

2nd International Symposium "NEW METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVES" - Strategic planning, spatial planning, economic programs and decision support tools, through the implementation of Horizon/Europe2020. ISTH2020, Reggio Calabria (Italy), 18-20 May 2016

City, Nature, Culture. New way of living sociability (the case of Reggio Calabria)

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Abstract

The paper tackles the problems of our modern political society related to city, nature and culture. The policies concerning such specific sectors, if designed in a coordinated and coherent way, are capable of creating an important development model. The case of Reggio Calabria, metropolitan city, is exemplary of this model. The specific characteristics of Reggio Calabria bring out the urgent need to rethink urbanization, together with nature and culture and thus change the very idea of city

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of ISTH2020

Keywords: Metropolitan city, culture, nature, Philosophy of Law, Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Life

1. Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the debate on new models of social development taking as reference points city, nature and culture. These three elements are conceived not as separate fields but in their mutual interconnections. The idea of city, in particular, allows us to encompass both nature and culture, as it is the place for social culture and a natural social space.

The case of Reggio Calabria, metropolitan city, provides an interesting opportunity for thinking this interconnection. I will proceed by addressing and highlighting some outlines from different perspectives: legal, political and philosophical.

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2. Some legal signs

It is well known that the story of metropolitan cities in our legal system is not recent: the so called Legge Delrio (a Statute Law of 2014) is just the more recent of a long series of acts and measures.

But what is the meaning of talking about metropolitan cities?

As Lucarelli has observed, “‘big cities’ have appeared on the International scene as one of the essential places to enhance quality of life of their communities. They are now fully considered as International entities, as, in some cases, the *brand* of vast Cities can have an international impact well above that of Regions.” (Lucarelli, 2014). And it is not only a question of ‘brand’, but also, and above all, a way of thinking and living the city nowadays.

Let us now try to understand on which pivotal element such paradigm shift is moving, in order to capture the spirit behind the legal foundation of the metropolitan city and its factual extent.

Yesterday - I could say recalling the famous essay by Gustav Schwarz (1908) - yesterday [in Italy] the organization was vertical:

- the State (and above the State the starry sky of International Institutions and Organizations), with its mandatory components of people, territory, and a legal system;
- The territory was divided into Regions (introduced in our system in the 70s, therefore long after the entry into force of the Italian Constitution), invested with several detailed attributions;
- Then Provinces (pre-unitary entities set by the Albertine Statute) representing units connecting historical, political, and social matrix;
- And then Municipalities, small or large urban sets.

From a top-down perspective, the three State characteristic components are specified and differentiated from a legal point of view:

- a) National borders are replicated in miniature by the boundaries across Regions, Provinces and Municipalities;
- b) People – the greatly debated mythology of the twentieth century and beyond – consists of populations, from North to South, from South to North, sharing one language, but each with its own dialect, and its own way of interpreting life and history. A sign of this attitude is in the peculiarities of Italian local history (also intending how Municipalities developed differently over space and time).
- c) Subsidiarity principle gave a sort of propulsion for *legal systems* put in place, rather by competition than by coherence, resulting in a picture of Italy of thousand rules, or maybe the thousand ‘Italies’ behind the same rule.

One aspect appears to be relevant – from a political point of view, and political architecture is prior to any legal framework – is the idea of *border*. Identity is the effect of specification and differentiation of individual experiences that converge and group together within a closed, safe boundary of the City or the Province, the Region or the State.

However, such kind of evolution not only *made* sense, but probably it was actually inevitable.

I use the *past* intentionally.

Because this “past” now belongs to yesterday.

The supra-national starry sky has declined and, with some respects, it has overrun and upset the vertical order of components.

Every single one of these new conditions have incontrovertibly marked the very idea of Statee – ‘Beyond the State’, is the title of a book by Sabino Cassese, and this is quite symptomatic (Cassese, 2006) – taking it towards a sort of epilogue. This process has caused a complete vanishing of the functions of the State, which, perhaps, is just destined to an operational ‘marginality’, as some would claim¹. As far as I’m concerned, I do not think so: the State will certainly play a different function than what modern theories say, but it is still going be crucial.

3. Rethinking borders: the idea of inverted pyramid

In this framework, we now have to consider Metropolitan cities.

Art. 114 of the Constitution and the Statute Law of April 7, 2014 no. 56, gives a legislative definition as “large area district”. But let us ask what is behind this laconic and rudimentary legislative definition of Metropolitan city?

It is an entity that, once the vertical model is over, is today settling in a new horizontal scenario.

The paradigm shift is well perceived with reference to the City of Reggio Calabria. The so called ‘reggino’, the Reggio Calabria area, i.e. the whole vast area of the new Metropolitan Municipality, has its own specific and proper measurement in being ‘metropolitan’. A dimension that – as some authors have already well exposed (Grossi, 2012; Manganaro & Romano Tassone, 2005) – is also a vocation. It seems to me, that this is the specific *nature* of Reggio Calabria, compared to other Cities in Calabria Region and it marks an important distinctiveness.

The idea of a Metropolitan city, in fact, implies to move from a complex (and vertical) administrative structure to a more horizontal and flexible one; the new cities that adhere to this model are designed to operate as *strategic places of social life*. This way a city really belongs to citizens, and gets back to them; hence also Reggio Calabria can become “the Imaginary Institution of Society” (Castoriadis, 1995).

From here, let me introduce some considerations.

The city as a social institution is certainly a cultural site, at least in the sense that it conveys the culture of its territory and the culture expressed in that territory. Part of this culture is the idea of sociability today: sociability of interconnection.

But what does nature have to do with that?

In my opinion, this is the point at stake in our contemporary society.

I already outlined that this is the world of ‘yesterday’, and today the world has already changed. The word *globalization* is usually the most used to try to define the steps of the transition between modernity and postmodernity. I propose to use another word: *technology*.

In today's world, thanks to technology, we have an actual and factual possibility of reducing initial costs for doing business, just to make an example. And good ideas are more important than available resources. There is an opportunity of full interconnection that affects the quality of life of each and every one.

But is this opportunity producing a change in society?

To me, this change is clearly happening; but how so?

Considering society, the spatial parameter and the time coordinate are dissipated, allowing us to dissolve distances, but also, and because of this, to *rethink the very idea of border*.

In yesterday's world, and not only within a legal perspective, the term border was related to what it contained, also by defining the identity, the people, and the society it encompassed. Now the border is dissolving and it leaves, or it must leave the place to a network of interconnections. The new border is not closed but open, it does not classify but it includes, it is a place of exchange and not of walls, fences, or, in fact, a limit (and thus we intend border not as a limit, but as a connection point (and even better as an interconnection). Just think of the network between Metropolitan Cities and all the benefits it can bring about, becoming the new model of the State and its organization, also in terms of outcome in new development opportunities for non-metropolitan areas as well).

However, such a society needs also to have administrative structures, capable of supporting it, as those are identified in the framework of Metropolitan Cities.

And it is on that point that I like to adopt the image of the *inverted pyramid* model. I take this representation from Lucarelli, who speaks of Metropolitan City as an inverted pyramid model. It is an inverted pyramid, because instead of the vertical axis of the old model I just described, the Metropolitan City now assumes itself as the summit, but this time it is set in the lower part and it forms the base. A territorial organization model that ends up affecting, for example, the form of State and the role of Regions towards territory, as many have detected (Lucarelli, 2014; Benvenuti, 2013), and thus it tends to change to a more horizontal model, than the traditional vertical one.

I like the image represented by the inverted pyramid, because it shows a new way of thinking boundaries, in terms of structural opening and inclusion, it involves a revolved relationship within the territory, and it embraces a dynamic type of organization by the single Municipalities it embodies. The transition should move from a hyper-structured model to a functional and lightweight one (Lucarelli, 2014).

Moreover, the notions of autonomy and management of a wide area, above all, bring out a way of thinking about the city and the territory not in terms – let me use an urban lexicon – of “extended city”, i.e. by the process of fast and disorganized appropriation of the territory, but as the area of the “Metropolitan City”, not only connected with the outside (and here we see again the idea of borders as interconnections), but also strongly interconnected within the inside (Alberti, 2015; Aragona, 2012).

Therefore services and better organization of joint living are oriented not only to living *on* the territory, but also to living *the* territory itself.

On the economic level, but also in terms of programming and planning, this means positive outcomes on tourism and greater development of quality of life.

Culture and nature appear to me decisive in a synergic connection. I do not refer so much in this context, even if this could also be a very fascinating topic to develop as a subject of study, to the use, in cultural terms, of local territory, landscape and nature, but instead – according to the purpose of this paper – I intend the quality of life.

The creation of the ‘social imaginary’, here, becomes a form of design and programming of urban architectures capable of promoting and not depressing the quality of social life, fostering new approaches to meeting (also intended as intercultural) and gathering. To establish the social imaginary institutions becomes the chance of performing policies that focus on the individual and on his/her relational development, as the community apex. A social community that becomes non-functional, but co-existential (Cotta, 1989; Punzi, 2009), perhaps also by embracing the *Public Choice* approach (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962; Brennan & Buchanan, 2010; Forte, 2010; Forte & Mantovani, 2004; Simon, 1983).

4. Conclusion

Possibly, what we have just described, can be better clarified by the case of Reggio Calabria, which – compared to other great area Cities– is typified due to its shape: not a large town surrounded by small satellites (just think of Milan and Rome) but a main town that is numerically smaller than the rest of the inhabitants as a whole, and whose small Municipalities are not neighboring, but often quite distant.

That case is interesting because it calls for consideration about interconnectedness and unity, not to centralize, but to dislocate, to distribute. It is a question of placing the main town at the service of the smaller, and not vice versa. By building interconnection, but also by relocating functions and connecting them in a sort of social, cultural, and natural network of all single components.

All this seems to me the way to promoting a true quality of life and a way of thinking and living the territory, all the existing territory, with a new attitude and approach.

The idea of the city multiplies centers and delocalize them, while at the same while it strives to keep them strongly related and connected to proper infrastructure, taking into account the geography in order to optimize it and not to exploit it or mistreat it as an obstacle the social dimension. To improve the local quality of life, instead of supporting the flow from outside to inside, which has been the main characteristic of the idea of great city up to the present.

The perfect match between the Province and the Metropolitan Reggio area, does translate into thinking of Reggio Metropolitan City as a single, although unique, town (in fact the largest in terms of territorial extension, even though the smallest of the Metropolitan Cities by population) and yet characterized by multiplicity.

The whole picture is the best setting to apply a philosophy of nature.

A *philosophy of culture* and a *philosophy of nature* have their profound reason in thinking about the idea of city as founded on nature and culture, as essential elements, and not only as merely related ones. Reversing the traditional image, there is a city, if there is one, only as there is respect for nature (quality of life) and development of culture (social quality). In such model, in particular, the curve that marks the mutual connection between the three elements is directly proportional to their growth, and each element increases (and it is capable of increasing), or decreases (and it is capable of decreasing) as the others increase (or decrease).

That is why the image of the inverted pyramid appears to me particularly effective of a different way of thinking about political actions and legal structures. The starting point is not the vertical one, with measures and content dropped from above, but it finds its core inside the territory and from there it arises content and measures according to a rising spiral, respectful of the centrality of each participating unit; and therefore giving concrete expression of Castoriadis’ idea of *the Imaginary Institution of Society*.

I think this is not of slight momentum, to the extent that the system inversion, i.e. the inversion of the pyramid, is able to promote the resulting reformulation of all, legal, political and social, categories involved (Castoriadis, 2001; Ciaramelli, 2008; Viola, 2012; Preterossi, 2016).

Suffice to say that the question would no longer be of seeking standards to be applied to specific situations but, in the plural system proposed here, each local entity becomes model to itself and for others.

Not to think in terms of standards, which has been typical for European policies, and too often also with negative impact on the Italian context, it means not to import (or export) pre-packed solutions but to develop an original, native model.

The social nature of the city, enters thus into contact with nature, once properly recognized. Nature means to develop a policy on territory that can be built from such premises and from specific requirements. The combination of nature and culture shapes the social as its own setting.

In these terms, I agree with Italo Calvino 'Invisible Cities' image:

“*Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules absurd, perspectives are misleading, and everything conceals some other thing (...)*
the cities believe they are the work of mind or of chance, but neither the first nor the other can hold up their walls.
Of a city you cannot enjoy the seven or seventy-seven wonders, but the answer it gives to a question you asked”.

Cities are built right on desires and fears, and it is perfectly true that in order to be enjoyable, a city must answer to a question. A question that I express, in terms of closing remark, pointing to our times: *did we learn to live a space?*

The feeling that social planning, closely related to the city (and possibly also oriented by the city itself), removes this question because it removes the question about the sense of living.

A meaning that brings the idea of space as a void to be filled in a chaotic, disorganized, and senseless accumulation, I would say. That is also why I wonder if we have learned to build.

To start by asking the question: *did we learn to live a space?* it means to start looking for sense. By thinking of the whole throughout the distinct parts, and the distinct parts from the perspective of the whole: thus city, nature, and culture can be joint and held together.

I'd like to close with Calvino (2015), that seems to be describing this very situation and the achieving of the *imaginary institution of the city*:

“*Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone.*

- *But what is the stone that supports the bridge? - Kublai Khan asks.*

- *The bridge is not supported by this or that stone, - Marco answers, - but by the arch line that they form.*

Kublai Khan stayed silent, reflecting. And then he added:

- *Why do you speak of stones? It is only the arch that matters to me.*

Polo replies: - Without stones there is no arch”.

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