



The new territories of urban planning: The issue of the fringe areas and settlement filaments



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ABSTRACT

This research involves a lengthy study of Marche territory, a region which is well-known for its particular “Marche way to development”: small companies and small towns linked by a close network of badly planned settlement filaments. The aim of the research is to propose new settlements models, based on the development of quality rather than quantity, and tools to save, preserve and live a territory with low settlement density.

The results of the study bring to light above all the serious shortcomings of the public authorities in their management and planning of the territory. A number of pathologies present in the new settlement typologies are then explicitly pointed out. To conclude, the research proposes a spectrum of possible solutions.

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1. Introduction¹

Marche is an unusual region with respect to the rest of Italy, which hides a secret: a mysterious thread links cities and territories, sea and hillside country landscapes, which are defined in visionary terms: Green comet (a weave of built-up and farming area fragments along radiocentric systems of urban fringes), Luminous serpentine (formations that connect the cities, winding over the hilltops of Marche region, and linking them to the consolidated coastal systems); Luminous paths (Linear branching of settlements, narrow lines of continuous building fabric along the main valleys, that tend to dilate close to the urban centres), Urban nebulas (constellations of small urban settlements).

Planning in Italy has up to now neglected the study and planning of new filiform settlements, along thousands of miles of hilltops, valley bottoms, settlement filaments of the urban fringes of consolidated centres, while in a time of economic recession, the transformation of these low density settlements might turn them

into areas that attract investments and an experimental territory for the planning of innovation, social and equal-sustainable protection of rural-urban green areas, in an extensive landscape rich in social and ecologic interactions (Rauws and De Roo, 2011).

These urban structures, which are characterised by extreme and disorganised land use and a high risk of negative interaction, degradation and abandon, represent a new opportunity for a policy to relaunch local values (Stephenson, 2010) and a way of life in environments with a low anthropisation level and high environmental landscape value: neither city, nor countryside, nor park. What is the future of these different typologies of peripheries? (Grant et al., 2013).

The research identifies numerous pathologies: the co-existence and competition of centrifugal and centripetal forces, settlement disorganisation without recognisability, identity, functionality, relationships between the parts; structural degradation including of the formal, functional and social quality of disintegrated urban settlements; a loss of the value of historical-cultural assets, dangerous interactions between vehicle and pedestrian traffic; an uncontrolled increase of costs per residential unit and the costs needed to resolve situations of unsustainable environmental incompatibility; a lack of functional organisation and rational management of the filiform settlement along the narrow urban sections etc.

The conclusions of the research work provide a set of intervention suggestions: reassertion of the crucial and strategic role of territorial-urban planning policies and choices, and governance, at

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a regional, provincial and municipal level, to protect the landscape; a common strategy by the local authorities for the protection, management and containment of dispersive processes and the conservation of the peri-urban fringes of the marginal urban-rural landscape, a multidisciplinary approach, that focuses attention on the quality of life and care of the landscape, the attenuation of unfair distribution of environmental resources, new forms of shared management of the territory, the re-proposal of a slow pedestrian and cycling re-appropriation model of the territory, urban forms of excellence for environmental quality and life, with the creation of new possible common European scenarios for the third millennium.

2. The disciplinary context

In the collective imagination, cities and countryside have long represented two separate entities that are investigated with different tools. In more recent times this interpretation has begun to crumble, and new paradigms have been established that explore the city-countryside as an indivisible whole in terms of investigations. A functionalist systemic approach was that of the “city-region”. In the 70’s, in a climate of uncertainty and helplessness with respect to guiding territorial processes, firstly the paradigm of “weak thought” was asserted and then, under the influence of the spatial concept of territorial economy, that of the urban planning process, sub-urbanization, de-urbanization, re-urbanization, in order to interpret the life cycle of cities.

With the spread of medium and large conurbations and their dispersive processes, the new settlement phenomena was examined: peri-urbanisation, metropolization and rururbanisation.

The latter term, coined in France, focused on the contribution to the consolidated urban system, by active farming and a rural environment which found itself involved in a process of widespread uncontrolled housing developments (Donadieu, 1996, 2006).

With the spread of settlements in rural areas, above all due to manufacturing activities, private mobility and new private housing models, new forms of governance were required for these new conurbations (Clementi et al., 1996). In these years, the settlement model of “urban countryside” was consolidated across-the board, with a new way of life and lifestyles which were neither rural nor urban. Many under-used open spaces were still not formally or functionally characterised, generating new settlement geographies, on one hand, with the abandonment of farming practices and cultures and, on the other hand, the extreme exploitation of lands.

While the cities continued to impose their dominance, the countryside continued to be relegated to the remaining reserve area (Palazzo, 2005).

Within this conflict, landscape protection focused on single anthropized landscapes of consolidated quality and nature reserves of recognized value, neglecting the landscapes “of everyday life”: those everyday areas, or “paysages du quotidien” under the European Landscape Convention (2000), which explicitly refers to the “aspirations of populations with regard to the landscape features of their living context”.

To overcome this approach, research aims at the involvement and participation of communities in the choice of sustainable and shared models between preservation and development (Van Der Valk, 2013), evidencing the need for the reintegration of areal peri-urban and linear systems (which had escaped the attention of local administrations, studies, territorial land management and planning) within a strategy that enhances the new values available to the community.

Competitive free trading has reached levels of exasperation: economic and social figures have become competitors, social

memberships are devalued and there is a new rivalry between individuals and between regions, a rivalry that clashes on the field of urban explosion (Gibelli and Salzano, 2006). This is the new desecrating paradox of globalization (Sassen, 2008).

The dramatic effects of settlement flooding (Bonora and Cervellati, 2009), the profound change in the dichotomy between development and growth (Latouche, 2008) and the effects of centrifugal recentralization are analysed.

Land and building speculation and the use of land are the engulfing effects on the territory, of uncontrolled economic freedom (Berdini, 2008; Zanfi 2008).

The territory, represented as a stage of attraction, is now reduced to a mere market commodity (landscape, rurality, sociality, quality, beauty, sharing): it is the expressive form of post-modernity (Choay, 2008; Bauman, 2008). Marketing is the new and powerful weapon of global conflict (Indovina et al., 2005).

According to Salzano (Salzano, 2012), today, “the rural area is not considered, valued and treated according to its qualities, but according to its ability to enter the urban utilisation (and economic value) cycle. This is nothing more than land waiting to be urbanized. The claims of civil society are a criticism of how the relationship between city and countryside, urban and rural territory has changed. The city model, the demand for which stems from this criticism, must permit drawing together, on different scales (countryside and district, city, vast area, region, etc.), urbanised areas (prevalently artificial) and rural areas (prevalently natural)”.

In the drama of modernity “perceptive, emotional and behavioural boundaries, in addition to functional boundaries, have been cancelled and the administrative decisions that determine the same have been overwhelmed by extreme indifferent lifestyles” (Bonora, 2012).

The approach proposed here is based on a vision of hope. A new deal for city and countryside (Magnaghi and Fanfani, 2010), where the concept of urban bioregion integrates the bio-regionalist vision which focuses on the integration of urban systems (Magnaghi, 2009) – based on the Geddesian principles of “section of the valley” (Geddes, [1915] 1970) – the recovery of segments around historic cities, the redefinition of urban borders, the reconnection of open spaces enclosed with the countryside, the reconstruction of a fruitful and nurturing relationship between city and countryside.

In this problematic context, the approach to this research is based on a multilevel process (from regional to vast area, and local), which is close to the aspirations and participation of the people. The design outlook focuses on issues on a “case by case basis”, raising the questions of care and the new meaning of contexts, where solidarity between city and countryside becomes a pact of mutual utility, a value that helps to weather the current crisis, guiding us to the road of development based on valorisation and integration of resources, urban-rural and environmental landscapes, centralized and consolidated, on one hand, widespread and as yet undefined, on the other (Bronzini and Marinelli, 2010). The new socio-economic models of the future are thus proposed, where territory, environment and landscape are once again considered as common non-appropriable and non-alienable assets. Subjects of the reproduction of life and the production of collective wealth.

The originality of the approach proposed by this project comes from addressing a theme such as that of “the new territories of urban planning”, that the scientific community has rarely addressed, and which have been disregarded altogether by territorial government agencies, who are unaccustomed to addressing planning problems that go beyond provincial and municipal borders but develop along settlement filaments over thousands of miles, enveloping, like a spider-web, thousands of historical centres, and an endless dissemination of more recent scattered settlements.

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