17 Is Italy still special?

Conceptual and empirical remarks on urbanization in the era of globalization

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Many scholars have argued, over time, about Italy's social, economic, political and cultural peculiarities. Its urbanization too has always been studied as fairly distinctive: many historic cities with singular settings, often held up as models of an appealing way of life.

How has globalization changed the Italian city and its *image*? Is Italian urbanization just a part of an overall global flattening? Do Italian cities, and their social and spatial settings and practices, show a radical break with the past? Do its greater metropolitan city-regions show patterns and transformations like those of post-metropolitan situations around the world?

In this chapter, we will try to frame these issues through a discussion of some concepts which seem of basic importance for the understanding of Italian urbanization. Such concepts are mostly related to the influence of time (and space, place, territory, also as a legacy from the past) in the urban persistence and transformation (not only physical, but also social and economic), which appears much more powerful than in other realities, such as the US or Asia.

First remark: the (supposed) flatness of the world and Italy's peaks and valleys

The effect of globalization has not been to "flatten the world." Friedman's interpretation of the world as a level playing field, as a process of equalizing power, capacity, opportunities of more and more connected people, seems more wishful thinking than reality (Friedman, 2005). As many scholars argue, the world is instead fairly spiky (see, among others, Rodriguez-Posé & Crescenzi, 2008; Florida et al., 2008). Economic and social opportunities are differentiated in their dispersion around the world, and even across countries and regions. Such supposed equality/flatness of opportunities seems more and more selective with regards to geography, history, and so on.

Economic as well as social and cultural globalization are producing – or reproducing – far more differences than similarities among territories. As the neo-classical economic theory failed in predicting convergences among countries in the long run, globalization produces, at the same time, homogenization and differentiation. How much differentiation and how much homogenization depends, at least in part, on the historical, geographical and institutional legacy of each territory.

Italy is a case of strong differences, inside the national borders and in comparison with other territories, even when globalization produces major economic, social and urban transformation.

Italy's population is about 59 million. Shanghai has 24 million inhabitants, Beijing almost 20 million. These two megacities account for 44 million inhabitants, 75 percent of all of Italy. The urban dimension in Italy is totally different. The Italian territory is densely punctuated by more-or-less ancient urban nodes, with a strong sense of identity and often a fairly vibrant civic life. About 30 percent of the population lives in 105 cities with populations of more than 60,000 inhabitants. Twenty-two percent live in small cities with populations of between 20,000 and 60,000 inhabitants. Economy and society are hosted in (and produce) a variety of different models of urbanity.

Such small cities are cities in the full sense of the term: they provide services, they usually boast a large amount of cultural capital, a deep sense of identity and civic engagement, and a lively environment. The metropolitan phenomenon has been quite limited in its quantitative terms (compared with the USA, Northern Europe or the recent Asian megacities). Generally speaking, its territory has maintained, in the long run, a (morphologically) polycentric structure which dates from the Middle Ages or even earlier, with roots in Greek and Roman colonization.

Both larger and smaller cities have developed connections and forms of embedment into their regional spaces, so that we can recognize a large variety of situations: urban corridors as open systems of relatively integrated places and regions, historically polycentric city-regions (or regions of cities) diversely affected by and/or reactive with the globalization process, large, monocentric agglomerations in rapid transformation toward a more diffuse and regionalized grid of centralities (leisure, jobs, facilities, and so on), local systems with diversified economies and strong identities but nevertheless open to change, urban simulacra (such as some "new cities" in Sardinia) together with previously marginal areas revived by attracting new (often globalized) inhabitants. Often, such different spatialities are simultaneously present, impacting each other and, consequently, effecting social and urban configurations, and producing very complex territorialities (see the regional portraits).

Even if the nighttime satellite images of light-studded Italy seem to depict a giant megacity which covers almost the whole country (connecting Milan, Turin and Rome), a country which would be the third wealthiest in Europe and the seventh in the world (Florida et al., 2008; see also Soja & Kanai, 2007 for the concept of URB-Italy), the analysis of flows of people, goods and information (see Chapter 12 in this volume) show the persistence of regional patterns, more or less connecting each other, in some case forming corridors (particularly, from Venice to Milan and Milan to Bologna), in a transcalar game of lifeworlds, territories of circulation, spheres of daily life, urban and metropolitan networks, local production systems alongside the global ones, and so on. If every place is influenced by (economic, social, cultural) globalization, at the same time the Italian patterns seem often capable of combining the hypermodernity of globalization with a constant re-invention (starting from the legacy) of territories and places, sometimes simulacra, sometimes original spatialities (as in the case of Sardinia).

Globalization is a game of de-territorialization and re-territorialization (Cacciari, 2008; Madden, 2012), of often creative invention and production of places across the wrinkled crust of the earth (and, at the same time, practices of resistance and effects in terms of resilience). The Lefebvrian "urban" is everywhere, but at the same time the (changing) cities continue to exist.

Second remark: concerning what is "urban"

As previously illustrated (see Chapter 3 in this volume), the idea of "post-metropolis" (Soja, 1999), which somehow inspired the work of the national research group, was conceived for the Los Angeles area and therefore can hardly be applied to the Italian context. For this reason, this research has addressed regional processes of urbanization. In many cases, with the exception of that of Milan, it is difficult to speak of true metropolitan areas in Italy. Rome itself, though Italy's capital, can barely be considered a metropolis.

What can be gleaned from the work of Soja, however, is the multidimensional quality that characterizes the urban, in particular those immaterial qualities, be they financial flows or symbolic systems, that refer back to the notion of "third space" already developed in previous years (1996). In truth, even with regard to this idea, Lefebvre's work (1970, 1974) was seminal and well ahead of its time, and most authors (Harvey, 2006; Harrison, 2007; Jessop et al., 2008; Schmid, 2012; Goonewardena et al., 2008; Brenner, 2014) begin with it and continue to build upon these dimensions, although in some cases with differing interpretations.

These ideas are widely adopted by Brenner (2014), in reasoning about "planetary urbanization." In this case, however, in the concrete work of interpretation, it seems to disappear entirely. While the work of Brenner's research group shows great intelligence in dealing with a great many methodological and data collection problems (Brenner & Katsikis, 2014), they seem in the end to forget this dimension and focus more on those aspects of urbanization, and more generally forms of "human activity" (including such uses of resources), which are physically detectable by treating such uses of land, or infrastructure networks and connections, or more recently the environmental aspects, remaining dependent on the availability of comparable information at a global scale. The research work on Italy has allowed us, instead, to address a complexity of problems and synergies lacking in global research. It has overcome (erroneous) macroscopic visions (as in the above-mentioned interpretation of the Turin–Milan–Rome system) and been capable of greater degrees of depth even compared with other regional portrait experiences (Diener et al., 2006). Rather than simply look to the "scope" of the phenomenon of urbanization, the national research was instead forced to look at the different "forms (and processes) of urbanization," as indeed Brenner and his group had suggested.

This is not just an apparent problem of scale. It is also a problem of the interpretative categories that are used, and it is useful here to return to the multiplicity of dimensions introduced by Soja, and later by various others. Although

there is still significant progress to be made, research has taken into account, in some cases, the characters of urban metabolism (how, for example, energy and waste flows characterize urban form), or in other cases the flows, in particular, of people (see the research developed by the Milan unit), or the relations between systems (see the reflection on "corridors" developed by Perulli and others, but also the reasoning on relations by the Venetian territorial unit). Furthermore, there is the study of environmental conflicts (as in the Veneto region) as indicators of the processes of an ongoing "planetary urbanization." The Sardinian study showed, instead, that the areas of this island, with very low density and strong natural and environmental components, can instead be considered "post-metropolitan" or subject to "planetary urbanization" if you look not only at the tourist flows (extremely relevant in this context), but also at the concentration of capital flows, on the one hand, and the changing nature of the places, on the other, with a crucial role played by the development and promotion of image perception, in this case due to the market.

Similarly, the question also arises, for example, with respect to agricultural or rural areas (however one prefers to call them), which have so profoundly changed the nature not so much in relation to the products of urban systems, but to their functions and to the people who live there and the cultures they bring. These cultures, even if cloaked in an "anti-urban" logic, are ever more urban in the perception that characterizes them. Furthermore, the Roman unit has studied the forms of dwelling, taking into account a multi-dimensionality that goes from the physicality of the house, property market trends, flows of movement, the organization of daily life, to the cultures of dwelling, and so on. The urban question is based on the question of how the city is inhabited and very often changes can be recognized not only in the physical structures of settlements, but in the very way of living and interpreting what we call urban.

The "implosion/explosion" dichotomy, to make a radical distinction, while certainly helping to fuel the debate, does not explain all the processes and does not help to clarify matters. We should talk instead about different forms of stratification of the urban, the co-existence of different ways to inhabit the city. It is, first and foremost, a stratification brought about through historical development, which means the co-existence today of various different structures that have emerged over time. It regards the hierarchy of city centers, now well-established distributions of urban functions, the local living arrangements and the reach of everyday life, the system of local and supra-local relations that has emerged over time (see Chapter 5 in this volume), and so on. But it also means layering different ways of life and different dimensions of urbanity all in the same physical context. The research has tried to read these dynamics through the processes of transformation of urban regions, and the role of mediation played by the territory. For Lefebvre, the city was the mediator between the great supra-local socio-economic processes and the effects on people's daily lives. Today this mediating role is played by the territory and the socio-economic processes have become global.

Third remark: path/space dependence

In the very long run, starting in some cases, like Milan with ancient Roman colonization, or even earlier, as in the case of the Greek Naples, or from the more "recent" medieval cities, urban persistence still supports the contemporary city and metropolis. Perhaps no other country has a similar legacy (New York and Boston were founded around 1630: Reps, 1965), apart from the urban Asia (China, Japan, India, and so on), whose trajectories of transition to a quasi-Western modern urbanization are pretty recent.

Urban persistence is linked primarily to physical factors. In particular, the case of Tuscany demonstrates that the primeval influence of physical geography (topography, water, soil, and so on) has been the basic determinant of settlements (differently from other situations, where the "physical" has been "tamed," like the levelling of Manhattan around 1815 or the recent levelling of hills to produce suitable room for the new Chinese urbanization).

Urban history has been, in some sense, a long history of urbanization on a single track, and the inertia presented by the physical artifacts of previous urban cultures has significantly influenced subsequent urban growth. Perhaps for this reason Italian urbanization seems more dependent on its past even with respect to other European countries. This "path dependence" is not only the trivial acknowledgment that preceding events influence successive ones. Particularly in evolutionary economics, the concept has been profoundly explored and critiqued (see, among others: Martin & Sunley, 2006; Martin, 2010; Simmie & Martin, 2010). Such reflections focus on important issues not only for the (regional) economic analysis, but also for studying the process of urbanization. They not only explain the self-reinforcing character of path dependence, which is in some way linked to successful events, and why it is so difficult to deviate from an established route, particularly in the presence of "sunk costs" (such as the huge investments involved in the building of an inhabitable territory). Such reinforcing dynamics, starting from an urbanization mainly determined at its very beginning by physical-geographic factors, demonstrate why, particularly in Italy, urbanization is mainly constructed on itself, even in the case of sprawl. The Veneto case, for example, depicts a situation where the contemporary urban corridor follows a sort of "secular cycle" (Braudel, 1992), starting from the flows of capitals, merchants, goods and ideas between Milan and Venice, reinforced during the "proto-industrial" formation, remaining latent during the Industrial Revolution and now returning, as a complex and transcalar connection of a variety of events, places, spatialities and actors.

Path dependence may lock in territories, systems of companies and firms, alongside cognitive frames. In some cases, this lock-in reinforces habits, trust, inter-connections and generates increasing returns. It creates an "atmosphere" which facilitates learning and the circulation of (particularly tacit) knowledge through proximity and interaction, as in the case of Marshallian industrial districts. The process of formation of specialized, concentrated industrial areas is quite similar to the description of urban growth we have suggested, particularly

in the cases of Tuscany and Veneto. According to Marshall, at the beginning the physical factors determine a firm location, and, in case of increasing return, a district is constituted forming a "region" in which

> ideals of life and [. . .] religious, political and economic thread of the [. . .] history are interwoven. [. . .] When an industry has thus chosen a locality for itself, it is likely to stay there long: so great are the advantages which people following the same skilled trade get from near neighborhood to one another. The mysteries of the trade become no mysteries; but are as it were in the air, and children learn many of them unconsciously (Marshall, 1890, p. 165).

So, the lock-in, as the main feature of path dependence, involves both time and space. Outcomes (and antecedents) of path dependence are quite local in character, and path dependence (as outcome and as process) is a local and contingent phenomenon, and hence to a high degree place-dependent. As in path dependence, spatial (dependence) forms have consequences on events, in such a way that spatiality is closely integrated to the production of history (Massey, 1992). The case of Rome clearly shows as the new extended grid of leisure/shopping centralities significantly (adaptively) change spatial behavior and daily practices, in new relations between housing (more and more abstracted from its territory) and leisure, in an extremely transcalar form. Path–space dependence, in this case, shows a dynamic of de-territorialization and re-territorialization, overcoming the traditional link between home and other places. The traditional space dependence of family/work/leisure is a path interrupted, the daily life is deployed in many places at the same time, perhaps producing new "worldlifes" and spatiality, in fact one of the many forms of the regionalization of the space.

In the regional portraits, path dependence (alongside space dependence) is well depicted, both in the negative and positive consequences of the lock-in. Path and space dependences are processes which imply reproduction and conservation (positive or negative lock-in, lock-in as a trap or as opportunity), or vice versa creation of new trajectories and a break with history. The case of Milan's urban region may be read, at least in the age of globalization and post-Fordism, as a case of positive lock-in, which reinforces itself through economies of agglomeration (network of learning), linkage and inter-dependencies at many scales, specific institutions. Over time, Milan (and in part Turin) experienced a dramatic break in the path (from Fordist industries to advanced producer services and creative industries) and the creation of a new path, perhaps thanks to the so-called Jacobsian externalities, a heterogeneity and diversity of local industries and organizations in dense urban agglomerations that facilitates innovation and economic reconfiguration – "avoiding complete adaptation and lock-in to a fixed structure" (Molina-Morales & Expósito-Langa, 2013, p. 744) – policy/ technology/ideas transfer through external linkages, and so on (on Jacobsian externalities see, among others, Jacobs, 1961; Lucas, 1988; Glaeser, 2012). Such processes have profoundly changed the social, economic and physical character of the Milan region, its position in the international urban networks, and the

spatial organization of the urban region, with a transition from a monocentric structure toward a complex grid of highly provisioned centralities. In comparing the transformations of Milan, Rome and Turin, one will find quite different models of urban regionalization, in which similar (general) trends produce quite different spatializations.

The game of creative/destructive/conservative time-spatial lock-in is quite apparent in the Third Italy. The cases of Tuscany and the Veneto show a profound crisis and restructuring of the Marshallian industrial districts, and the emergence of a plurality of socio-economic trajectories which contribute to the diversification of the regional economies. The quite introverted Marshallian district has broken beyond its boundaries, and in some cases disappeared; firms and clusters of firms locate themselves differently in the global value chain and the necessary (Marshallian) link with the territory has become significantly weakened. A cognitive proximity has partially replaced the geographic one. In Tuscany, a regionalization of the economic structure seems to emerge from the crisis of districts. The Veneto appears more and more a patchwork of different path–space-dependence situations, as the effects of globalization and economic crises are felt, where very old ways of production/reproduction/consumption co-exist with the hypermodernity of the locally global networks and lifestyles, producing a vast variety at every scale. Marshallian and Jacobsian agglomeration economies seem no longer to present opposing alternatives but rather co-exist (even in terms of spatial policy: see Frenken & Boschma, 2007). In Italian hypermodernity, specialization (not so much in the form of Marshallian districts but rather of more-or-less related functional clusters connected to the global value chain) and variety co-exist, influencing each other. Redundancy, slack and sometimes weak ties (in comparison with the strong Marshallian ties) seem to be facilitating innovations.

Such a situation produces profound differences in the configurations of Italian urban regions (in part global urban regions) particularly in comparison with non-European situations. This calls for a more profound analysis of the link between the micro and the macro. In fact, the Italian regions are a sort of blending between a historical (physical) legacy and their reproduction as relational entities in which different arenas, social and economic practices, and institutional arrangements co-evolve.

Fourth remark: the ambiguity of development and the role of the territory

The issue of path dependence, and the dependence on the historical development of the settlement, must then be framed in an Italian context. The weight these have in Italy is particularly significant, because it not only structures the forms of settlement, but strengthens cultures, economies and social systems. It is often in deep-rooted cultures with strong identities, real, alleged or claimed, that we find the traces of a long-term path dependence in Italy. This often results in negative components of a localist type, which can also take on an exclusive and exclusionary character, based on presumptions of (strategically re-invented) identity.

Beyond these general considerations, we see on the contrary, even in Italy (and in Italy this is a particularly significant factor), a breakdown of the historical pattern of settlement, a process that actually has been under way for a long time. And the most significant factor of this breakdown is not so much the emergence of new centers or new polarities, which is albeit as important a dynamic as settlement processes historically unknown in Italy (traditionally considered a land of minor centers, the renowned "hundred cities" of the *Bel Paese*, and so on). These processes include urban sprawl (in the north-east, and so on), the development of settlements in agricultural areas, urban fragmentation, and so on. In south-central Italy this type of settlement development has been characterized and supported by illegal settlements that have upset entire areas of the national territory, from rural Nocera and Sarno near Naples to the Roman countryside.

This dynamic interacts to produce profound changes in urban culture, in the form of lifestyles and ways of conceiving of urban life. This transformation has already had a deep effect on the reality of Italian cities.

What is important to note, as a significant factor that emerges from the Italian context, is rather the deep conflict, perceived and implemented, between human settlement, on the one hand, overwhelmed with the economies and cultures that accompany it, and the system of values, on the other hand. Whether real or imagined, these values are connected to a certain path dependence that also plays out in terms of a wide demand for new patterns of living and sociability. This conflict is therefore at the same time an ambiguity, one which seems suddenly to strongly characterize the current neo-liberally oriented territorial development.

The improvement policies of the major Italian historic cities (but also of minor centers and rural areas), and their related economies, provide a powerful example. Impacted by varying forms of tourism and by huge financial flows, included in international circuits and in globalized economies that uproot meaning and values, these local realities are often turned into "city-museums" or "postcard-territories" (Soja's simulacra). The emptying of significance of these places and these territories often turns them into simulacri of worlds that are then sold and marketed, offering experiences based on impressions and feelings. In some cases this path dependence can transform them into a massive theme park. Even if the physical structures are maintained or even improved, their internal contents are emptied or transformed, creating ambiguous and contradictory situations. As mentioned above, therefore, it is important to clarify what we mean as a path dependence and what it entails.

On the other hand, we are witnessing continuous processes of re-rooting, even within those areas of urban sprawl or squatter settlements, or within the new urban realities being formed, even if they lack the favorable characteristics for the construction of urban fabric conducive to social development of forms of appropriation and re-signification of places. Yet such re-rooting is constantly sought and expressed as a socially and widely felt need. Again it creates an ambiguous and contradictory dynamic; the results and meanings are yet to be understood or interpreted.

Against this background, the national research on the Italian context has detected a centrality of the territory, whose weight and texture is not so

much (and not solely) based on path dependence. Almost in contradiction with the process of dematerialization, or with an idea of the development of post-metropolis indifferent to place, it exhibits how the characteristics and materials of historical stratification of territories (in terms of the environment and landscape, but also in terms, for example, of stratification of the historic centers, consolidated axes, and so on) also clearly influence the regionalization of the urban, its development and its structure. This is well illustrated in the regional portrait of Tuscany, but also in others. The territory has a consistency, its structure and therefore its autonomy. It causes a friction in the mediation between global processes and local settlements and social organization. In this sense, it is not just "determined," but it is "decisive."

The elements of the local "milieu," tied to history, to local relationships and identity (including the "negative" or "conservative" connotation these occasionally take on) and other immaterial dimensions, analogously influence the development and shape of urban form (Dematteis, 2008).

Fifth remark: Resilience

Resilience, as path dependence, is not a property of a system, but rather a dynamic process (Boschma, 2014; Dawley et al., 2010). Resilience and path–space dependence are closely interwoven, particularly through the degree of connectedness of a system (Simmie & Martin, 2010, p. 33). High resilience and low connectedness produce a phase of re-organization, innovation and economic restructuring (through the virtues of the weak ties) that can evolve toward a phase of exploitation (growth and capacity to seize opportunities). Vice versa, low resilience and high connectedness (as in the case of negative lock-in) may more or less quickly generate decline and destruction. Italian urban regions, as they are depicted in the regional portraits, appear fairly resilient. Such resilience is not apparent only in the economic domain of the more industrialized northern regions (where the strong ties peculiar to the Marshallian district have been broken, creating in part new paths, or in the Turin and Milan urban regions in their different path to post-Fordist arrangements), but also in the socio-economic practices of daily life.

Naples is a case in point: in a situation of significant social heterogeneity, with substantial degrees of poverty, informality, illegality and deregulation, the city appears very resilient. In a sort of bricolage between old and new, some inhabitants use tactics and strategies in an interesting mix of pre-modernity, modernity and hypermodernity. Naples may be considered as a special case of deployment of Jacobsian externalities, where path and space dependence are not distinguishable and are co-produced in co-evolutionary processes.

In the Italian context, resilience appears to be closely connected to a social type of resilience, that is, to an adaptive capacity on the part of different social bodies, capable of more or less rapidly absorbing or responding to situations of stress, of change, of crisis, but also of dealing with the difficulty, if not the shortcomings, of public authorities to respond adequately and effectively to emerging problems and their functions. In Italy this has, in some ways, anticipated the effects of the

global abolition of the welfare state, so much so that some European states are observing carefully this type of process that in Italy has mobilized social energies and forms of adaptation. It is not unexpected that resilience appears to grow in the face of a major degree of "deregulation" or forms of behavior considered illegal, or even the presence of forms of cooperation between secondary subjects of the territorial government. Vice versa, it appears more problematic where strong players persist and attempts are made to coordinate policy among relevant bodies of the territorial government. This situation provides a possible explanation of the rigid/elastic relationship of the social bodies and the institutions.

The effect of this trend on the territories leads one, however, to question the generally positive value of resilience, especially in terms of a weakening of social protection, but also the waning of solidarity (in favor of a progressive individualism), as well as a negative environmental impact, in terms of the unregulated consumption of resources (with negative, often nearly irrevocable effects of the long term). Think of the problems of urban sprawl. This line of reasoning should not so much call for a return to greater rigidity or greater top–down control, as it should promote a move toward greater complexity in territorial government, where the capacity for social adaptation should be measured and coordinated with a more organic and collectively shared vision.

Sixth remark: regions between normative and interpretative perspectives, and some tentative conclusions

The case studies clearly show a variety of regions and processes of regionalization. The social and economic landscape appears as a multidimensional palimpsest. The many layers refer to co-existence of the past (which influences the dynamic in many ways, particularly important being the inertia of the physical structures) and new elements. Such a palimpsest combines differences linked to historical events (with different social and economic timing that overlap each other), but it also refers to the overlapping of a large variety of models and trajectories, whose evolution depends on the capacity to exploit or escape the lock-in opportunities or traps.

For Soja, the post-metropolis represents a historical phase, still in progress, the transition from the modern (in particular, industrial and Fordist) metropolis to a radically different configuration (see, among others, Soja, 1999, 2005, 2011). The metropolis explodes, it extends at a global scale; the hinterland is no longer defined in terms of proximity and, therefore, neither in traditional terms of transportation relationships between center and suburbs. A new metropolis form emerges, one that radicalizes the characters of the modern city, reaching unusual levels of heterogeneity and diversity (social, economic, cultural, life forms), in a radically different context from a spatial point of view. Soja puts particular emphasis on overcoming the drastic dualism between city and suburbs (suburbs now being affected by an unprecedented process of spatial, economic and social transformations, from edge cities to technoburbs, in a direction of propagation of various types of centers and the construction of new spheres of life (from gated

communities to large business parks or theme parks), which together reshape our social geography in a new way.

Everything appears everywhere as new form-metropolis, and locations can contain everything, offering a seemingly contradictory mix of variables of de-industrialization and re-industrialization, centralization and decentralization, combinations and hybrids, producing, from the traditional monocentric form to regional, polycentric systems (another distinction that is dissolving, according to Soja, is that between city and region). For Soja, this not only leads to forms of regionalization of the urban, but the region seems to take on a character which is not only interpretive but also administrative, as the context in which to treat or revise, in a unified manner, several important differences. These include the difference between traditional and innovative forms of production of goods and services, between populations, between competitiveness and solidarity, and so on. On these points seem to converge the positions of Sassen (as well as other important authors that, for brevity, we do not name), in which the regional dimension (with some of its characteristic features, such as the sense of belonging) seems almost in opposition to the dark side of the post-global city (Sassen, 2001). The region appears to be the place where forms of territorial solidarity could be exercised with respect to the intra-urban inequalities which seem to some extent inevitable in the dynamics of globalization.

In the American case, the exercise of solidarity also seems somewhat problematic, partly because of the constitutive fragmentation of city administrations, the effects of legal mechanisms of incorporation, and the intentional constitution of incorporated towns (often suburbs, which acquire the legal status of municipalities) in the processes of exclusion of "undesirable" social segments (see, for example, as a historical reconstruction, Teaford, 1975) and attraction of desired populations and activities. The case of Europe, however, leaves significant room for regional action (albeit with many and sometimes contradictory facets, from the European Union to the national states and regions).

The preceding paragraphs have shown how (and why) the notion of post-metropolis should be used with caution in the case of Italy. Without doubt, globalization has acted with force on the territories (which often posed resistance and creative interpretation), but the spatial results are quite different from those reported in the literature on the American city. There is evidence of similarities, but the processes of formation of new spaces appear quite singular, as in the transition to a polycentric system (but historically almost all urban realities in Italy are polycentric) or the increase of density of in-between spaces forming in the intercity connective tissues (already densely anthropic and punctuated by dense settlement pattern consisting of a variety of social and economic landscapes, radically different from the former suburbs) that are forming complex corridors. The social outcomes, by contrast, see a dramatic growth in inequality, in which Milan emerges as by far the most unequal city in Italy, while other urban situations appear much less unequal.

Economic restructuring has therefore impacted the city in a variety of ways, producing very different structures. The inequalities instead to a very limited

degree regard the in-between space now under development, despite the significant presence of immigrants. In these areas there is actually a post-metropolitan, and even post-urban, stratification of practices, from reverse commuting, to post-rural economic practices (niche agriculture, with high added value and new business operators), to re-signification of places in a bricolage of pre-modern and hyper-modern (see the case of Sardinia), to environmental conflicts that bring into play the plausibility of different models of development, to new forms of living in relation to work (and to changes in the labor markets, now much more flexible than before, and families, increasingly multi/single-person, and so on) to changing types of consumption. All these are aspects of a post-metropolitan and, simultaneously, a post-rural landscape. All this tends to "regionalize" (at various scales) ways of life and economic and social practices and, from the point of view of governance, the region appears, in Italy as in other contexts, as the designated place to exercise solidarity and forms of social and spatial justice.

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18 Conclusions

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John Friedmann, introducing his book *The Prospects of Cities* in 2002, wrote:
"The city is dead. It vanished sometime during the 20th century" (2002, p. XI),
and proposed to define the emerging forms of the human habitat simply as "the
urban." In the last 30 years, there has been a relentless search for new words
capable of expressing what has been happening to cities: the endless city,
"la città diffusa," disurbia, outer city, rurban, dispersed urbanization, urban
region, regional urbanization, mega-city-region, and so on. What is clear is that
the conceptual terms "city" and "metropolis," with their hierarchical and dichoto-
mous implications, are no longer useful for understanding what is happening to
the spatial organization of society.

The group of researchers that has coordinated the project we are presenting in
this book at Politecnico di Milano already had this fact clear in 2004, when they
decided to title the departmental research conference "Milano oltre la Metropoli"
(tr. *Milan beyond the Metropolis*, 2004). Holding that Milan could no longer be
described as a city based upon its historical radiocentric spatial structure, nor as a
metropolis, the term used to designate the relationship between the central city and
the cluster of cities depending upon it. In that conference we underlined the van-
ishing of the traditional center–periphery patterns, the emergence of a new form
of urbanization based upon conurbations and discontinuities – a phenomenon that
could be grasped only by an aerial view, because of its scale and dimension.

We observed that the spatial complexity and discontinuity was accompanied
by discontinuity in time: the pace of change in the last 30 years has been steady
and at the same time difficult to be recorded in a traditional way. In fact, it is pos-
sible to perceive the changes taking place in the former countryside and in the
periphery of small- and medium-sized centers only by looking at aggregate data
or using geographic information systems. Although the population of cities was
stable or decreasing, and although one could not notice the great changes taking
place at ground level (which were so fragmented and scattered that they appeared
almost imperceptible), there had been an incredible acceleration in construction
activity and related land consumption.

This book is the result of a large research effort produced by a network of
scholars in different Italian universities interested in delivering a significant out-
put for both the scientific and policy communities about new ways to describe this