Resources of the nature and resource of culture: an “original” 
Metropolis for Reggio Calabria

Stefano Aragona a, *

*Department of Heritage, Architecture, Urban Planning, University Mediterranea of Reggio Calabria Salita Melissari 89124 Reggio Calabria – Italy

Abstract

The paper highlights the originalities offers from metropolitan areas like that of Reggio Calabria. Here the human actions found their peculiarities and richness thanks to the close dialogue with the earth's resources and to their use. So the heritage and the social dynamics participate, more closely than in other places, in the designing the space and in giving prospects for development of the territory. According to an ecological vision of this, as the modern founders of this approach have done between the end of the XV and the first half of the XVI century: Bernardino Telesio with the “Philosophy of Nature” and his disciple Tommaso Campanella, both calabrians. Avoiding the risks and unsustainable choices that might be useful in the short time, but not for the medium or long term. Using the present cultural resources and the remaining natural ones.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of ISTH2020

Keywords: Nature; Culture; Metropolitan area; Ecology; Local Identity

1. Nature, Culture, Anthropization

The metropolitan area of Reggio Calabria city has great possibilities to propose itself as “original” metropolitan city. This originality is primarily based on cultural heritage, deriving from the ancient history of the anthropogenic
processes of its territory. At the same time, thanks to the magnificent naturalistic resources, albeit nicked, there other important potential for the construction of the characterization now said. Highlighting the existing elements “pro” and “against” and having the ecological approach as base philosophy: i.e. use the local conditions as “design suggestions”, avoiding choices that might be useful in the short term but not valid in the medium or long term. As written in 100IDEEeperReggioCalabriaCittàMetropolitana (Aragona, 2015) this metropolis must be “network of innovation, history and territories” (Fig.1). It must be capable of building an internal network on a regional scale. So, with Messina, becoming a reference for the areas of the Mediterranean basin (Aragona, Calabrò, Della Spina, 2014).

For this purpose, it is useful make a sort of SWOT analysis, i.e. de Strengths, the Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of this particular condition. Condition that should/could be an ideal place to implement the “Think Global, Act Local”. By now become a kind of slogan of the globalization, but that was formulated for the first time in The Limits of Growth (1972), that is in the first structured report that was requesting a sustainable development. So this “original metropolitan area” as experimental laboratory of the ecological approach, i.e. of the “human ecology”‡.

‡The concept of “human ecology” was proposed by the researchers Appold and Kasarda in 1990, recently it has been re-launched by Pope Francis with the Encyclical Laudato Sì of 2015
2. Strength

A key strength of the, constituting, metropolitan area is given by the magnificent geography of its territory. Territory that was built over the centuries becoming a stupefying scenery, using a “romantic” expression. Foreigners, when they discovered these landscapes, were amazed, as the Conferences dedicated to voyages of exploration of Saint - Non (2015) and the one titled Old Calabria (2016) have shown. These trips became essential for the formation of what today we might call as an intellectual.

The testimonials of the history inserted themselves in a strong and wild nature. Incredible panoramic views formed thanks to the particular physical conformation of mountains that go “to peak” down to the sea with snowy forests not very far from it. But also the inland areas were no less either as beauty and as cultural heritage: just think of the Carthusian monastery of Serra San Bruno (founded in 1090 in the heart of Calabria Ulteriore, the current central-southern Calabria), to Bernardino Telesio - born (1509) in Cosenza -§ and his disciple Tommaso Campanella - from Stilo (Reggio Calabria) - author of La città del sole. (The City of the Sun)**. Still in 1931 Escher in his journey in the South draws magnificent landscapes: citing one for all Tropea, that not accidentally has become the cover of the book Costruire un senso del territorio (Build a sense of the territory) by S. Aragona (2012). Flemish painter, fascinated by those lands, exalts the southern architecture so full of Arabic influences that he made it to prefer to Renaissance or Baroque style.

Such a link between nature and human action builds a balanced relationship for centuries, although full of risks. First of all the seismic one that, many times, has obliged people to rebuild countries, cities, religious complexes, or in some cases, to geographical displacement. With the time, there was more attention to place themselves in areas that today we would call at hydrogeological risk and in some cases were enacted laws, using our terminology, for the “forest protection”: as the Borbone Kings have done with the protection of the Serre’s forests, essential for the production activities of the industrial centres of Mongiana and Ferdinandea (current provinces of Reggio Calabria and Vibo Valentia). Moreover in this way they have succeeded in decreasing the hydrogeological risk because the tall trees, thanks to their deep roots, help to “hold” the land: it is what is now called natural engineering (Fig.2).

Fig. 2. Mongiana, Ruins of steel plants (Parco delle Serre, 2015)

§ His major work is the De rerum natura juxta propria principia (“Around the nature of things according to its principles”): the complete work was published in 1586 in nine books.

** Campanella goes back to Plato (fifth century BC) and to the Utopia of Thomas More (1517); among the antecedents of Campanella’s utopianism has to be mentioned also The New Atlantis of Bacon.
So land where nature has been generous, even if often stepmother with frequent seismic events or due to hydrogeological instability made even more risky by erroneous human choices. A territory rich in history and culture that could be rediscovered. This re-discovery has to be conjugated with the potential of the mountainous land resources, of the agriculture, of the water. This philosophy is that one driving the EU in attention to the Cultural Heritage as well as show the opening words in the call “Heritage Plus” (2014): “Under the ERA-NET Plus action, Development of new methodologies, technologies and products for the assessment, protection and management of historical and modern artefacts, buildings and sites…(it is) co-funded by the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) of the European Commission, this call is for pre-proposals advancing research primarily on tangible cultural heritage including the interlinked aspects of digital and intangible heritage… with the purpose of generating….new research-based knowledge to promote the sustainable use and management of cultural heritage and so to meet societal challenges and contribute to the development on the society”. With three possibly coordinated attentions: 1. Preservation of tangible cultural heritage and its associated intangible expressions; 2. Sustainable strategies for protecting and managing cultural heritage; 3. Use and re-use of all kinds of cultural heritage.

3. Weakness

Especially from the second part of the ‘70s, however, this beautiful nature is attacked and the landscape distraught. In the same years when the Regions (with Ordinary Statute) become effective, the (legal or illegal) buildings start to invade wildfire territory. After the first law on the building amnesty, indispensable because many abuses were due to causes of need, other amnesties followed: these convey the message that build is, anywhere, always possible. The cementification is the “criterion” at the base of the new human settlement processes. The rivers, the “fiumare” (typical torrents in the south of Italy, dry in the warm periods but sometimes swollen of water in cold ones), are intubated, blankets, as well increases the geological risk, but all that is “invisible”. The risk also increases because buildings are built alongside, if not even, above these covers: homes, industrial areas, airports, housing for students (Fig.3).

Fig. 3. Reggio Calabria, Ruins of student's home beside the “fiumara” (Source: Aragona, 2014)

All this with a short memory, since “only” in 1953 in Calabria there was an alluvion that had swollen the “fiumares” and their natural flow had swept all that had been built along the course of water, in what are identified as “areas of respect” and therefore not suitable for building. In this way, the strong point mentioned before, the magnificent wild nature, has been transformed into weakness. The shining areas defaced and raped by buildings, formally legal or illegal, that make you forget the origin of the term “landscape”, in italian “paesaggio” (“ensemble” of the French word paysage and “paese”, Italian word, i.e. small village), formation of urban peripheries (moreover, very often without a real town) without any design or shape if not a random one deriving from the possibility/license to build. All this happens especially in the downstream centres - in Calabria in the few plains present flooded with more or less high and isolated houses - and in so-called “marine” which arise from the ’60s onwards. While, there is
the abandonment of the small towns, for the most internals. Those centres that often were essential references of the Grand Tour. Centres more and more isolated, with less and less daily presence for the maintenance of the territory and therefore with increasing hydrogeological risk.

Isolation that involves many of the cities and urban realities that become, therefore, difficult to reach, while this “original metropolitan area” - which is supposed to be created - requires the realization of a robust structure of intra-regional and inter-regional connections, national and international. It must be accessible physically. Only Reggio Calabria has 6 high speed trains during the day which, except one that takes 5 hours and 10 minutes, for all other the trip exceeds 6 hours and the wagons are not new (often reused) and without services e.g. Internet (in any case there is not after Salerno). To reach by train Cosenza and Catanzaro, the regional capital, there are no direct connections with high speed. Fortunately, the bad idea of the Strait’s Bridge was abandoned. It would have meant a further weakening of Reggio Calabria because access to such infrastructure due to slope reasons, was designed approx.15 km before the city, in addition being impracticable one day on three due to local wind conditions (as written in the documents of the Stretto di Messina Company).††

Under a demographic profile, the town is small - it counts ca.179,500 inhabitants - compared to the other Italian cities, not to mention those in Europe. And it is the largest of Calabria: Catanzaro does not reach 100,000 citizens, between the capitals of Provinces Cosenza no more than 70,000 residents and together with Rende arrives just at 104,000 inhabitants, while Crotone has slightly more than 61,000 citizens, Vibo Valentia less than 34,000. Lametia Terme is the alone other centre that arrives to 70,000 residents. Only three cities are around of 35,000 inhabitants, 3 approximate or slightly over 20,000, 7 between 18,000 and 15,000. All the remaining - i.e. short less of 400 centres - are below this threshold. Beside this situation there is the isolation due to the geographical conditions that characterizes the region. So small towns in a pulverized territory into small agglomerations, little cities, villages.

Features that may become an opportunity for experimentation for a different development, ecological, alternative to that one “expansive” of the contemporary city. Development based on building cooperative processes useful to trigger territorial synergies. But one of the major weaknesses derives from that which some, such as e.g. Cananzi recently (2016) has recalled in a meeting held to discuss about the Metropolitan City, i.e. an anthropological diversity of Reggio Calabria’s citizen. A diversity that consists in a mixture of individualism and of competition with anyone other “close”. This attitude means that instead of trying to build cooperative attitudes there is a continuous competition.

4. Opportunity

Already in the POR (Regional Operational Plan) of 1999, in the Axis “City” there was the Action titled “Networks between small towns”. There was also the proposition/purpose of “coopetition”, i.e. cooperation and competition, with the objective of “constructing/making network”. But in reality there has been little cooperation and a lot of competition. Or, better said, individualism. Individualism first of all at institutional scale i.e. the municipalities, the hundreds of tiny municipalities that make up the Calabria, have tended to ignore their “neighbours”, despite laws (also with financial advantages) which push towards association, such as the Associated Structural Plans; and the “personal” individualism as previously said. The cultural resources are many. There are excellent Universities in Calabria, in the first place the Mediterranea of Reggio Calabria that is devoting itself since decades, was born, on studies about spatial planning, urban planning and environmental. Here it has been founded a degree course dedicated to those arguments, the oldest in Italy, promoted by one of the Italian City Planning’s fathers i.e. Giovanni Astengo, after that historical of the Venice’s IUAV located in Preganziol. And there is the Department Heritage, Architecture, Urbanism as a privileged place of research and design on the History and Restoration.

To network the disciplines of engineering and agroforestry - the Faculties, now Departments of Agriculture and Engineering of the Mediterranea and of the Calabria of Arcavacata are to that effect already renowned centres of study - for creating poles of excellence on renewable energy related to the timber, the sun and the wind, could be an

††Furthermore, in the case of an earthquake similar to the 1908 the bridge over the Straits would be one of the few things slightly damaged in a territory largely devastated
efficient tool/objective for this “original” metropolitan area. Exemplary in this regard the participation of the Mediterranea at the recent first meeting of the European Energy Cluster, held in Trondheim (Norway) in February 2016, as a member of the European Universities Network for Energy, one of the pillars of EU programs and of Horizon 2020. Equally innovative is the experimental project REWECH of the NOEL laboratory for energy conversion of the waves into electricity, another priority topic in UE energy policy.

The Department of Engineering of the Mediterranea for years proposes tangible and intangible connection networks. For the first many have been the proposals to create a more efficient and effective system in transport and regional logistics. After 20 years there should be the Regional Transportation Plan, which contains the 25/30% of shares also present in the National Plan released in 2015 (Malara, 2016). This allows to be more confident about the reliability of the formulated intentions. It is planned not only the high-speed but also a rail hub of service to the Port of Gioia Tauro and a connection axis with Bologna through the Adriatic line. If Reggio Calabria has to become a metropolitan area it must have Gioia Tauro Port as one of internal reference poles. But that means, requires, fast connections with it.

There are also proposals for networking cultural heritage also virtually: as symbolic example “The Archaeological Heritage of Reggio Calabria. A network of social use” (by Borruto et al., 2013) presented at 99ideas for Reggio Calabria, International Ideas Competition for the Valorisation of the National Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria in reference to the cultural and territorial context of the city. Operating signal since the CIPE (Interministerial Committee for Economic Planning), by resolution 39/2012, required that the upgrading and the completion of the restoration of the museum had to be associated with the development of the area. Useful to develop the potential of the museum and of the city’s cultural resources to promote the growth of tourism demand, even internationally, and trigger entrepreneurial initiatives of the cultural tourism industry. An important signal to support the complex approach aforementioned, attentive and made up by many components that are the “wealth”, as said in the previous pages, based on innovation and history.

The museum, one of the most significant historical reality of the city, as part of a network composed of the many widespread ancient testimonies, small, that draw the morphology of the territory. Territory that is rural and urban. It should benefit from the networking, cooperation, of the great potential related to land and of the relationship between and with the spread anthropic phenomena. Even for these issues the EU (2014) promotes support actions such as the one given to the recovery of micro hydro (water mills and electric production) which often has been the site of settlements, villages, cities.

The many initiatives of young farmers, agricultural cooperatives, should collaborate. Their presence on the territory should be supported certainly for economic and social objectives but also to restore a “sense” to places. All this would help reduce the hydrogeological risk thanks to the continuous presence and grounds maintenance. The landscape could regain its beauty. Also, if initiatives such as the Laboratory on Seismic Risk was active again, the metropolitan area could further increase its originality and thus the “offer”, strengthening its centrality was active again, the metropolitan area could further increase its originality and thus the “offer”, strengthening its centrality.

---

1 Event dedicated to “Human resources and new knowledge to build the future energy system”, where Professor Carlo Morabito has illustrated the research and the training proposal to that effect of the Mediterranea

†‡‡ Founded by prof. Paul Boccotti and directed by prof. Felice Arena, with researchers (prof., Barbaro, Flame, Romulus) and young people from the Mediterranea and the spin-off wavenergy.it of this University.

§§ It is no coincidence that a professor of Transport of the Mediterranea, prof. Francesco Russo, is Assessor of the “Logistics system, the Regional port system and Gioia Tauro system”.

*** Call Competition of the Ministry of Territorial Cohesion - the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture - Regional Directorate for Calabria, from the Calabria Region and the Municipality of Reggio Calabria

††† This structure was built years ago on the initiative of prof. G. Fera of then Dip. of Environmental and Territorial Sciences at the Faculty of Architecture of the Mediterranea.
5. Threat

If there is no participation, the involvement of the population in these processes nothing of new there will be. The risk is not only the creation of a “fictitious” Metropolitan Area, only institutional. The real risk is a gradual abandonment of the territories with an acceleration of impoverishment. Impoverishment in economic, social and cultural terms.

If the railways’ strategy launched in 1992 with the cutting of so-called “dead wood” will continue the aforesaid impoverishment will grow. It will also increase if the choice of cuts in public services such as hospitals, schools, courts, will continue.

If the weakening of Courses of Degree dedicated to Architecture and Urban Planning - which have been at the base of the Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria - continues, this will lose not only other students but also the characterization that it had. From a couple of years the Degree in PTUA, either the one of three years that the masterly, were closed for lack of professors not of students. Even the PhD in Regional Planning was closed. Human resources, scientific and cultural skills, have remained but need support.

If the many initiatives on the legality will not have a strong and continuous support, the lawlessness, become structural, will continue to pose the major obstacles for a different development of the territory. To this respect the many initiatives of organizations like Libera Reggio or the same university, as the recent meeting “The project of the confiscated Mafia assets, are signs, steps that give hope.

If the individualistic attitude first mentioned will not be defeated by constructive, synergistic, actions the harmful effects of globalization, certainly not the “intelligent” requested by Rodrick (2011), will grow more and more. So not only the nature and culture will be overwhelmed, but each will be left to itself although formally a metropolitan area will be created.

All this in a wider threat, as there is the risk that Calabria, and all the South after Naples, is excluded from the large traffic flows for what Fusco (2005) has hypothesized as the “Mediterranean croissant” that starts from Valencia and arrives at the capital of the Campania Region (Fig.4).

---

As well as “The Great Reggio” of the 1927 Reggio has not been realized in practice.

Event (2016) organized by the Laboratory of Architectural Design, prof. O. Amaro, in collaboration with the “Landscape Research Group in progress”, Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria - Department DARTE, with intervention of the prosecutor N. Gratteri and presentation of the book Land of Music, traveling between the assets confiscated from the mafia spoken and musical comments by S. De Siena and A. Sirianni.
6. Final cues as policy proposals

Institutional Authorities in the situation described have even more responsibilities in addressing the developmental trajectories. First in doing link together with the various actors, the thematic areas, and in building culture. Elements than at a more local level must then be implemented. This is a very great effort because the situations lagging behind, less well equipped economically, tend to have cultural backwardness, to succumb to market pressures, to a modernity indifferent to the people, to the domain of things and the economy.

There are elements that concern the national scale, e.g. the links, the infrastructures and the services, and they involve also the Regional Authority. On the paper, as mentioned above, plans and intentions seem exist. Although the emphasis given to road transport with the desired upgrading of the Autostrada del Sole threatens to put the rail transport on a second floor. Anyway, a modernization that after Cosenza does not seem yet to arrive and thus it makes Reggio Calabria still far away. Will know the mentioned Regional Transport Plan cope with all that? Will it able to remedy the growing isolation that regards the many realities, large and small, of the Region? Reggio Calabria and its hinterland have to be connected to these and to the widespread common cultural heritage.

Finally, to be successful it is essential to be able to create the awareness that one's wealth lies in the rediscovery of its own origins: nature and cultural heritage. Being aware about the positive and negative elements of them, and to be able to create an ecological original idea of anthropization and of city. This is the challenge/opportunity of the Metropolitan area of Reggio Calabria, based on the resources of the natural context and those of culture.

References

UE POR 1999-2006
http://www.parks.it/parco.serre/edu.dettaglio.php?id=6153