

Global City or Ordinary City? Rome as a case study

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Abstract - The present paper debates on the factors of urban competitiveness in 'ordinary cities' and their links with urban planning. By analyzing the case of Rome (Italy), we examine the impact that planning practices, deriving from the mainstream literature centered on 'global cities', may have on cities that are not supported by an advanced system of governance. In Rome, policies promoting urban development were mainly focused on 'global' city models which result in the oversimplification of urban competitiveness issues. Planning strategies divorced from the present territorial context may have social and environmental effects and prove the importance of policies facing with 'ordinary cities' and referring to 'ordinary geographies'.

Keywords - Urban competitiveness, Ordinary cities, Global Cities, Governance, Rome

1. Introduction

Cities and urban regions are considered the most important territorial organizations in the post-industrial era (e.g. Hall, 1966; Sassen, 1991; Scott, 2001a). A number of studies dealing with urban competitiveness have addressed the relationship between post-industrial capitalism and regionalization processes (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982; Taylor et al., 2002; Townsend, 2009; Gonzales, 2011). Research has increasingly related the economic success of firms to specific territorial traits, including face-to-face interactions, knowledge spill over, original social networks, and relationships based on trust (OECD, 2006). The 'Global City Regions' and 'Mega City Regions' have been seen as the leaders of the global urban hierarchy (Taylor, 2004). These regions concentrate hard and soft infrastructures, multi-cultural life, talent, and tolerance, within a production network formed up by several Marshall nodes of production (Jonas and Ward, 2007).

How the recent urban development of Rome, a

southern European capital, may contribute to the international debate upon urban competitiveness? What are the strengths and weaknesses of its economic structure and governance system? These questions offer the input to investigate on the role of planning strategies promoting competitiveness in 'ordinary' cities (Amin and Graham, 1997) and contrasting with planning practices designed for 'global' cities. Rome is a Mediterranean city with a fairly increasing population, a tertiary-oriented economy, a relatively low unemployment level, a wealthy society although with marked social segregation (Mudu, 2006; Munafò et al., 2010; Ciccarelli et al., 2011). However, Rome ranks low in the global urban hierarchy (Beavenstock et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2002; OECD, 2006; European Commission, 2007). This is probably due to the fact that, after the second world war, the City's development was driven by policies supporting the traditional tertiary sector and depressing the industrial growth at the same time (Seronde Babonaux, 1983; Costa et al., 1991; Krumholtz, 1992; Insolera, 1993; Fratini, 2000).

During the last two decades, however, the local institutions¹ have promoted a new development based on tourism and cultural industries (Gemmiti, 2008). At the same time, the undertaken policies impacted weakly the traditional socioeconomic structure of the city, mitigating only partially the existing gap between the inner city and the suburbs (Fratini, 2001).

In the light of the debate on 'ordinary' and 'global' cities, the present paper comments upon the current Rome's social context, its production and territorial structure. This paper also identifies and possibly criticizes the planning strategies undertaken

¹ With special reference to the municipality of Rome, which is one of the largest municipalities in Europe (1285 km²).

in Rome that point out the possible contrast between policies facing with 'ordinary' and 'global' cities. The negative effects produced by this kind of policies on Rome's competitiveness were partially due to the oversimplification through which the complex city/economy/development relationship was (sometimes rhetorically) presented and addressed at local scale (Gargiulo Morelli and Salvati, 2010). At the same time, the geographical category of the 'global' city seems to be meaningful to formulate guidelines to promote Rome (and other 'ordinary' cities) competitiveness in the coming years.

2. Global cities. Inputs from the literature

The relationship between cities and economic development has been increasingly interpreted using the metaphor of the global city (Ward and Jonas, 2004; Jonas and Ward, 2007; Neuman and Hull, 2009). Globalization processes and ICT development have recently added to the traditional concepts of concentration, hierarchy, spatial agglomeration, and inner scale economies (Harrison, 2007). Although even during the industrial era the international profile of some cities emerged from the political, cultural, economic, and media perspective, these cities remained undoubtedly linked to their countries (Hall, 1966). During the 1980s, however, a change in the urban paradigms to tackle with the on-going drastic challenge arose.

This challenge dealt with the creation of a global system of production and trade exchange among a large network of cities (and, in some cases, large urban regions). The ability a city has to dominate this system depends on its economic, production, and social capitals (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982). These urban poles also acted as coordination nodes of the entrepreneurial, social, and cultural networks scattered across the space of global flows (Sassen, 1991; Castells, 1996). As a consequence, studies upon 'territorialized' production networks and the globalization processes focused on the global cities, seen as nodes capable to orient the economy and society (Hall, 2009). These territories assumed the physiognomy of 'global-city regions' or 'mega-city regions' in the XXI century (Scott, 2001a).

These geographical categories contributed to the analysis of urban agglomerations formed by a network of Marshall local economies capable to attract and maintain relevant functions including i) financial and production services, ii) command and control functions, iii) cultural and creative industries,

and iv) tourism (Scott, 2001b; Hall and Pain, 2006). Obviously, the socioeconomic profile of top-ranking global city regions contrasted with that observed in the traditional Fordist city. On the one hand, their economic functions have changed into a different, wider range of production sectors (Celant, 2007). On the other hand, they also undergo transformations in their urban form towards polycentricism, with a possible positive impact on firms attractiveness, and the economic development in general (Davoudi, 2003; McCann, 2007; Davoudi, 2008; Rodriguez-Pose, 2008).

Hall and Pain (2006) described the polycentric mega-city region as "a series of anything between ten and fifteen cities and towns, physically separated but functionally networked, clustered around one or more larger central cities, and drawing enormous economic strength from a new functional division of labour. [...] It is no exaggeration to say that this is the emerging urban form at the start of the 21st century".

Polycentric growth thus became one of the most relevant issues in urban planning for the (supposed positive) link to urban competitiveness (OECD, 2006) and territorial sustainability (Krueger and Savage, 2007). A polycentric region is characterized by three attributes: i) a rapidly changing urban form and a diversified economic structure, ii) a thick inner network of functional relations based on local specialization and, finally, iii) the willingness of a number of urban nodes to cooperate for 'catching' the opportunities offered by globalization, according to their own identity and socioeconomic attributes (Deas and Giordano, 2003; Etherington and Jones, 2009; Neuman and Hull, 2009).

3. Rome and the global cities

Although urban systems are often analyzed using the robustness of the internal relations, their position in the urban hierarchy is measured by the intensity of international relations. By looking at several city ranking exercises (both those evaluating assets (Hall, 1966; Friedmann and Wolf, 1982; Sassen, 1991; Scott, 2001) and those estimating flows and relationships between nodes (Castells, 1996; Hall and Pain, 2006; Taylor, 2004)), it became clear how Rome always occupied a relatively low position. Studies evaluating urban competitiveness through performance indicators confirmed its ranking (Turok and Mykhnenko, 2007).

As an example, in the study conducted by Loughborough Globalization and World Cities Group (Taylor et al., 2002; Taylor, 2004), Rome was

classified as a 'Gamma World City', i.e. a group of 'sub-global cities' characterized by intermediate population size, stable demographic performances, and endowments capable to influence the regional (or even national) economic system due to the presence of some global services (e.g. banking, fashion, culture, media). However, Rome was still far from the most dynamic and globalized cities. This result emerged from an urban competitiveness report (OECD, 2006) where Rome ranked 41st in economic competitiveness, 20th in short-term economic growth, 27th in work productivity, and 5th in wealth disparities.

Although these findings depict Rome as a city with moderately high demographic dimension and economic performances similar to other European cities, they also reflect the uneven difficulty for local firms to connect to the global networks. The poor degree of internationalization observed in Rome's economy emerges also from a recent classification elaborated by the European Commission (2007). Rome was classified as an 'International Hub', namely a city sharing a European influence. Rome, however, was also labeled as 'established Capital' and ranked below Milan, the second city of Italy forming one of the largest urban agglomerations in southern Europe, which was classified as a 'Knowledge Hub' (a key node in the global economy and a leader city at national scale, characterized by the presence of international firms, high level of talent and creativity, and high connectivity with the rest of the world).

In summary, Rome maintains the political and cultural centrality typical of a capital city, while losing the economic centrality. A report profiling the polycentric regions in the European Union (Espo, 2006) offered similar results. By defining Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) in Europe, ESPON elaborated a city rank based on competitiveness, connectivity, and knowledge indicators. Rome was classified as a 'Metropolitan European Growth Area', belonging to the (wide) group of cities with a relatively good score in all considered indicators but with a subordinate role in the global world.

4. Global does not mean all cities

The Rome's economy is based upon different assets from those typically observed in the 'global' cities. According to the latest available data provided by Istituto Tagliacarne (2007), the market openness and the export propensity indicators confirmed the weak economic performance of Rome in the global arena. The market openness indicator is almost four

times lower than Milan, and even lower than that observed in Latium and in central Italy². The same pattern was found in the export propensity indicator, with a very low value recorded in Rome (5%) compared to Milan (30%), Latium (10%) and Italy as a whole (25%).

The relatively modest performances depend on the 'traditional' production structure already existing in the urban region of Rome. As a matter of fact, up to the early 1990s, the country-wide centrality of Rome was mainly based on the public sector (Clementi and Perego, 1983; Seronde Babonaux, 1983; Insolera, 1993). Of course, Rome has played an increasingly important role in the international arena as a tourism pole (Celant, 2007). In 2008, the total arrivals have been almost 10 millions, two third of which was represented by foreigners, over than one fourth of whom coming from the United States. Rome attracted 8% of the international tourism flows, a share similar to that observed in other European Capitals but lower than the two main international gateways, London (35%) and Paris (19%). Nowadays, however, it is still the public sector (together with commerce and construction) to create the majority of (low-salary) job opportunities in the area (Ciccarelli et al., 2011)³.

Nevertheless, the share of tertiary sector in Rome product (87.6% in 2007) indicates a comparable performance with the most advanced economies. Services consolidated during the last years, particularly in some innovative segments such as informatics, research and development, finance, and banking. Other sectors such as entertainment, culture and sport have also been acquiring relevance, providing evidence that the city is (slowly) evolving towards post-modern economy (Beriato and Gospodini, 2004). However, occupation still grew in traditional sectors such as health, education, and

² Rome municipality belongs to the administrative (NUTS-2) region of Latium and to the geographical (NUTS-1) region of central Italy. Latium is a moderate industrial and agricultural region with some service-oriented local districts localized around Rome and Latina.

³ It is not surprising that in the ranking exercise proposed by Richard Florida and the Creative Cities group for the Italian cities, Rome ranked at the top. This was mainly due to the contribution of the 'Talent' component. Talent estimation, indeed, was based on indicators such as the density of population with a high level of education and the number of public and private researchers (Tinagli and Florida, 2005), that was strongly influenced by policies oriented to promote concentration of public research institutes in Rome.

constructions. In summary, the economic base in Rome remains 'traditional' and, in some aspects, similar to that observed in other semi-peripheral, Mediterranean cities (e.g. Clementi and Perego, 1983; Leontidou, 1990, 1993; Barata Salgueiro, 2001; Busquets, 2006).

5. Coming back to the centre-periphery relationship in Rome: a likely unsolved issue?

As said previously, the polycentric spatial organization may result as a more competitive urban form compared to the mono-centric model (Klosterman and Musterd, 2001; Davoudi, 2003; Longhi and Musolesi, 2007). Increasing competitiveness in the polycentric region could derive from the contribution of the different production nodes (Hall, 1997; Lambooy, 1998; Scott, 2001a).

On the contrary, Rome has been often proposed as a model for urban concentration and economic polarization (Seronde Babonaux, 1983). More than 66% of the population residing in the Rome province, and about half of the whole Latium population actually lives within the Rome municipality boundaries⁴. However, as occurred in other Mediterranean cities (Dura Guimera, 2003; Couch et al., 2007; Chorianopoulos et al., 2010; Gargiulo Morelli and Salvati, 2010), population has recently decreased in the core area (Salvati and Sabbi, 2011). It is therefore interesting to focus on the existing centre-periphery gap in Rome and on the recently adopted policies aimed at mitigating this gap (Phelps et al., 2006).

Rome's municipality is subdivided into nineteen municipi (i.e. sub-municipal districts) with a population similar to many middle-size Italian cities (i.e. 100.000 - 200.000 inhabitants). These districts are endorsed with restricted governance functions (social services, culture, local entertainment, handicraft, and local police). The territorial complexity described above was neither faced by an efficient local governance system, nor by effective forms of cooperation that could be considered as an expression of polycentrism (Tewdwr-Jones and McNeill, 2000; Feiock, 2004).

⁴ As said, the surface area under the municipality of Rome is 1.285 km², compared to the much small figures from Milan (182 km²), Naples (117 km²) and Turin (130 km²). Rome municipality (NUTs5) covers 25% of the whole NUTs-3 province of Rome and over 7% of NUTs-2 Latium Region.

This planning strategy reflects the uneven difficulty showed by local and regional institutions to identify and border the Rome metropolitan area. According to the Law no 142/1990, the Italian administrative regions were engaged to identify their metropolitan areas. During the following twenty years, Latium institutions failed to identify the border of the Rome's metropolitan area. Only in 2010 Rome has been acknowledged as the 'Capital City of the Italian State' with special power (Law no. 42/2009), and the boundaries of this area were chosen as corresponding to the Rome municipal borders.

The attitude showed by local institutions to consider the metropolitan area of Rome as coinciding with Rome's municipality conflicts with indications coming from the mainstream literature and the orientations of European policy (Giannakourou, 2005). As a matter of fact, it was suggested to establish political, social, and economic cooperation across the widest possible urban region, in order to maximize the territorial assets of specialization (Brenner, 2003; Salet et al., 2003. Bongaerts et al., 2009; Townsend, 2009). Unfortunately, government institutions in Rome missed the opportunity to set up a territorial system capable to support innovative planning strategies at regional scale (Jessop, 2005; Deas and Lord, 2006; Gualini, 2006). The main issue, also emerging from the comparison between Rome and top-ranking cities, thus stands in the governance weakness at all planning levels in Italy (i.e. national, regional, and local level).

In addition, during the last twenty years, planning choices addressed public (and sometimes private) investments towards the city centre of Rome, with the possible effect of disregarding the development potential existing in peripheral areas (Gonzales, 2009). The Rome Master Plan (1993-2008) and the New Strategic Plan (2008) identified tourism and culture as the two main sectors affecting urban development. According to this approach, the central area was mainly considered for measures promoting these two sectors (Gemmiti, 2008). Large hotels, congress centers, shopping malls, often designed by famous architects, have been concentrated in the 'consolidated' city (Gospodini, 2001, 2009). Through these architectural symbols, planners have tried to renovate the traditional image of the city centre by creating a conventional landscape, which is one of the essential attributes of 'global' cities (Gospodini, 2006).

Doing so, urban planning in Rome has been oriented towards measures unable to radically modify

the economic structure of the urban region and to alter in-depth the traditional city-economy relationship (Delladetsima, 2006). Measures were not designed to promote local specialization and economic relations within the city region. The construction of a new urban landscape, in Rome as in other 'ordinary' cities, could have the effect of consolidating the gap between inner city and suburbs.

6. Conclusion

If you look at the new architectural symbols of the city centre, you could suppose that Rome has partially gained the image of an international, post-modern city. However, its economic role hardly exceeds the national borders excepting for tourist attractiveness. The modest Rome's economic performances were mainly due to the preservation of traditional production sectors. The limited international role definitely stands on the lack of innovative firms in the investigated urban region.

Besides that, the governance system in Italy was not able to promote strategies facing with the specificity of Rome's territorial context. Urban competitiveness, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability cannot be fulfilled when policies fail to support local economies outside the inner city (Krugman, 1997; Amin and Thrift, 2000; Kresl, 2006). The decision to identify the metropolitan area as overlapping with the municipal borders is only an example demonstrating how the (few) opportunities to implement innovative governance solutions have been systematically missed in Rome. This claims for rethinking the role of Rome as a city capital. This is a tricky issue when reshaping a network of towns autonomous from the capital, in the light of a really polycentric development. To promote urban competitiveness in Rome definitely means to replace the 'centre-periphery' vision with a really systemic and holistic 'city-region' vision.

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