its prominent innovative role, in that it lacks, on both the urban and metropolitan level, leadership, inclusion and cooperation capacity. In the bargain, a critical legacy of this recent urban and political cycle is represented by the weakening of the actors-network that contributed to making the change possible. Once ‘accompanied’, involved and coordinated by the local authority, these actors are now suffering from its weakness, proving unable to take advantage of the social and relational capital accumulated during the past twenty-five years to foster innovation and to work cohesively in partnership ‘beside’ (or ‘relating to’) the public sector. Though tending to blame the public authority for unsuccessful policies and programs, they still consider it the main political and economic interlocutor, the one player in the field able to aggregate shared interests, resources, values, visions and metaphors.

This progressive detachment is explicitly apparent in the spatial policy area, and it is especially and increasingly evident in initiatives ranking an urban and metropolitan importance. Despite the presence of many planning initiatives (whether publicly or privately led), the ‘operational’ dimension of processes seems to become sectorial and sectorial, abandoning the inclusive, integrated, multilayered and large-scale perspective somehow experienced in the past decades. This participatory and, under certain conditions, cooperative attitude seems not to enter the current public agenda.

In this sense, the discourse on space itself has been shrinking its previous range, shifting to economic matters and increasing the competition among municipalities belonging to the same metropolitan system. These difficulties become more persuasive given the necessity for local authorities to cope with ‘spending reviews’ diminishing financial resources at national level, and the critical condition of local welfare systems. From this perspective,

work on the cityscape seems to be losing the capacity it once had – almost for a period – to connect different issues and policy areas, and to act as some sort of ‘translating device’ between public and private instances. It seems to be reducing to a mere, opaque, business transaction.

Turin’s more recent vicissitudes reflect a local institutional system trying to maintain its accountability, and still attempting to actively fuel the political process and the urban economic system. With the increasing lack of an integrated perspective on emerging and unknown issues, the local authority is not giving up its administrative and leading action, but it is more than ever overwhelmed by the need to make choices, build and prioritize problems, and foster a wide and open decision-making process. Some efforts emerge on different levels, though often confusedly, performing action oriented to the issues of internationalization and European competitiveness, insisting on knowledge-oriented policies (i.e. the ‘Torino Città Universitaria’ programme), and pursuing a policy of foreign capital attraction.

The accent on physical restructuring still has an important role in the rhetorics of change.<sup>5</sup> It is presented as an essential engine for the future development of the urban system, and generally inflected as a possible stage for multi-scale integrated urban policies. At the moment, the tactic outlined highlights key interventions in the city, but what seems to be missing is a clear strategic spatial frame able to organize a new hierarchy and a new long-term vision, interested in embracing a metropolitan large-scale effort.

What is also emerging is an urgent call for assessment of the consequences and results of the great effort required to undertake such a demanding urban restructuring process. Its price is still being paid today, and it represents a key issue besides the need for a shift to new perspectives and strategies. It is becoming important to understand if what has been done in the past three decades has worked, on what bases, and in what policy fields it has proved able to generate development occasions; whether it has been able to strengthen the local system – in terms of social restructuring effects, asset-building, human capital stabilizing, and so on; whether the Turin urban system is today adequately ‘equipped’ to face the impressive changes that are globally affecting cities in the world. Although this evaluation would have to be seriously framed, an investigation of the present conditions could usefully prompt reflections/criticisms questioning the legacy of the past. For a start, attention could

focus on the role that the public actor(s) has played, and will be able to play in the next decades, and on the kind of framing that it(they) will be conveying to urban policies and 'physical matters' from a local and metropolitan perspective.

The transformed field of action, and the impossibility of playing a prominent role also from the economic point of view, may favor a shift in the public's attitude. Although maintaining its leadership, and in order to reinforce it, the assumption of an 'enabling' perspective and a growing interest in strengthening the local actors-network could foster a renovated declension of the public-public and public-private relationship (partnership-oriented, but also interested in transferring the 'public function' to a wider set of actors).

In order to focus on intercepting the sphere of these actors, the development of programmes and strategies focused on social and relational capital growth should be considered. The call for new 'operational' planning practices should intercept the pursuit of a higher, more distributed and equal capability of innovation. In this sense the rethinking of planning tools and instruments is crucial, as much as enlargement of the scope of spatial policies (Cottino and Zeppetella, 2009) intended as an occasion to cross the physical dimension with local actors' mobilization (Lucchini, 2013).

This framework could give urban and regional spatial policies a brand-new perspective, letting the discourse on space perform a crucial role in framing the local debate, offering a possible 'trading zone' (Balducci and Mantysalo, 2013) among different purposes and interests (public and private), between the physical and the social level, in order to get the urban political process going, and to foster a different relationship between spatial matters and local development strategies. The proportions, complexity and scale of the issues to be treated require highlighting the critical 'metropolitan' and supra-municipal nature of the problems to be addressed, and they call for a necessarily large-scale redefinition of directions and strategies. This paradigm shift – weakly emerging also from recent attempts to start debate on a metropolitan strategic plan<sup>6</sup> – will finally (but not only) have to consider the possible evolutions of the off-chance of an administrative rearrangement brought about by the institutionalization of the metropolitan authority, and its consequences on local regulation systems.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Urban, cultural, economic, financial, knowledge-based, etc.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. the new law on the mayoral election system approved at the beginning of the 1990s which allowed citizens to choose their mayor directly. Thanks to this law, Valentino Castellani – a civil society candidate and a scholar – became the first directly elected Mayor of Turin, launching a new season of local government which lasted for almost twenty years.

<sup>3</sup> i.e. Progetto Periferie.

<sup>4</sup> Associazione Torino Internazionale (2000), *Piano Strategico per la promozione della città*. A paradigmatic scheme in this sense is represented by Urban Center Metropolitan (for a detailed description see Lucchini, 2013)

<sup>5</sup> Città di Torino, Programma delle trasformazioni urbane 2013-2014. Linee di indirizzo, delibera di Giunta Comunale, 8 ottobre 2013.

<sup>6</sup> See the activity performed in recent months by Torino Internazionale/Strategica in order to build the basis for a third strategic plan. Among the main contents of the plan emerges an idea of strenghtening the metropolitan dimension of decision-making processes ([www.torinostrategica.it](http://www.torinostrategica.it)).

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# **‘DIVERCITY’ AT STAKE UNDER PLANETARY URBANIZATION: THEORETICAL PITFALLS AND CHALLENGES TO THE ITALIAN CITIES**

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This contribution focuses on *DiverCity*, conceived as a key concept with which to analyse the current far-reaching change of urbanization processes strongly determined by an increasing number of immigrants bodily marking urban places – besides the enormous amount of intertwined flows and powers. This concept uses a ‘play on words’ between diversity and city, in which these two terms are understood as denoting entities with a one-to-one ontological interconnection. *DiverCity* is at the same time the bedrock of a ‘difference-sensitive’ planning, transformative and proactive, and the highly imaginative frontier at which to deal with multicultural planning enigmas that could open the doors to new planning potentialities. The concept is both unfolded in its urban nature (Perrone 2010) and stressed – under the presently debated *theory of planetary urbanization* – to such an extent that it implies a rethinking of the *urban* itself (Brenner, Schmidt, 2012).

As addressed by Neil Brenner (2013, p. 96), such theory asserts a shift from ‘concentrated urbanization’ (as the agglomeration of population, capital investment, and infrastructure in large clusters of settlement space) to ‘extended urbanization’ (as the processes of socio-spatial transformation that facilitate and result from urban development across places). It is also a shift from *urban* as ‘nominal essence’ (properties and/or spatial morphologies that are thought to be shared by all urban phenomena, conditions, or landscapes) to *urban* as ‘constitutive essence’ (the various processes through which the *urban* is produced – whether as phenomenon,

condition, or landscape).

The scientific framework in which this debate is placed has been recently intertwined with the discourse on how 'urban restructuring' and 'multiscalar regional urbanization' processes, defined by Soja (2011) as 'post-metropolitan developments' (Soja 2011), are profoundly transforming the world's cities, reframing the concept of 'urban' and driving the metropolitan urbanization model to its end (beyond the rural/urban divide).

Such processes indeed affect different urban formations in different ways (as they have been defined by the literature over the past three decades): the monocentric metropolitan areas, polycentric metropolitan areas, territories characterized by settlement sprawl and dissemination, multipolar urban networks formed by cities that are at the same time interdependent and distinct. The uncertainty in the literature over the labels for these phenomena bears witness to the multitude of forms of post-metropolises (Polycentric Urban Region, Polycentric Metropolis, Mega-City Region, Polynuclear Urban Region, Polycentric Network, Edgeless City, Endless City, City-Region, Regional City, etc.) (Gillham, 2002; Hall and Pain, 2006; Keil, 2013; Kloosterman and Musterd 2001; Lang, 2003; Roy, 2009; Scott, 2001). At the same time it makes evident how such a multitude is disqualifying the common lexicons from rightly contributing to redefinition of the post-metropolitan account of urbanization.

There is evidence that the old categories need to be rephrased and re-signified. *Urban* and *diversity* are two of them. Accordingly, the paper investigates whether (or not) such shifts (concentrated/extended urbanization and metropolitan/postmetropolitan era) are affecting the concept of 'urban diversity' and how the latter should be rephrased in the face of the contemporary urbanization processes that pose a fundamental challenge to the entire field of urban studies. It might even be said that they call for a revision of the epistemological assumptions if they are to remain relevant to the massive transformations of worldwide socio-spatial organization. The reasoning will hence try to understand how the new perspective on the nature of such processes might lead to a different understanding of *diversity* as an urban feature (and/or city feature) while arguing on the meaning of *urban*. What is *urban* in the frame outlined under the theory of planetary urbanization?

To what extent does *urban* become more relational and extended – beyond the border of *urban* as it has been drawn by categories that emphasize? the urban/non-urban dialectic, such as 'city-regions', 'urban regions',

'metropolitan regions', and 'global city-regions'? Does it challenge the City itself as both a spatial entity and a social-spatial organization? To what extent does the concept stress the meaning of *diversity*? Then, could diversity be still considered a city feature? Should planners and scholars rethink the concept of *City*? Is it still useful to rely on *DiverCity* (understood as the outcome of a process producing and exchanging multiple, plural, interactive and experiential knowledge(s); Perrone, 2010) as a key concept with which to address a debate in contemporary urbanization processes? Following this sequence of hypothetical questions, the paper outlines some first implications in the theoretical discourse on diversity, which is still difficult to capture in its very essence. Drawing on the countless efforts to specify the multicultural essence of city-ness, the reasoning will build on Leonie Sandercock's seminal work (1997) that first addressed the topic in the planning field by focusing on the epistemology of multiplicity (and the role of cultural diversity) conceived as a cognitive method underpinning the planning of multicultural cities beyond the identity/difference divide. It asserts that what constitute the main ingredients of the concept of diversity are precisely the modes of knowledge (meant as the exchange of knowledges) and the forms of interaction and transaction (Friedmann, 1973 and 1987; Bentley and Dewey, 1946) between the communities and cultures correlated to such modes of knowledge. As such, it is also closely connected to the discourse on the epistemology of multiplicity, and Bhikhu Parekh's (2000) claim to recognise the interculturally-constituted aspects of a local society as constitutive categories of postmodern planning. Following such reasoning, also to be recalled is the debate on diversity as something related to differentiated forms of rationality, including experiential, intuitive and local knowledges based on practices of dialogue, listening, observation, contemplation and the sharing of knowledges expressed iconographically and in other symbolic, ritual and artistic manners (Bridge, 2005).

Therefore the goal in what follows is to present a convincing argument on contemporary urban diversity as a planning challenge to cope with the emerging urbanization processes with a specific focus on Italian cities.

The very *nature of the contemporary urban Italian landscapes* is strongly affected and determined by intertwined and not simply untangled processes. History, urban and territorial heritages, patterns of settlement, development models: all of these features make cities dynamic and at the same time unique places in which to live when compared to each

other and to other European cities. Profiling the changing nature of such components, even in a comparative manner which implies a selection of levels of comparability, might be an utopian enterprise.

What all the Italian cities share – as much as do the other cities in the world – is an account of diversity that affects and marks cities' shapes, patterns, landscapes, people and architectures.

In a period of 'revolution' understood as epochal change in the very nature of the urbanization process all over the planet, it seems interesting to assume 'diversity' as a key issue for planning practice and theory. On the other hand, the challenge of *urban* as something to be re-conceptualized amid planetary urbanization, raises new issues in the analytical frames of cities as changing domains.

Drawing on some cases described as processes of transformation of socio-spatial organization affecting Italian cities and urban region, the paper focuses on such dilemmas in order to define the concept of diversity better. It will stress the conceptual couple '*DiverCity vs. urban diversity*' beyond the border of what could still be considered as *City*, highlighting some lines of theoretical work.

The paper will provide a sort of *taxonomy* of urban spaces defined as diversity-based. At least five kinds of urban processes can be identified as featuring components of Italian diverse cities:

- stigmatized concentrated ethnic neighborhoods (such as Prato's Chinatown, Italy);
- social mixing in the historic city centers (medium sized town, North Italy);
- 'multicultural social-spatial sprawl' in the periurban areas (Osmannoro, Firenze);
- multicultural rural areas (South Italy);
- 'diversity-based urban spaces' as key component of the contemporary urbanization processes.

With the reasoning conducted from a place-based perspective, the focus will be on the *agency of urban spaces* and their potential to provide a range of diversity conceived as a variety of opportunities for any kind of user and place maker. The aim will be to suggest *critical planning and design issues* and spatial policy inputs while arguing on contemporary theories concerning urbanization processes (Keil , 2013; Soja, 2011).

The overall argument presented in the paper is a contribution to an Italian

Research Project titled *Post-metropolitan territories as emergent forms of urban space: coping with sustainability, habitability, and governance* undertaken by some Italian universities, such as the Polytechnic of Milan (as coordinator) and the University of Florence (of which the author is a member), and international institutions such as the City Institute at the York University of Toronto; the CRESR at the Hallam University of Sheffield UK, the Geographisches Institut at the Tuebingen University, and some others. The contribution made by the Florence Unit is divided into two parts. The first part concerns the analysis of the superseding of the metropolis form and the processes of 'multiscalar regional urbanization'; the definition of a new interpretative paradigm called the 'new regional city' meant both as a tool to describe the transformations underway and as a project scenario. The second part, closely linked to the Horizon 2020 research topics, concerns study of the theory and methodology of the concepts of resilience, diversity and well-being and their conversion into analysis and project tools. Within this frame the concept of diversity (and the connected concept of inclusiveness) is understood as a constitutive element of the project, according to a difference-sensitive planning model. It includes attention to the role of cultures and different lifestyles in the construction of new territories meant as hospitable places adaptable to the requirements of the New Regional City's inhabitants.

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# **MARGINALITY AS A RESOURCE: ROMA MIGRANTS IN TURIN**

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## **FOREWORD**

This paper concerns research conducted in the framework of the international scientific programme on urban marginality ANR *Marges et villes entre exclusion et intégration. Cas méditerranéens*. It began in 2013 and is coordinated by the University of Tours. Because the research is still in progress, the paper discusses its main purpose, the underlying methodological perspective, and its preliminary results.

## **QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES**

The social and spatial disciplines are widely covering urban marginality from different perspectives, particularly pointing out the marginalisation processes caused by urban transformations (the effects of neoliberal policies: Harvey, 2008; gentrification and the revanchist city: Smith, 1996; the opposition movements against urban transformations: Paba, 2003; the insurgent agency of people in marginal conditions: Miftarab, 2009). Yet on approaching this topic I found that most studies define a deep opposition between 'marginal' and 'non-marginal', with very little attention paid to the interactions between these two urban dimensions (Potter, 2011). This gap can also be found in several studies on the housing conditions of Roma people, who are often represented as the extreme case of socio-spatial marginalisation (Marušiaková and Popov, 2008). Roma settlements are analysed within their marginal dimension with very little attention



given to the multiple relations that exist between these populations/ these spaces and 'the rest of the city'. Most of these approaches deal with marginality as if it were an object in itself, finally producing a kind of 'reification' of marginality which makes it impossible to read the relationship between marginal and non-marginal. It is specifically this methodological perspective that I will critically analyse, as it seems to me the main limitation of current approaches to urban marginality.

The research reported here therefore focused on the increasing interaction between marginal and non-marginal. Referring to the 'critical urban theory' (Brenner, 2009), and particularly to those authors who are exploring 'a new lexicon of spatial difference' (Brenner *et al.*, 2011: 237), a different approach to marginality is suggested and implemented. Following Michel Agier (1999) and other authors, who highlight the large amount of resources that people in marginal conditions are able to mobilise – social relations and networks, social capital, etc. – and the various kinds of interdependence that they activate with other social groups (Roy, 2009; McFarlane, 2012), the questions underlying the research were as follows:

- can marginality be considered a resource? What kind of resource is it? For whom?
- what else can be learnt about the relation between (so-called) marginal populations and the city by considering marginality as a resource?

These questions were approached in light of Roma migrants' territorial practices, which can be used to test the validity of the 'marginality-as-resource' paradigm and which make it possible to reduce the distance between marginal and non-marginal because their practices are not linked to a single spatial dimension (McFarlane, 2012). In particular, the focus is on the practices of using, staying in and crossing the city spaces, including marginal, non-marginal and in-between spaces (or 'the gray spaces': Yiftachel, 2009). Furthermore, these practices are understood to be signposts for a set of activities more complex than their labels may suggest: resources mobilisation (using), appropriation (crossing), ordinary resistance (staying in) (Dobré, 2002). I will therefore highlight the 'generative potential' of the marginality-as-resource paradigm, and show how such a perspective could be useful for urban theory and planning practice, particularly in order to go beyond the typical approach that, by various kinds of policies, 'moves the margins a little further' (Simone, 2007).

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The research topic was analysed by referring to the case of Turin. This city is today marked by large-scale urban regeneration processes and transformations concerning former industrial sites and deprived neighbourhoods; and by slum growth related to recent migrant inflows, particularly Roma people from Eastern Europe (henceforth 'Roma migrants'), mostly from Romania. Moving for economic reasons, they usually settle at the 'urban margins' (Legros, 2010): vacant lots, abandoned buildings, brownfields, peri-urban fringes; and they usually live in precarious dwellings, such as caravans, barracks, tents, squats. The attention therefore focused on the Roma illegal settlement of Lungo Stura Lazio.

The case study analysis was conducted in two steps:

1. *Why and to what extent are the spaces of Roma settlements marginal?* Turin planning policies and transformations in the recent past were analysed with a particular focus on those spaces where illegal Roma settlements are located. What kinds of policies and projects/transformations have characterized those spaces over time? Or rather, what kinds of non-projects and non-policies? The research involved analysis of planning documents and in-depth interviews with local public and institutional officers, and with local experts in urban planning and policies.
2. *What kinds of territorial practices do Roma migrants develop* in marginal and non-marginal spaces and in the in-between spaces? Direct observation, including non-structured interviews, was conducted *chez les Roms* and participating in their daily practices. In-depth interviews were also conducted with local stakeholders involved in Roma issues (associations, activists, etc.).

## LUNGO STURA LAZIO

The first Romanian Roma arrived in Turin in the early 2000s, but the main migrant inflows started in 2007 when Romania entered the European Union. Roma migrants are not the only community living in marginal conditions in Turin; nevertheless, they can be considered the most visible and obvious example of socio-spatial marginality due to their deep rooting and settling in space and time. This is true in particular for the settlement of Lungo Stura, which was the focus of the research. The area named 'Lungo Stura' is located in the north-east part of Turin, traversed by

the River Stura, whose basin has become over time the city's waste tip, both physically and metaphorically. Turin's industrial and urban growth during the twentieth century shaped the history of this area, where many factories were established following railway development towards Milan and Novara and attracted by the river, which was used as a source of energy and a place to dump waste production.

Over the years, all the activities that the city decided to keep distant from the centre were located in this area: the municipal dump and dog pound and three official '*campi nomadi*'. Other non-authorised activities then gradually arrived: illegal dumping, illegal vegetable gardens, illegal Roma settlements. Turin's City Master Plan provisions for this area concern the creation of a public park, a project confirmed and re-launched by other territorial planning tools (*Corona Verde, Torino Città d'Acque, Piano d'area del Po*, etc.), but none of these transformations has yet begun (and one may wonder why). Meanwhile, other processes follow their own course.

In the illegal settlement of Lungo Stura there are approximately 800 people living today, mainly Romanian Roma but also non-Roma, Hungarians and Bulgarians. The first families arrived in 2006.

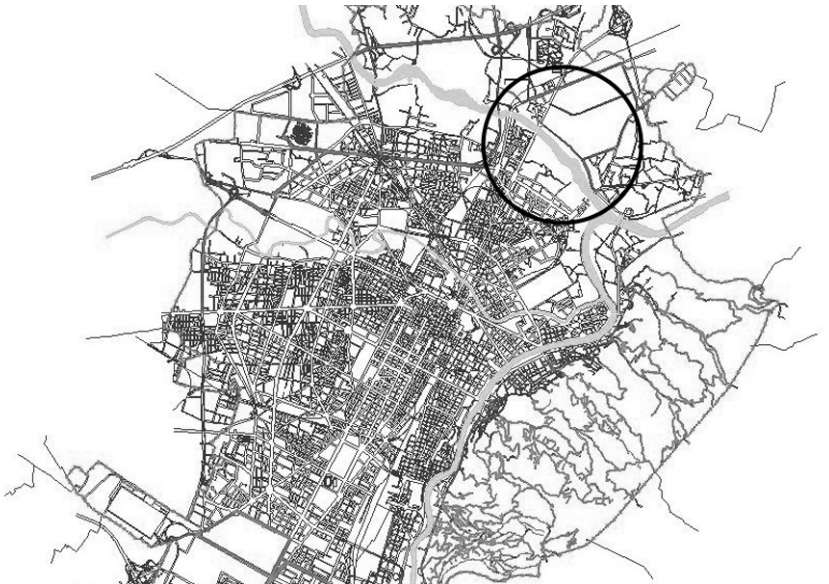


Fig. 1. Lungo Stura in Turin. (source: elaboration by the author from Comune di Torino).



Fig. 2. The Lungo Stura illegal settlement (source: Google Maps).

## TERRITORIAL PRACTICES AND RESOURCES MOBILISATION

Relying on the analytical framework outlined above, and through fieldwork conducted in 2013, different kinds of resources could be distinguished. These resources configured, or were configured by, relations between marginal and non-marginal or rather among different actors, so that marginality can be considered a relational resource (Bradatan & Craiutu, 2012). Furthermore these relations and the encounter of different actors (Amin, 2012) are made possible by the porous nature of marginality. From these considerations, the analysis yielded a first articulation (should it be integrated with further investigation) of the concept of marginality-as-resource.

Marginality can be a *spatial resource*, including:

- transforming areas, i.e. all urban areas marked by processes leading to a change between what there was before and what there will be after, during the waiting time between the past and the future (besides, what is the time of marginality?): vacant lots, brownfield sites, abandoned buildings, urban fringes, etc.;

- natural areas and in particular rivers: the water is used for bathing, washing clothes and dishes, as a swimming pool during summertime; a river also serves as a dump and as a physical barrier that protects from the external world; the vegetation protects from climate excesses and from public exposure;
- city waste and abandoned areas, i.e. rubbish and spaces that nobody uses or 'the back side' of the city. Garbage and scrap iron collecting is a very common activity for Roma people and it requires a deep knowledge of the city, of its functioning, of its spaces and time organisation; it is a kind of activity that reveals an 'inverse city': working at night before garbage bins are emptied; hanging out in shopping malls and supermarkets after closing time and entering from the unloading side of the building; meeting in marketplaces when the market is closing, etc.

Marginality can be a *social resource* as well if we consider:

- transactional relations, which concern cultural proximity and distance management (Rémy, 1992) but also economic exchanges: donations from local residents who get used to the frequent transit of waste collectors and activate direct relationships with them; donations from local traders who give unsold goods to the beggars working outside their shops; begging practices themselves; the provision of a service at the traffic lights (such as washing car windows); selling recycled material at the flea market, and scrap iron in formal and informal markets; etc.;
- the use of public social services and other services furnished by private actors: an ambulance stationed in the (illegal) nomad camp all day long; social workers who look after children at school; local parishes that offer them lunch and dinner; local associations that organise various kinds of activities (cultural, sporting, recreational, etc.).

Therefore, urban marginality is not a resource only for marginal people. It is also a resource for other urban actors:

- the local public administration: through the spatial concentration of marginal populations like Roma in Turin, or through forced evictions (a common practice in many other Italian cities, like Milan or Rome), it pursues the objective of spatial and social control of certain areas of the city;
- local institutions and citizens: marginal spaces are where they can

put all the things that they do not want to keep/see in the centre or in any other part of the city: it is quite common to find Roma settlements near the municipal dump or the municipal dog pound; but despite trying to hide them, their practices and their territorial rooting make them very visible;

- urban transformation itself: the presence of an illegal Roma settlement is (or could be) a consensus resource (or a pretext) to justify cleaning up a certain area through urban renewal, regeneration, etc.; moreover, Roma settlements represent an important resource of negotiation among the various actors interested and involved in urban transformations, such as the public administration, landowners, real estate investors, etc.

Marginality is therefore:

- a multiple resource that changes according to the context, to the different actors who mobilise it and to the relations that they develop with each other; we should therefore speak of different marginalities (in the plural: Bradatan & Craiutu, 2012), each time specifying the context in which marginality develops and the aspects it is characterised and affected by;
- an ephemeral resource, because it is always in transformation, in a condition of permanent change due to changing relations among different actors and to new configurations and reconfigurations of the urban.

The justification of planning depends, in my view, on a vision of the city 'rather than simply a method of arriving at prescription' (Fainstein, 2005: 121). I consequently presume that a different perspective on marginality could lead to a different vision of the city and of the ways to plan for it.

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# **URBAN SHRINKAGE. THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM A SOUTHERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

These notes discuss the conceptual category of urban shrinkage from an analytical perspective, a concept widely discussed in international debates but much less so in Italy, bearing in mind the spatial trends taking place in Italy over the past decade and recorded in the last census (2011).

What are the distinctive features of urban shrinkage? The term was invented to indicate the processes of physical abandonment and economic decline involving many urban areas of old industrialisation affected by the production crisis during the transition to post-Fordism. We are therefore faced with a multidimensional phenomenon, which needs to be observed paying particular attention to demographic and employment dynamics and their implications in terms of urban intervention policies.

In the literature, there are many significant examples of studies focusing on the abandonment of the industrial cities of the so-called North American Rust Belt (Buffalo, Cleveland, Youngstown, Pittsburgh, etc.) dominated by the production cycle of the steel and metal industry; the urban centres of the former German Democratic Republic, 'victims' of the 1990 reunification and the post-socialist transition (Wiechmann and Pallagst, 2011); the Polish urban systems (Nowak and Nowosielski, 2008); and metropolitan Japan (Flüchter, 2008).

Many attempts have also been made to include in this category? French and British industrial cities (Cunningham-Sabot and Fol, 2009), whose decline is related to the emergence of new regional specialisations as a



response to globalisation, resulting in the relocation of private investments from heavy industry to high-tech sectors.

## **OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER**

If it is not possible to verify the hypothesis of the influence of long-term spatial dynamics on urban responses to global change within this paper, a topic which deserves to be assessed in a next phase of the research, we nevertheless seek to demonstrate that the urban shrinkage model does not fit any process of demographic decrease and functional decay occurring in urban systems, and that these processes need to be analysed by contextualising cities in the specific macro-regional system in which they are situated.

The publication of the 2011 Census results (ISTAT, 2012) provides us with the opportunity to take a look at the overall applicability of the categories associated with urban shrinkage to the Italian context, focusing on the transformation processes of urban systems by drawing on general data collected from across the entire country which, under certain conditions, can be compared with analyses carried out in the European context.

In fact, in recent years a copious international literature has dealt with the phenomenon of shrinking cities, attempting to create cross-country comparisons which invariably result in a summary of general statistical observations and a focus on specific situations – examples of individual urban realities – whose selection appears to be based on nothing more than impressionistic observations (see, among others, Wiechmann and Pallagst, 2012; Hollander *et. al.*, 2009; Martinez Fernandez *et. al.*, 2012; Cunningham-Sabot and Fol, 2011).

In this article, we will therefore attempt to bring some order to the argument, according to the following structure:

1. firstly, the theoretical framework on the processes of urbanisation is reconstructed, also by reviving an aspect today neglected by the literature on the urban life cycle, in the hope of creating a distance from the interpretive logic which emphasises the role of economic causes (the end of Fordism, the real estate/financial crisis of 2007-2008) whilst showing no sign of wanting to measure itself against broader interpretations, and tending to treat structurally different urban areas in an equivalent manner. In addition, a definition of the territorial units for statistics is presented, so that a definition of city that corresponds to the phenomena observed can be adopted.

2. secondly, a preliminary survey of the demographic and economic processes taking place in Italian urban systems is conducted, by taking a long retrospective look that extends until the data collected in the last Population Census (ISTAT, 2011), which would seem to highlight the revival of a marked North-South dualism, especially concerning the behaviour of territorial structures, whose qualitative aspects are, however, likely to be very different than those of the past.

3. finally, some concluding remarks are made on the limits of the application of concepts drawn from specific spatial processes, such as urban shrinkage, to situations that are structurally different, as in the case of Italy, and on the need for further theoretical and interpretive work in this area.

## **A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC EVOLUTION OF LOCAL SYSTEMS IN ITALY**

Before focusing on the last decade, a retrospective glance at the temporal trajectory of the Second World War is useful not only to summarise, but also to explain, some interpretive issues that have arisen in more recent times.

As pointed out in recent works on the same topic, any consideration that focuses solely on contemporary times is likely to provide an incomplete and misleading picture of current trends (Grasland and Sessarego Marques da Costa, 2010).

The percentage variations in the population of urban systems in the decade 1951-61 confirm recognised trends. During that period all peripheral and rural local systems lost a large part of their populations to urban systems and, in particular, metropolitan regions. The drainage was especially acute in the systems located along the Apennine ridge and marginal areas of the North: Polesine, Mantua, alpine systems, etc.

This situation was accentuated in the following decade – 1961-71 – with massive depopulation (from -30% to -20%) at the expense of systems located in internal mountainous areas, especially in the Apennines. Conversely, notable demographic growth in metropolitan regions (from +20% to +30%), was accompanied by a significant increase of non-metropolitan urban systems.

During the decade 1971-81, the slowdown of industrial development that had begun in the second half of the 1960s was reflected by population

trends: the growth rate in Northern Italy, characterised by large industrial concentrations, clearly decreased, whilst positive trends persisted in certain peripheral systems where district economies were consolidated or strengthened. The hypothesis that this was due to the development of industrial districts seems to be corroborated by the positive dynamics characterising both Central Italy and the Adriatic Corridor.

By contrast, in Southern Italy tumultuous metropolitan growth was accompanied by the strengthening of urban systems affected by the so-called 'Extraordinary Intervention' and the establishment of public and subsidised industry, which caused the first clean break between the northern metropolitan systems undergoing a phase of economic slowdown, and the southern metropolitan systems that were draining the population from inland areas.

From 1981 to 1991 these dramatically opposed dynamics underwent a major change, with a significant and generalised contraction in many northern and central urban systems and the continuation of the demographic crisis in the southern peripheral systems, especially so in the local systems located along regional boundaries or the outskirts of macro-regions (Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Eastern Veneto, the Ligurian coast, non-metropolitan Piedmont). The local systems of Made in Italy production (textiles, furniture, shoes) still kept their positive sign.

Between 1991 and 2001 another novel feature arose: all of the country's metropolitan systems appeared to be in demographic crisis, whilst the local urban and non-urban systems of the peripheral areas of Northern and Central Italy – although not dramatically - started growing again. The crisis of the southern metropolitan areas – an entirely new Italian demographic trend – was matched by an even more accentuated crisis of the local systems located in inland areas of Southern Italy.

In this case, the question is this: because it was not just a matter of a reduced birth rate, where was the migratory component directed? Most likely towards the more dynamic systems in the North, where there were also some particularly lively components in terms of growth (notably the areas in eastern Lombardy and central Emilia where districts survive).

Finally comes the past decade (2001-2011). After a generalised analysis of the entire national territory, we can certainly affirm that the macro-regional North-South divide has returned to the fore, although in past years it had been challenged by the emergence of growing areas in various parts of the country, on the basis of equally different driving factors (industrial

districts, especially in the so-called 'Third Italy'; in the South, urban systems favoured by public industrial investments or government incentives for the localisation of private facilities). The inland areas of Southern Italy have been those most affected by demographic haemorrhage: if Calabria and Basilicata are almost entirely in demographic deficit (the situation in Basilicata particularly confirms the observations made by Schmoll *et. al.*, 2010), inland Sicily, northern Apulia, inland Molise and Abruzzo are in no better condition.

Most of these processes overlap with regional boundaries, in peripheral systems rather than central areas of economic and administrative life, especially in the South, but also along the regional boundaries between Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, Liguria and Piedmont, and northern Veneto and Friuli.

The demographic growth of the systems that make up the Po Valley is particularly striking. Almost all of them have a positive balance and, in some cases, an extremely positive one. This contrasts with the obvious urban crisis of the southern regions, where metropolitan regions and many urban systems, almost everywhere, are losing population.

It is therefore worth focusing on the trends verified in urban systems over the last decade in order to formulate interpretative hypotheses and compare them with the reflections provided by the international literature on the theme of urban shrinkage.

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# **URBAN EVOLUTIONS IN ITALY: TRENDS IN SPATIAL STRUCTURES AND THEIR ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

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## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The paper explores the relationships between the spatial structure of the Italian urban systems and their economic outcomes. More specifically, it analyses what the characteristics of Italian cities are in terms of spatial structure, what their evolutionary patterns in the most recent decades have been, and the links between spatial structure and urban growth.

The above-mentioned goals imply critical reflection on the theoretical basis for the role of spatial structure in urban and regional development. While in the urban economics literature the agglomeration externalities that ensure higher productivity and growth in cities are proxied by size and density only, contemporary functional urban regions are characterised by highly complex spatial structures, which in turn are the result of several spatial and economic dynamics affecting urban areas in the past decades. Spatial structures appear to be the result of self-organizing processes involving both centrifugal and centripetal forces, and at the same time they are the result of history. The most evident phenomenon is probably suburbanisation, which first affected American cities and then European ones. This process was driven by several factors, including growth in incomes, technological progress in transport systems, change of preferences, and migration. As a result, cities expanded their geographical scope and (especially in Europe) new functional urban regions – or cities *de facto* – arose as the result of the territorial coalescence of pre-existing self-contained cities (Calafati and Veneri, 2011). These phenomena yield

spatial patterns in urban areas that are definitely more complex than the simple physical expansion of cities, and they may influence economic activities and relationships occurring within and between cities.

We focus on two aspects that characterise contemporary (functional) urban regions: dispersion and polycentricity. The former relates to the decentralisation of economic activities from urban cores. Hence, it represents a morphological aspect. The second relates to the distribution of activities, which are likely to be concentrated in more than one urban centre. The presence of more than one urban core within urban areas is a functional aspect which influences the spatial hierarchy within urban areas.

Recently, the aspects of urban spatial structure have attracted the attention of scholars, and at a specific level they have also become issues for long policy debates on spatial planning policies to overcome possible social costs due to excessive urbanisation: this is the case of polycentric development policies, which have been strongly promoted at the European level (Commission of the European Union, 2011). Despite the increasing interest, however, there is still a lack of empirical research on the economic implications of spatial structure.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The research questions addressed by this paper are grounded on the agglomeration economies literature. Agglomeration economies have been conceptualized mainly as positive externalities, i.e. advantages for economic agents deriving from different mechanisms that are usually based on their physical or relational proximity. When production processes are taken into account, agglomeration economies can refer to single firms (scale economies), to the clustering of firms within the same industry (localisation economies), or to the proximity of economic agents from different sectors (urbanisation economies).

The literature on localisation economies states that the proximity of the same industries enhances innovation processes and growth through mechanisms of cooperation (Marshall-Arrow-Romer externalities) or competition (Porter externalities) among economic agents.<sup>1</sup> According to theories on urbanisation economies, proximity is maximised in cities, where the density and size of economic activities are high and foster mechanisms of information and ideas sharing, matching job supply and demand and learning processes by the workforce (Duranton and Puga, 2004). Notwithstanding differences between the two main approaches to

agglomeration economies, both of them assume size and density as the main proxies for agglomeration. In particular, urbanisation economies have been assumed to be an increasing function of scale and density – up to a certain threshold – and a decreasing function of the distance from the urban cores (Rosenthal and Strange, 2004).

Hence, structure is implicitly incorporated in the concept of agglomeration economies by mass and density, while there is a lack of research on the role of the urban and interurban structure, other than size or density, in economic performances. At least two other aspects that characterize contemporary functional regions have to be taken into account. These are the degree of polycentricity and of spatial dispersion of the population and economic activities within functional urban regions. Both can have economic implications for urban areas. On the one hand, polycentricity can be a tool enabling regions, especially the smaller ones, to 'borrow' size – fostering agglomeration economies generally related to urban scale and avoiding the congestion which can occur in large cities. On the other hand, urban dispersion may be harmful for the economy of urban areas because its consequence can be the loss of benefits related to physical proximity. Our paper tests these hypotheses on the case of Italian urban areas.

Our analysis draws mainly on the works by Lee and Gordon (2007, 2011) and Meijers and Burger (2010). Both studies approach spatial structure by using the taxonomy of dispersion and polycentricity and applying it to assess economic outcomes in terms of urban growth of jobs and population (Lee and Gordon, 2007) or labour productivity (Meijers and Burger, 2010); both found that decentralized structures are not harmful for growth. However, other works have found a negative role of dispersion in the economic performance of regions (Fallah et. Al, 2011; Veneri and Burgalassi, 2011). Regarding the role of polycentricity, despite the claims about its possible advantages in terms of preventing congestion, the results are controversial, thus allowing criticism of its effectiveness (Vandermotten et al., 2008; Veneri and Burgalassi, 2012).

## **METHODOLOGY**

We carried out an empirical analysis by considering 82 Italian Functional Urban Regions (FURs) as units of analysis. FURs were defined as aggregations of municipalities comprising one centre (or more than one) surrounded by neighbouring municipalities, the latter showing high degrees of interdependence with the centre(s) (Boix and Veneri, 2009).



Then, building on previous literature, several indicators of spatial structure were proposed, where spatial structure was declined in terms of polycentricity and dispersion. For data availability reasons, we were able to measure spatial structure variables for years 1991, 2001, 2011 by using census data. Subsequently, the main spatial trends followed by the Italian cities in the past two decades (1991-2011) were assessed.

Finally, estimation was made of an urban growth model where agglomeration was conceptualized as a source of increasing returns and as explaining the growth of cities beyond the level of their steady state (Rosenthal and Strange, 2004). The model assumed that change in population or employment is a function of a set of variables such as human capital, sector specialisation, demographic structure, and employment rate (Glaeser et al., 1992). We included also the variables of urban spatial structure, in terms of size, dispersion and polycentricity, in the model specification. In this framework, we tested whether the (average) performance of FURs in terms of growth of residents and jobs has been affected by their characteristics of spatial structure. In order to check the consistency of spatial structure variables, we used more than one variable for each dimension.

## **FINDINGS**

The data showed that the spatial structure evolved towards the decentralisation of FURs in the period 1991-2011. However, this pattern seems to have mainly affected the population, while jobs appear to have followed a more stable pattern. However, when focusing on the dynamics of the past decade, FURs have decentralised both in terms of population and jobs. The data also showed a general pattern of increasing polycentricity of the FURs.

Regression analysis of the determinant of urban growth showed that both the centralization and polycentricity characteristics of FURs were not significantly associated with growth of total employment, while urban size emerged as negative and significant. Hence, after other possible determinants of urban growth had been controlled for, smaller FURs showed higher growth. When considering population growth, we again found that urban size was negative and significant, while dispersion was positive and significant, and polycentricity was negative.

The fact that urban size is negative for growth can be interpreted as indicating the presence of congestion effects which harm the growth

potential of large FURs. The positive effect of dispersion for population growth may mean that physical proximity is less important for growth and for the quality of life within cities – hence it did not drive residential choices. Finally, the weak relationships between spatial structure and overall urban growth seemed to show no evidence of regionalised agglomeration economies, since polycentric FURs did not perform better than monocentric areas.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the sources of agglomeration economies, see Glaeser et al. (1992). For an application to Italy see Cirilli and Veneri (2011).

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# THE 'CITTÀ ABUSIVA' IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN ITALY: PRESENT CONDITIONS AND EVOLUTIONARY PROSPECTS

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*Abusivismo edilizio* is a familiar issue among Italian urban planners and policy makers. Outlaw construction accounted in fact for a large slice of the national building sector for several decades during the second half of the twentieth century (CER and Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, 1986), affecting a variety of urban environments the length and breadth of the peninsula: rural and coastal settlements, small and medium-size towns, as well as those emerging metropolitan areas undergoing huge internal migration flows. While popular among scholars from the 1960s to the late 1980s, the topic has received dwindling attention since then. Nowadays, it registers little interest in urban studies circles, even if it still weighs heavily in relation to national building production (Berdini, 2010: 67-78) and remains a burning issue both at local and national level in terms of its political implications. This has again been underlined by the controversies surrounding centre-right party candidates in Campania during recent elections.

If *abusivismo* is once more under scrutiny – in this seminar, dedicated to changing Italian cities – and if we are using the word *città* to refer to its outcomes, then this is in order to advance two significant hypotheses. The first is that outlaw construction, far from being a form of deviance, can be seen as one of the structural factors in the building of contemporary Italian cities, particularly in the South. The second is that the settlements generated by informal practices decades ago are undergoing deep changes, and these changes have to be described and interpreted, because they will

heavily impact on the liveability of the urban systems of the *Mezzogiorno* in the near future.

To lend support to the first hypothesis, a backward glance may be taken at the main factors at play in the social and material construction of these peculiar forms of *città* – factors that continue to influence its present-day condition.

First, southern *abusivismo* can be read as a more sinister manifestation of the tacit policy of “individual mobilization” that operated throughout Italy in the second half of the twentieth century. Described by Alessandro Pizzorno (1974) and then specified in its spatial details by Bernardo Secchi (1996), it developed where an inoperative State played on disadvantage in order to encourage individual families to work out their own solutions, taking advantage of incentives and the opportune lack of controls. Whereas in the North-East this has mainly taken the form of diffuse economic activation by local communities (Bagnasco, 1978; Bonomi, 1997), in the *Mezzogiorno* the same strategy of mobilization seemed to respond almost exclusively to the demand for private residential space. A demand which can be better understood when seen in the context of the acute economic imbalances and housing shortage that still afflicted the regions of the South in the early 1970s, and which was answered by local elites through the patronage of a massively abusive campaign of house building (Fera and Ginatempo, 1985; Cremaschi, 1990; Nocifora 1994).

Second, the history of Italian *abusivismo* is closely connected to the amnesty policy promoted to grant retrospective legalization to illegal housing. Initially tested in Sicily and Lazio in the early 1980s, the *condono edilizio* has been recurrently adopted at national level – in 1985, 1994 and 2003 – producing a variety of uncontrolled outcomes. On the one hand, by assigning to local municipalities – with no specific resources – the onerous recovery of outlaw urbanization, it has created the conditions for a permanent urban landscape of extremely poor quality, with scarce, if not totally absent, infrastructures and civic facilities (Fontana, 1988). On the other hand, the periodic re-introduction of the *condono* has encouraged more de-regulated behaviours – as pointed out by Carlo Donolo (2001) – which has even led to structured initiatives on the part of criminal organizations quick to recognise in the shady area of *abusivismo* an opportunity to launder money from illegal activities.

In support of the second hypothesis, we may look at the findings of fieldwork that I have undertaken in recent years in an attempt to correct

and enhance the interpretative frameworks formerly adopted to define outlaw building until the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, we may observe three transformation trajectories that are taking place in specific parts of southern *città abusiva* (Zanfi, 2008 and 2013).

The first trajectory, set in a quarter of Sarno, a municipality in Campania, tells the story of a widespread trend towards rootedness and responsibility. What we see is that the growing perception of failure – a mood that pervades many illegally-born settlements where both quality and facilities are missing – at times goes hand in hand with a conscious decision by the populace to take care of the space in which they live. Independently organised initiatives and residents' committees are thus growing in response to the chronic lack of a collective dimension. The result is an unprecedented concern for public space.

The second trajectory, set in the municipality of Ardea, in southern Lazio, is a story of individual responses to the absence of publicly supplied infrastructure networks. Here we see that off-grid solutions are being implemented by individuals, at times achieving higher standards of comfort and performance compared with the public infrastructure provisions to which they are a creative alternative.

A third trajectory – set in Marina di Acate, in eastern Sicily – tells of the abandonment and decay processes that are affecting the lowest-quality settlements. An increasing number of coastal resorts are showing serious signs of neglect, becoming increasingly unsuitable for tourism and seasonal use. Unable to attract the investment needed for maintenance, they are being repopulated by marginalised groups, and this often adds a social emergency to what is already a serious environmental issue.

Beyond their local specificities, these stories allow us to glimpse some of the general evolutionary dynamics that give new meaning to the term *città abusiva* within the urban systems of contemporary Southern Italy. As such, they are a long way from the interpretative paradigms inherited from the debates of the 1970s and 1980s. By following these new trajectories, we can formulate a more meaningful urban-policy agenda designed to deal with the *città abusiva*, thus going beyond the intervention modes envisaged by a policy of *condono* – interventions that have repeatedly proven inadequate. Three approaches can be adopted according my perspective, with a shift of focus towards the opportunities for and the limits to their implementation within the existing administrative framework and contextual factors. In particular, these approaches have to consider both the fiasco of the actual

measures related to the building amnesty in terms of urban upgrading, and the difficulty of implementing the demolition orders issued by public officers against strong social resistance.

A first line of approach is inspired by the embryonic sense of awareness and rootedness which is appearing in certain settlements, where the residents are beginning to perceive the limits and the failure of individual and family action. These expressions of social capital could be enhanced so as to feed alternatives to recovery plans, whereby citizens would no longer be required to wait passively for services to be supplied by a remote authority – nor should they have to demand such services after payment of the amnesty surcharge – but would feel involved as aware agents. The Roman case of *Consorti di auto-recupero*, in spite of the ambiguities that they have shown (Cellamare, 2010; Coppola, 2013), can still be considered a promising model, to be further articulated on the local contexts of *Mezzogiorno*.

A second line of approach regards the scattered self-improvement schemes being promoted by individuals in response to delays in municipal action. Rather than relying entirely on public intervention to fill the infrastructural gap that still afflicts most of the formerly-unauthorized-and-now-legalized settlements, it could be assumed that the absence of traditional infrastructure is the precondition for a different infrastructural policy, where individual initiatives could be fostered through incentives and opportune regulations, in order to disseminate the most scattered settlements with decentralized and flexible infrastructural solutions (for an interesting case of planning in regard to the territory of Southern Puglia see Viganò, 2001).

A third and final line of approach implies the removal of the more problematic and disqualified outlaw urbanizations from the southern landscape. This scenario relies on the fact that today many abusive settlements show irreversible processes of abandonment, and provide the precondition for new long-term policies aimed at reorganizing these built volumes, taking into account their embodied values and development rights. This scenario supposes a change in taste of future generations: it assumes the children and grandchildren of those responsible for unauthorised building in run-down areas might today be persuaded to consider valuable alternatives to maintaining inherited, decaying buildings. In this perspective, we have a long way to go: we need specific policies to transfer volumes from the shoddier developments, whose market value

is falling, to more dynamic areas with future development prospects; to treat and recycle the abandoned structures into new infrastructure or landscaping projects on the same sites; to manage the spontaneous and gradual return to the landscape over an extended period of time. In this regards, it is imperative for the Regions of the *Mezzogiorno* to consider the planning measures under experimentation in other urban-shrinkage contexts (Pallagst, Wiechmann and Martinez-Fernandez, 2013), tailoring them to the distinctive features of their urban contexts.

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Under the pressure of a complex configuration of interdependent factors – economic, demographic, technological, institutional and cultural – Italian cities are experiencing profound structural changes. The heterogeneity of the Italian urban system makes this process highly place-specific. The structure (and size) of the Italian cities, the rationality of their political-administrative elite, their resistance and resilience capacity, and the shocks hitting them are very different. Consequently, the adjustment strategy that cities will implement and the development trajectories that they will follow may be expected to be rather different as well. The Italian urban landscape will undergo a profound transformation in the next decade and beyond.

There is a manifest ‘lack of knowledge’ about the on-going process of Italian cities’ structural changes, and it has straightforward negative implications concerning the capacity of local and national policy makers to forecast cities’ future development trajectories and to design appropriate regulation policies. This collection of papers – presented at the workshop “The Changing Italian Cities. Emerging Imbalances and Conflicts” (L’Aquila, 10-11 December 2013) – is the first, preliminary result of a research programme in progress at the Gran Sasso Science Institute on the state and potential evolution of the Italian urban system. The papers explore structural changes in Italian cities from an interdisciplinary perspective, conducting empirical investigation and field studies focused on long-term trends and the policy challenges that they raise.

