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The metropolitan plural city

Antonio Taccone^{a,*}

^a*Department of Heritage, Architecture, Urban planning, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, Italy*

Abstract

An inclusive metropolitan city can be considered as a urban system that changes by designing social, economic, and environmental innovative responses which enable it to withstand social change in the long term.

It is a city that produces significant economic opportunities taking advantages of the political trend, or particularly following the adoption of Law Delrio, of the policies of composition of metropolitan cities which cause expectations and priorities at all policy levels. Precisely, once established, metropolitan cities will be able to carry out essential purposes and build a more integrated urban policy and a ethical urban development planning.

The constitution of inclusive policies should be part of the process of implementation of metropolitan city since the beginning, both in the chief town, and beyond.

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1. Introduction

The issue of the contrast to social segregation in the urban area, a contest which is characterized by large migration flows, constitutes a very topical and relevant problem that needs to be addressed with the participation of stakeholders who can jointly work towards in both projects of urban planning and socio-cultural integration.

Our society is constantly changing and is now considered “multi-ethnic”.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39.(0)965 169 6403.

E-mail address: ataccone@unirc.it

Social changes within the cities are due to the impact of migration flows, which bring opportunities and stimulus for the implementation of new processes that take into consideration the different cultures, in order to provide a higher urban quality.

For the last several years, field research has focused on social transformations.

As far as back in the 1977, Christopher Alexander (Fallanca, 1997) turned his intention to one of the pattern for the maintenance of ethnic neighborhoods within the cities.

That originated a critical debate. His approach was interpreted as a form of maintenance of social segregation, but was later intended as an inclusive policy where cities could interact with one another and cultures co-exist.

In the design of several Mediterranean cities, or in the urban interpretation settlements, it is possible to identify different methods and strategies useful to maintain and promote conditions for multi-ethnicity.

Several cities already contribute to urban design with preservation and promotion of the heritage cultures and ethnic groups.

The newly aroused multi-ethnicity demand requires new approaches and large cultural openings. In order to create a break in the current trend towards the homologation of the way of living, before planning existing spaces it is necessary to reckon with customs and traditions, and a new awareness of areas and cities in the most peculiar way.

A strategy that gathers territory development and new city requests, is required in order to focus on a new model of development, based on sustainability of interventions and multi-ethnicity working towards a cultural growth.

The purpose is to trigger strategic transformation processes, characterized by a strict preservation of the individuality and a proper redesign of the existing, in the belief that our urban areas, for their peculiar landscape, characterized by a legacy settlement whose historical sedimentation proves a millenarian coexistence of different cultures, deserve an ambitious project.

The aim for this plan is a place in which the articulation and shapes of spaces, both public and private, constitutes a mirror of complex identity, and where we can recognize many architectural and urban connections about which every inhabitant can find himself, and understand the bond with territorial and cultural context wider than the one he lives in.

In this process of redesign, a real cultural progress, particularly evident in the new urban entities as the metropolitan cities, may be represented by the constitution of Territorial Laboratories, that are centers dedicated to deal with residents, migrants and citizens' complaints, and fulfill their needs.

It is a new information system, dedicated to citizens, which provide urban policies build with joint participation of the whole community, citizens and experts coming from different cultures, in order to create a feeling of belonging and citizenship.

Metropolitan Territorial Laboratories set as several urban centers, could be actively involved in the constitution of metropolitan city networks (Fallanca, 2008). They could be seen as poles and instruments of "communication on the city", oriented towards citizens and organizations, and people who can offer a significant contribution to the search of potential, purposes and needs of the metropolitan identity.

A new way, coherently with the latest trends of urban planning, not only to inform but mostly to share ideas, purposes and projects about the development of cities and metropolitan areas. A new cultural turmoil is active in the governance of local authorities as well.

Participation process in the design of urban plans become mandatory. The local laws identifies them as laboratories. This allows to combine actions for the construction of the metropolitan plural city, designed to both citizens and migrants.

This innovative policy of close collaboration and participation of citizens in the transformation of places and urban contexts, can be realized in specific areas, public help desks, or small urban centers where hosting conferences, meetings, projects and requests for the requalification and the transformation of the cities, in order to support the planning of innovative policies in which citizens can work together and cooperate at the transformation of places and urban contexts. The implicit purpose is to allow every citizen, starting from the migrants, to know and live better their own city, to trigger a virtuous process able to offer instruments to wonder about the city, and have the chance to promote initiatives oriented to the construction of new scenarios for a plural city.

Under these influences, many local administrations already embarked on this new path dealing with citizens and joint participation so that it is not a one-off action but it could be followed up.



Fig. 1. Reggio Calabria: waterfront

Many opportunities of information and presentation of problems are organized in relation to bigger goals, to achieve lasting results. These are aimed at raising awareness amongst the citizens of their roles for concrete proposals for the development of their own city.

Moreover, these opportunities are seen as stimulus for the local administrations so that they can establish an open and honest dialogue with citizens and workers, final recipients of the urban policies.

In this particular period of the Mediterranean and European history, cities that were not defined multi-ethnic are now hosting amongst their inhabitants, several migrant communities, who chose to reside in the cities for an indefinite period.

Territorial Laboratories networks could offer a valid instrument for socio-cultural inclusion, sharing citizens' requests and all those who chose to live in the city.

This inevitably leads to a "plural city", a city for everyone, made for those who share the same urban place.

2. Building the metropolitan city of the future

Nowadays, as a result of the law Delrio, we are still at an experimental stage of innovative policies of the metropolitan city, from a perspective of local administration recomposition could generate new opportunities, not only for economic growth and territorial organization, but, in particular, for a social development.

Metropolitan city is a city that creates economic opportunities only with awareness of the changing demands, and needs of the new society, and a demand of an ethical and inclusive planning (Sbetti, 2015). We could imagine a system that meets the economic, environmental, and social requirements and offers urban policies in order to support social changes in the long term.

The hoped-for system should find solutions to adapt the project processes towards the social changes that is becoming more and more multicultural and multi-ethnic, and take effectively action above all in the urban areas (suburbs and sensitive environments), places where actions due to remodel a centrality and urban quality are highly required.

Historically the territorial projections of Project 80 (1970) presupposed the recognition of a demand for a urban evolution towards metropolitan dimension. It proposed the achievement of a "rational metropolitan planning organization", and the only way to make it possible was with massive allocation of a productive and infrastructure investment.

The National Strategic Reference Framework, in its action lines, proposed a national strategic plan build by transnational platforms aimed at realizing new centers, in an attempt to a competitive balance of the Euro Mediterranean system, through "corridors" identified as "territorial devices" able to structure a Mediterranean reinforcement.



Fig. 2. Reggio Calabria, a waterfront view

NSRF already emphasized on the existing of uniqueness present in the national territory, in an attempt of requalification of resources, development of accessibility measures and economics, promotion of excellence, and innovation opportunities that would nurture the national strategic role.

In accordance with the law Delrio, what it is an issue, is the interpretation of the main theme of the statute and strategic metropolitan plan, in order to design an innovative model of territorial governance that takes into account the socio-economic development processes and area requests. These tools are necessary to hold strategic actions, worth for the project of a new role, based on originality of features of the different parts of the territory, in a multicultural vision to achieve a claim of identity of these areas which no longer have identifiable features, or more likely never had.

The key connection for human activities should be the different and peculiar cultures of the places, interpreted as guidelines aimed to provide evolution for the “master plan choices”.

In this context, the urban suburbs segments of the metropolitan territory can be a test ground for Laboratories and planning ability, in which urban design represents a way for linking disjointed places, with a lack of identity and community facilities, making them supportive.

The suburbs involved in a wider process of constitution of a metropolitan reality, can play an active role in realizing public places and areas, spreading new senses of belonging and forming a new collective identity: a metropolitan identity.

In this landscape architecture, a shared spatial design must keep an eye out for conferring or reestablishing higher quality urban conditions and affect the equilibrium and the spatial relocation of functions. The experimentation of these places, seen as intercultural contexts, could better combine experiences and cultures of living, compare different ways of planning, and personal architectural visions, in order to imagine a wider and complex vision, expression of a metropolitan civilization that contains shared values as hospitality, inclusion, vitality, and multiple forms and ways of living.

As a consequence, Laboratories have the task of stimulate and encourage the constant participation of the local stakeholders with the choice for the city, providing information for citizens about centers and development modality.

Nowadays, due to a different cultural approach, and under the influence of innovative urban policies, we are able to save and restore the territory through strategies and projects that succeed in reintroducing a quality of space and cultural facilities of social inclusion. The Urban Emergencies and Territorial Framework Agreement, intervention program of the town planning department and government of the Territory of “Regione Calabria”, which represents a regional official guideline, orients urban development, announcing the abandon of unsustainable intervention models toward a sustainable economy based on safety and promotion of the local resources and still intact landscape values that require a well-structured plan of intervention aimed at recompose and requalify the physiognomic of the urban system in general, able to sort out the continuity of nature, the reorganization and restoration of urban settlements.



Fig. 3. Reggio Calabria and the Strait

The time is ripe to propose in our cities an innovative process towards metropolitan policies that could represent a boost to effective and strategic planning, as it is recently happening in the best Italian and European experiences.

Policies that identified resources, time and effort, to promote local social fabric, and reduced socio-economic cultural and structural diversity in the sensitive areas of the city.

Particularly in the southernmost settlements, the chronic lack of healthy productive fabric, the decreasing economic contribution of agriculture industry and many other factors that local policies have sadly failed to implement, we are witnessing the formation of new suburbs, very often places of poor quality, lacking in services and infrastructures.

We should be aware that these areas, from a metropolitan perspective, do not only have incidents of deterioration, but they are filled with extraordinary potential that could turn into peculiarities, restoring and creating historical memory and reevaluating a heritage to save and protect, so that we can actually choose policy solutions that aim to alleviate ethnic social segregation. It is time to address new challenges to those best practices that produced powerful impacts on the territory.

Renzo Piano played a major role in supporting the idea to set up a working group G124 (Piano, 2014), established using his salary of senator, donated to the brightest young architects.

The group is deeply committed to excellent results in the design of marginal areas, in Catania, Rome and Turin, in order to set up a centrality of the suburbs, through a design model of innovation and the participation of local communities.

3. The plural city

The implementation of inclusive policies must take part of the process of constitution of metropolitan city from the beginning. Many metropolitan areas have embarked on the process provided for themselves with legislation on this matter, started realization of Metropolitan Strategic Plan (Reggio Calabria is another issue, since its constitution will be in June 2016 when the current local politicians would no longer rule).

Many statutes contain peculiar laws especially in matter such as internal security, urban regeneration, quality of public and residential areas, land-use reducing strategy, in order to protect valuable agricultural land and green areas of the city. Bologna provided in its statute, a peculiar law about urban resilience directed to socio-economic political institution.

The Metropolitan Strategic Plan can represent an important opportunity to reintroduce some principles in order to improve urban quality, evoking in the city areas, whether public or private, cultural identities, that hold within themselves, the roots of the place of origins of the sensitive communities, revisited and enriched with features and wider meanings, belonging to a society and an evolved citizenship: a new metropolitan citizenship.

Territorial Laboratories could be provided in the statute at the early stage, in order to set up inclusive urban policies, made up with participation of every class of citizens. This is the only way to gain a place in the city intended as a place of intercultural dialogue, aimed at the respect of every living, principles, shared values, and

above all, at the differences connoted with every living culture; at a sharing and exchange knowledge hub, at professional experiences and ways of planning; places in which promote knowledge of metropolitan city, to orient its transformations through quality design hypothesis and urban social policies.

The principles and laws embodied in the statute lead to a more adaptive city in which evaluate new models of knowledge of urban reality, aimed at a smarter city planning.

It involves using new processes of participation in order to raise awareness of the rights of the local and migrant communities that could play their role in the project of design.

We should preconfigure at local and metropolitan levels, the creation of places of exchange and opportunity of interaction amongst citizens, to spread knowledge of urban realities on behalf of migrants, citizens, politicians, local institutions, architects, town planners, sociologists, and associations as well.

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