

CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR LARGER CITIES

by

Prof. Franco Archibugi
Planning Studies Centre, Rome
Graduate School of Public Administration, Rome

Paper for the International Conference
"Athens-Attica: Strategic Planning
towards Sustainable Development"
Athens, 22-24 May, 1996

Rome, May 1996

CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR LARGER CITIES

Summary: 1. The crisis of "overloading" in the larger cities. 2. The "overloading effect": the environment degradation. 3. The chronic imbalance between demand and supply of urban spaces and the peripheral growth of the larger cities. 4. Degradation of peripheries. 5. The unique possible strategy: the alternative centralities. 6. A weak and useless decentralisation. 7. Some false illusion of recovery: pedestrian zoning and gentrification. 8. The false illusion of re-equilibrium: the more or less satellite "new towns". 9. New centralities within the larger metropolitan areas. 10. New centralities within the larger metropolitan areas with respect to their regional environments (magalopoles). 11. New centralities for the medium and small cities in the national territory. 12. The technical conditions for the new strategy. 13. The political and cultural conditions for the new strategy. *Bibliographical references.*

1. The crisis of "overloading" in the larger cities

All of the larger cities of Europe and generally of the western world are vibrant centres of political and economic activities. Some of them are political capitals others business capitals, others have assumed both functions and sometimes assume even important international functions. But, all of them, have entered into a deep, dimensional crisis. In other words, they show some pathological characteristics derived from their unbalanced and unharmonic growth that is compromising the quality of life for their inhabitants and for their own functionality.¹

If we could define this crisis with a concept common to all of these cities, independently, even from important historical, morphological, and structural differences that still survive, we could say that we are facing a crises of "overloading". And, it is to this

¹ The literature in this field is endless. My preferred list includes, the books of Harvey Perloff (1969) and (1980), Peter Hall (1980), and certain anthologies, for example, that edited by Eldridge (1967) and Brotchie et al. (1985).

overloading that we must attribute the principal phenomenon of urban degradation that we register in the larger cities.²

2. The "overloading" effect: the environmental degradation

We can list these phenomena, very synthetically, in the following groups:

- a. pollution (either of atmosphere, water, soil, or waste)
- b. traffic congestion and the lowering of the accessibility level
- c. the uglification of the urban landscape
- d. the decline of both social control and urban managerial effectiveness

These are all phenomena, as said, that must be reconnected to overloading and that we will call, as a whole, *environmental degradation*.³

It is not our intention, here, to make an analysis of each one of them with the intention of selecting suggestions - as normally are made - for their mitigation or management. Instead, it is our intention to assess these phenomena of environmental degradation as a whole and state that they have a major factor that is common to all of them; that is just "overloading". And, it is our intention to underline that, by overloading, we mean an imbalance that becomes chronic and endemic between the space supplied by the historical city to produce the city effect (which we certainly do not lack in our larger cities) and the amount of demand for such space that the population and activities that grow in these cities would require.⁴

² I have developed this point, more widely, that is a way to "read" the present generalized urban crisis in the western countries in a forthcoming book on the "Ecological City".

³ The best reference for more insights on this topic are some documents of the European Commission: the "Green Book" on urban environment (EC 1990) and the report on sustainable cities (EC 1994).

⁴ See among a legion of books on these matters, Archibugi and Nijkamp (eds.), *Economy and Ecology* (1989). For a informed panorama of this topic, see White (1994).

It is with this key to reading the degradation of the urban environment, that, we believe, we can open the appropriate perspective of a strategy of an urban planning type.

3. The chronic imbalance between demand and supply of urban spaces and the peripheral growth of the larger cities

Overloading is, in effect, reduced by the fact that the recipient (the historical city) is not more capable of containing what it should contain (the growing activities). The imbalance adjusts itself as well as it can, creating a peripheral growth of residential settlements and a sort of decentralisation in the periphery of the urban functions.

It is the classical way to respond to the imbalance imposed by purely physical factors of the relation between available peripheral resources and demand for settlements. The effect is that, in many ways, the distance (first physical, later even social) between residential areas and areas of social urban life (jobs, services, shopping, recreation, and social, political, and cultural relations) has grown.

Such a distance is only slightly mitigated but not compensated by the growth of telematic and informatic relationships. Even if it is true that they have substituted for a large amount of needs of personal and physical access with and between an important number of activities, these telematic and informatic relationships do not answer, sufficiently, to the growing number of other expectations and new needs for relations (expectations and needs previously ignored but that now ask for physical space of the city as a still important factor of social life and communication)⁵. On this point, the behaviour of new generations, in our larger western cities, with respect to the places of access and frequency, is extremely indicative.

⁵ At least judging from the first serious enquiries on the implementation experiences at larger scales.

4. Degradation of peripheries

But, the peripheral growth of cities also increases their degradation in two ways:

1. From one side, the historical centre always remains the unique gravitational centre for all such services that produce a high city effect.
2. From the other side, the peripheries - either those for the richer but limited classes or for the less rich but larger classes - have been rendered with wide areas for housing deprived of such urban qualities that before were derived from a adequate proximity and from a certain mix of urban functions.

5. The unique possible strategy: the alternative centralities

Consequently, it seems to be that the unique effective strategy to be developed is:

- not to pursue the spontaneous decentralisation with a similar diffuse decentralisation of functions
- but to create centralities alternative to the historical one which have the same force of attraction and image of the historical one; and on which to shift a good amount of this catchment area of the present periphery, concentric to the historical city. These alternative centralities must have both an economic and non-economic advantage not lower than that of the historical centre.

This strategy although unique and elementary, is not yet really diffused into the spirit and action of either the planners or the decision makers of the destiny of our larger European cities.

6. A weak and useless decentralisation

People continue to pursue, in a false and pragmatic belief, an impossible dream to reconstitute an equilibrium of loads between the central area and the peripheral area with diffused attempts at decentralisation.

But, if the decentralisation is incapable of providing agglomerations that strongly substitute for the historical centres of larger cities, these later will always keep the role of "point of reference" for the superior and rare services. They will always be the concentration and supply centres for an exceeding demand; hence the congestion, the paralysis of functions, the reduction of city streets to racetracks, the overloading that produces pollution, urban degradation and the breakdown of the social life in urban places.

7. Some false illusions of recovery: pedestrian zoning and gentrification

Neither the wide use that people have begun to make of pedestrian zoning for important segments of the historical centres, from one side, nor the attempt to "gentrify" some quarters to recover a certain urban quality on the other side are valid. All this is undoubtedly an improvement, but, its radius of effectiveness is limited to a local and particular scale. It cannot constitute a valid strategy for the entire city and for all the citizens.

On the contrary, for some aspects they could constitute a worsening. The pedestrian zoning of certain, more or less limited areas of the historic centre, make the later even more appetising as targets for services and pleasant stays. Thus, it reinforces its centrality with respect to the peripheral areas, strengthening the organic disequilibrium between the availability of spaces and the demand for spaces for urban superior services.

8. The false illusion of re-equilibrium: the more or less satellite "new towns"

In order to achieve a real re-equilibrium, using present residential settlements and the same essential settlements for urban services already functioning, there is a need for a strategy that focuses and polarises the "city demand" of the people on *few but strong* alternatives to the historical centre. The "new towns", until now conceived and implemented in the city planning traditions of almost all countries, have failed substantially in their task, because they only have looked at the creation of overall good housing and residential settlements.

Leaving aside the fact that their dimensions have been shown to be too small every ten years (inducing thus, an increase in size for each new generation of "new towns" with a geometric progression), it has been the conceptual setting itself that has been wrong. There has been too much thought given to housing, concentrating on certain essential services related to residential functions (in the logic of the minimum unit of residence) and too little thought to the city as a totality of services and as city effect. At the most, the "new towns" as a new quarter in an old city have been useful to create a better environment for certain residential needs, but, they have not contributed to the resolution of the problem of the overloading of the larger cities.

9. New centralities within the larger metropolitan areas

The unique strategy, we repeat, that seems to us to be both possible and rational to resolve the overloading of the old larger cities, is to concentrate the efforts of decentralisation for certain key services and functions in a limited number of privileged and organised alternative centralities. Theoretically, their catchment areas could not be less than between 500,000 and 1,000,000 inhabitants. Below this threshold, it is difficult to create the indispensable ser-

vices which produce the city effect, and the old historical city, therefore, would keep its role of a gravitational pole for all types of growth forms; making unsuccessful any attempt to decentralise.

This has been the strategy suggested in many cases of hypertrophic agglomerations or metropolitan growth in Italy. One of these cases is Rome where we are trying to apply this strategy (see maps 1-4 for Rome). Rome is a old town that is passed, after several millennium of life, from about 150.000 inhabitants in the last century (mid-1800) to 3.000.000 inhabitants today. Only in a century it is grown 20 times. The territorial space and land-use is grown proportionally, but non the "centrality", which remained the same.

The new strategy, propose to create a scenario with 4 o 5 others centralities alternative to that of the unique historical centre, each with a "cachtment area" of about 500.000 inhabitants, settled where they actually are settled (map 1) , and to promote in these new centrality a proportion of new superior urban services, instead to decentralize in loose and casual order (map 2) . And to implement basic public fonctions (greenery and transportation mass transit, map 3 and 4) in strict relationship with the above outlined scenario.

10. New centralities within the larger metropolitan areas with respect to their regional environments (megalopoles)

Another case is that of the metropolitan areas which are even larger than usual and incorporate a regional pattern. In Italy, this corresponds to the case of Milan (see annexed map concerning the Lombardia region).

The influence of Milan is spread within its own metropolitan municipalities of the first, second, and third belt (essentially in the area of its administrative province); but it is also spread toward important cities of the entire region of Lombardia (such as Como, Varese, Lecco, Bergamo, Brescia, and Mantova); and even of bordering regions (Novara, Vercelli, and Alessandria in Piemonte;

and Piacenza and Parma from Emilia). These are cities of around 100,000 to 200,000 inhabitants each, and have their own provincial territories, dense with small municipalities. In this manner, each city has a catchment area of around 300,000 to 400,000 inhabitants each. They gravitate for superior urban services to Milan, and the less rare, more diffused services are spread throughout the territory. And, all this makes, of this area, a sort of Megalopolis. The overloading of certain areas (the core of the Milanese area) and the diffusion of conurbation, creates, in any case, a breakdown of the environmental quality (increased pollution, congestion, the uglification of the landscape, anonymous peripheries) and requires a new strategic vision for regional land-use planning.

Since some new centralities, more autonomous from Milan, could be created by a reorganisation of the territory, it has been proposed to associate a few of these cities of the "megapolitan" area in some *new urban basins* (or urban "eco-systems") as a new strategic scenario clearly independent from Milan, itself (see map).

11. New centralities for the medium and small cities in the national territory

Within this strategy that looks at a mitigation, if not elimination, of the overloading of larger cities, the positive role that could be played by a *parallel and joint strategy* which operates on a *wider scale* and looks at a greater equilibrium of the urban framework *at the national scale* cannot be neglected. This strategy against the overloading of the larger cities needs to be helped, by a halt to immigration from the national hinterland areas whose cities are losing urban quality, because they have not been capable of achieving a *size threshold* which produces the city effect (about which we insist to invoke the presence).

Therefore, it is necessary to take care of a contemporary action with the aim of polarising an urban quality within the areas that, even if composed of individual cities that are still inadequate in

themselves, in their whole constitute a common urban network that can achieve, at least potentially, the above said threshold that produces the city effect.

Many individual medium and small sized cities in our western European countries gravitate, singularly, towards the nearest larger city, sometimes with accessibility isochrones absolutely unacceptable within daily life. They remain, therefore, cities of lower rank and they risk being progressively marginalised, culturally and socially. But, a good organisation, political and territorial, could make these cities part of new polycentric urban units or basins that could achieve the level of urbanity required. This strategy could help the other that is the subject of our theme, devoted to the conservation and development of larger cities.

In Italy, it has taken the aspect of a general framework of urban eco-systems or basins of the national territory as a whole. This scenario is composed of three strategic typologies of systems: eco-system to be *polarised*, eco-systems to be *rationalised*, and eco-systems that already exist with regard to their larger metropolitan areas to be *depolarised* (see the general map of the urban eco-systems for the entire italian territory). The specification of the Scenario of proposed eco-systems, include their classification non only by "strategy" (as already said) but also by "structure" (concentric, polycentric or diffuse), by "form" (linear, star-shaped, reticular or polygonal), and by urban quality.

The scenario outlined also a network of intersystemic relations, of different functions⁶.

⁶ This scenario is the result - as said - of a research project sponsored by the Ministry of environment and funded by the (italian) National Research Council, research project named "Quadroter", from *É"Quadro territoriale di riferimento per la politica ambientale"* (Reference Spatial Framework for the Environmental Policy). The writer has been the coordinator of the project. An attempt to apply the same approach and the objectives of the Quadroter at a European scale, (for the moment applied only to France, Germany and Great Britain) has been promoted by the European Commission, DGXII and performed, always under the coordination of the writer, by a qualified number of german, french and british scholars. The research is ongoing and the results will be available at the end of the year.

Of course, each of these urban eco-systems or basins of the national scenario represent different degrees of *potentiality*. The bet of strategic planning is that all territories that have been delimited surely have such starting potentiality, but that it could be achievable *at different maturities*.

12. The technical conditions for the new strategy

Of course, the strategy that we have very broadly outlined must be supported by a deep and careful study activity, either of the territorial distribution of settlements and of the urban services, mainly the rarest, or of the threshold parameters of which we are speaking.⁷ Not even the experiences to be transferred from one city to another are completely available; first, because the experience implemented in the logic, that we have, here argued, are very scarce, and second, because they are strongly influenced by the circumstances and situations where they are implemented. And for this reason, they must be studied case by case. The strategy as a whole, in any event, keeps its validity.

13. The political and cultural conditions for the new strategy

⁷ At the European level, the research above mentioned (note 6) has developed - promoted by the European Commission (DG XII) and under the coordination of the author - the subject of the definition of parameters with which to discover city effect and city overloading; the objective in using these parameters is the identification of the urban eco-system or basin (in the sense above indicated); and to propose a layout of them in at last four countries in the Union: France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy. It would be recommended to extend this research and the consequent scenarios to all the territory of the European Union.

Of course, the various spatial interventions, public or private (in the field of urban and metropolitan transportation; in the field of industry location and relocation; in the field of higher education and specialized health location policy; in the field on the placement of new residential quarters; etc.), would be provided and implemented in the light of the new strategic scenario.

Even the practical possibility of managing a strategy of the type indicated, is not to be taken for granted. Firstly, it requires a high level of coordination between public decision makers, both of the national government and the local government; which does not seem to be an endemic attitude. Further, it requires a high level of willingness by the private sector to cooperate in the common interest of the implementation of the strategy itself.

But, the possibilities of coordination among public decision makers and of cooperation between public and private decision makers are stronger if people create adequate procedures of consultation and concerted decision making. And, in their turn, these procedures need to be effective and not only abstract discussions to be applied to proposals, schemes, and finalised qualitative analysis well prepared by appropriate technical bodies. A lot of the failures of programming and negotiating actions tried in the past, have been explained by the bad techniques of consultants and analysts, who have been incapable of providing alternative scenarios and proposals supported by appropriate information and technical evaluation, and therefore, have been incapable of stimulating debate and concrete exposure of the advantages and disadvantages, and also of the eventual contrast of interests. The concerted application of plans and project evaluation methods is still at its first steps everywhere, even in the countries apparently more advanced technically and culturally.

The objective of these encounters, in which we are currently participating, is to revive the hope that new methods of management could progress through the responsible technical and political leaders of the management of our environment and cities.

Bibliographical References

- Archibugi F. and Nijkamp P. (eds.) (1989), *Economy and Ecology: Toward Sustainable Development*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1989.
- (1990), *Rome: A New Planning Strategy*, (english version of a study prepared for the Regional Institute for Socio-Economic Planning), Planning Studies Centre, Rome 1990.
- (1994), "Ecological Equilibrium and Territorial Planning: the Italian Case", in *European Planning Studies*, vol.2, 1994.
- Brotchie J. et al. (eds.) (1985), *The Future of Urban Form: the Impact of New Technologies*, Routledge, London, 1985.
- EC-Commission (1990), *Green Paper on the Urban Environment*, Communication from the Commission to the Council and Parliament, Brussels, June 1990.
- Expert Group on the Urban Environment (1994), *European Sustainable Cities*, Report for the "European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns", Aalborg, Denmark, May 24-27 1994.
- Eldredge W. (ed.) (1967), *Taming Megalopolis*, Vol 1: *What Is and What Could Be*; Vol.2: *How to Manage an Urbanized World*, Anchor, New York 1967.
- Hall P. (1980), *Great Planning Disasters*, Weidefeld & Nicolson, London 1980.
- Perloff H.S. (ed.) (1969), *The Quality of the Urban Environment. Essays on "New Resources" in an Urban Age*, Resources for the Future, Washington DC, 1969.
- (1980), *Planning the Post-Industrial City*, American Planning Association Planners Press, Washington DC, 1980.
- White R.R. (1994), *Urban Environmental Management: Environmental Change and Urban Design*, Wiley, Chichester, 1994.