



Scientific Journal of the Observatory of Mediterranean Basin.
Polis University / Ferrara University /
UNECE Center of excellence / Co-PLAN Institute.

TITLE: **New Dimensions of Urban Living**

AUTHOR: **Prof. PhD. Antonello STELLA**
SOURCE: *Scientific journal of the Observatory of Mediterranean Basin,
Volume 1 / 2015, pp. 15-20*

ISSN: *2959-4081*

ISBN: *978-9928-175-52-6*

PUBLISHED BY: *POLIS-Press*

DOI: ***10.37199/o41001102***

2.1 New Dimensions of Urban Living

Prof. PhD. Antonello Stella

Department of Architecture, IDAUP
University of Ferrara

It can certainly be asserted that the concept of evolution in the space / time of the city has changed profoundly in the history of the city at a given moment of its evolution: or at the time in which the machinery and, with it, the concept of velocity has entered the urban panorama. And this event is located precisely not only in the history of the cities but of the same evolutionary history of man, in between the XVIII (eighteenth) and the XIX (nineteenth) century or in that of the Industrial Revolution that has so profoundly changed human life and the look of one of the most important aggregative forms of social life. Even more precisely, it can be stated that the structure of the city and the perception of it have undergone a profound change with the entrance of the machine itself in the space of the city, namely with the advent of the railway that can be located exactly in between the second and third decade of the XIX (nineteenth) century. (Fig 1)

Since then, the evolution of the city deviated from the one that characterized the urban development until then. In fact, if until the advent of the machine the urban development had been, from a strictly morphological point of view, a "rail" development made of alternation between built and open public spaces, the entrance of the rails within the space of the city has introduced a third element which, in fact, more than changing

the perception of the space itself, has introduced for the first time in its evolutionary history "a different speed" in its pace of development. From that moment, with the subsequent advent of the second World War and onwards, of the automobile as a means of mass shift, which has further implemented the displacement speed in its interior and added to the bundle of rails, the ribbons of asphalt crossed increasingly faster by rivers of automobiles (Fig.2) which gradually reduced the space dedicated to the public meeting of the people who lived in the "polis", the city has had to cope with the concept of time in the sense of rapid transformation of its structure. The contemporary city and

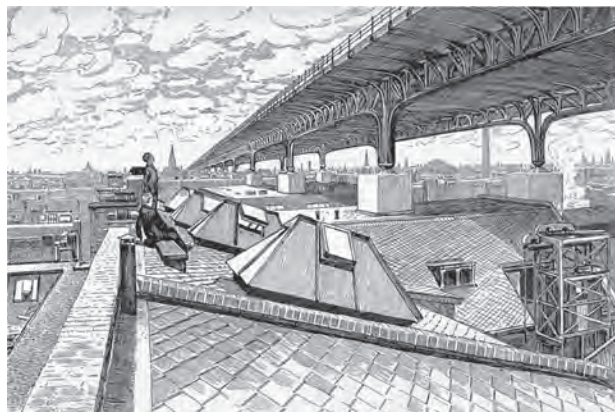


Fig. 1. Design for an elevated railway in the German cities, Anonymous 1901



Tirana MetroPolis, Berlage 2003



Fig. 2. Motorways, Los Angeles '70



Fig. 3. Chongqing, China, 2009

the development of the western metropolises of the XIX (nineteenth) century up to the contemporary and even more abnormal development of the eastern city, particularly Asian and, specifically Chinese (Fig. 3), shows us the infrastructure of the city in the near future, rather than its original structure made of "full and empty spaces populated by man", one of the elements of most interest and attention from the urban planners' perspective. Certainly, it has to pass from a monocentric idea of the city to a polycentric idea, namely a city that has built some pockets not necessarily inhabited, in the strict sense, by the inhabitant, but rather just crossed by the same. And as if inserted in the traditional differentiation between city and landscape, a third dimension emerges without internal clear limits that contains them both, and where the transport infrastructure becomes the key element of the structure of the city. To visualise this idea, think, for example, of Los Angeles or many Chinese and Asian metropolises.

In the framework briefly described here, it is clear that the very instruments of the urban project have been thoroughly reviewed in these last years and there is still a search of new methodologies and new tools of in-

vestigation and reading of the urban fabric, in order to better interpret the future development of the cities. Also, it is evident that in the last decades the urban analysis has increasingly favored the analysis of urban spaces rather than that of the built ones, and the tools of the project are increasingly focused on the attribution of a new meaning to these empty spaces. The urban project has become increasingly less volumetric and increasingly more project of soil, up to being pushed to its most extreme hypothesis and if we want paradoxical to restore the natural landscape inside the city itself in a Utopian and anachronistic attempt to return to nature, we have to contrast that process previously described of increasingly major infrastructure of the polycentric city. But this "pseudo-natural" attitude, which sees the proliferation of green facades, artificial hills (Fig 4) or "vertical woods" (Fig 5), does little other than remove the real understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon. Thus, in the future, the tools of the project will increasingly focus on interpreting relations rather than the elements themselves. Intervening on the relations means therefore understanding the empty and interstitial space of the city going so far as to pass the same physical limits of the city itself, if these still exist,



Fig.4. *Vertical woods, Stefano Boeri, Milan*

presenting, in some way, the reason of the prophecy developed by Jean Gottman between the 60s and 70s of the last century, of an urban universe consisting of continuous Megalopolises that exceed the concept of the metropolises. With the advent of the computer it was mistakenly believed that the end of human activity was one's own home, or office, from which it was possible to govern everything comfortably seated behind his/her desk, showing the interior domestic and work space at the center of human and, therefore, even urban activities. The advent of mobile devices has instead turned such a centrality, bringing in the center of attention the other areas of the city: if it was the Square in the Polis, the workplace in the industrial city, after the war and until recent times, the domestic living quarters in relation to new ways of labor, in the contemporary city there are no more predetermined limits; we can work on the subway, in the park, in the hall of an airport as well as at home and in our office. This is the real revolution of urban living of the contemporary city - that between domestic living and the public one, a new way of inhabiting is inserted in the city, representing a third dimension, all of it to analyze and solve. One thing is certain: the home, office and square are no longer

able to represent the fullness of living in the contemporary city.

In the context briefly described here, the experience of the Tirana / Rinas workshop falls precisely in the will to interpret these new dimensions of living, the space of the contemporary city that privileges the relation between urban phenomena (such as Aldo Rossi would call them) rather than an analysis of their nature. Tirana, more generally, which is a quadrant included in the urbanized space between the city and the airport area named Rinas, analyzed in the workshop, represents, in this sense, an interesting field of experimentation in several respects. First, because of its physical characteristics, that see an urban development along three very important infrastructural corridors for the city, (Fig. 6) or the pair consisting of the fast road to four lanes which connects Tirana and Durres and the parallel railroad, and the quadrant towards the north that reaches beyond Rinas International Airport, through the articulated joint of Bexull and the axis of urbanization of Kamza, the area is characterized by the admixture of primary urbanization, infrastructures and landscape with natural characteristics. Such physical characteristics are combined then to produce



Fig.5. Atelier Jean Nouvel, competition design for a Museum in Burgos, Spain

the social particularity of the metropolitan condition of Tirana: a metropolitan area developing in between being a city established in the national territory of Albania, but still with major margins of development, and therefore still to be defined as a sort of virgin land where similar European contexts can be viewed as a learning experience the same mistakes of which must be avoided and to experience the new dimensions of the contemporary urban living described above. Among others is the decision to focus on the area between the city and the airport is not accidental: in all the contemporary metropolises, the development between these two poles represents the strategic junction of development in a vision of the global net-

work of the cities. In this sense, the design assumptions formulated in the tables of the analysis and in those most foreshadowing of possible future scenarios, represent and tell their willingness to intervene over more relational spaces than on the existing body of the city. They try to interpret Tirana in its entirety more like a polycentric and polymorphic complex with many internal borders, in the will to interpret not only the space as the "time inside the city" of which the infrastructure is a key to the future development.

In conclusion to this brief analysis on the general aspects of the reflection on urban development of the contemporary metropolis and the particular decline of the theme,



through the opportunity provided by the exercise of the developed project in the area under study, I would, however, underline the value of the cultural exchange represented by the cooperation program created between our two schools in 2011, with the first rounds of workshops and lessons, and that is not confronted on the highest level of education with the International PhD IDAUP, which sees the confrontation between the two schools and therefore two different didactic models. Above all, two also different models of socio-economic development, are found, in the direct and joint confrontation of a similar vision of the city in "a human dimension" which may appear as a banality or a commonplace, but this is not the result after

a long collaboration between the students and teachers who find themselves, after having started from very different points and experiences, practicing a completely analogous language of the project, regardless of the analyzed territory and the economic and social reality.

References:

- Rossi, A., 2011, *L'architettura della Città*, Quodlibet.
- Lynch, K., *L'immagine della Città*, Marsilio.
- Schivelbush, W., 2003, *Storia dei viaggi in Ferrovia*, Einaudi.