

Policies, Plans and Projects

Governing the City-region of Milan

Like many other metropolitan cities, Milan has experienced spatial decentralization of industry and population during the last decades. At present, a multiplicity of settlement patterns can be observed. Particularly the highly industrialized North has been able to strengthen its position in many sectors with areas of specialization and intense growth based mostly on small enterprise.

This article presents the evolution of the city-region Milan and the metropolitan governance experience in the Milanese area. It argues that new demand for general spatial planning is basically tied much more to the problem of constructing and legitimating choices than of certifying rights; of making action possible rather than of imposing choices based on rational technical principles. Furthermore, a demand for reference frameworks to facilitate co-operation and agreement in unstable and highly fragmented situations is identified.

The case of Milan gives strong evidence that any of the problems which have prevented metropolitan governments from being effective or even coming into existence are positively solved when there is a bottom-up aggregation of municipalities and actors.

1 The Evolution of the City Region: Decentralisation and Centralisation

We know that with the increasing importance of economic forces on a global scale, thanks to advanced technologies and deregulated trade barriers, metropolitan cities have experienced *spatial decentralization of industry and population*. Urban sprawl has undoubtedly become a common feature of the modern metropolis. Populations have moved out of the urban cores and settled into surrounding suburbs and the countryside. Technology now makes it more possible for people to carry out their work at greater distances from ur-

City	Population			Net Change ~1970 to ~2000
	Circa 1970	Circa 1990	Circa 2000	
Amsterdam	820'000	701'000	715'148	-12.79%
Barcelona	1'745'000	1'694'000	1'505'581	-13.72%
Birmingham	1'098'000	970'000	1'008'381	-8.16%
Berlin	3'273'074	3'347'512	3'425'759	4.66%
Brussels	1'075'000	976'000	950'597	-11.57%
Copenhagen	725'000	556'000	487'969	-32.69%
Dortmund	542'396	584'600	594'274	+9.56%
Dublin	568'000	485'000	481'854	-15.17%
Frankfort	657'776	623'700	643'469	-2.18%
Glasgow	940'000	734'000	680'000	-27.66%
Hamburg	1'781'621	1'603'070	1'704'731	-4.32%
Liverpool	610'000	479'000	474'001	-22.29%
London	7'800'000	6'638'109	6'962'319	-10.74%
Lyons	520'000	413'000	445'257	-14.37%
Madrid	3'146'000	3'124'000	2'881'506	-8.41%
Marseilles	881'000	840'000	797'486	-9.48%
Milan	1'725'000	1'432'000	1'302'808	-24.47%
Naples	1'234'000	1'025'000	1'035'835	-16.06%
Paris	2'591'000	2'176'000	2'123'261	-18.05%
Rotterdam	687'000	574'000	589'987	-14.12%

Tab. 1: Population of major cities in Europe (circa 1970 to 2000).

ban cores. The below table (Kantor and Savitch, 2002) displays this decline of the city center in terms of population. As observed from the figures, the rate of population decrease for Milan between 1970 and 2000 is about 25%.

In examining the population decline in European cities, it is evident that the rate of population decline in Milan seems to be comparatively high.

This figure has to take into account the fact that the territorial extension of the municipality of Milan is very small (181.7 km²). Even though it is important to notice that the core city has experienced an important decline in population that now seems to have ended. But during the long period of population decline, it is all too evident that the city experiences a process of residential decentralisation due to a variety of factors: the search for better living conditions, prices of the property market, progressive disappearance of the rent market.

In the same period, Milan has been able to face a deep crisis of its productive basis with a major loss of jobs in the

industrial sector (-54% only in the period of 1970 to 1990) and a parallel growth of opportunities in new sectors like research and development, services, advertising, media, fashion, and science and technology related activities.

Yet what has affected the industrial basis has not just been a process of decentralisation at the territorial scale. The outer part of the city region, and particularly the highly industrialized North, has been able to strengthen its position in many sectors (furniture, mechanics, textile, electronics etc.) with areas of specialisation and excellence and intense growth based mostly on small enterprises.

The outcome of this process has been a reshaping of the relationships between different parts of the metropolitan area, with a wide diffusion of residence evidenced by the stability of the provincial population (circa 4 millions) in the face of the huge loss of population of the core city (more than 400 000). In relation to 1981, the census data of 1991

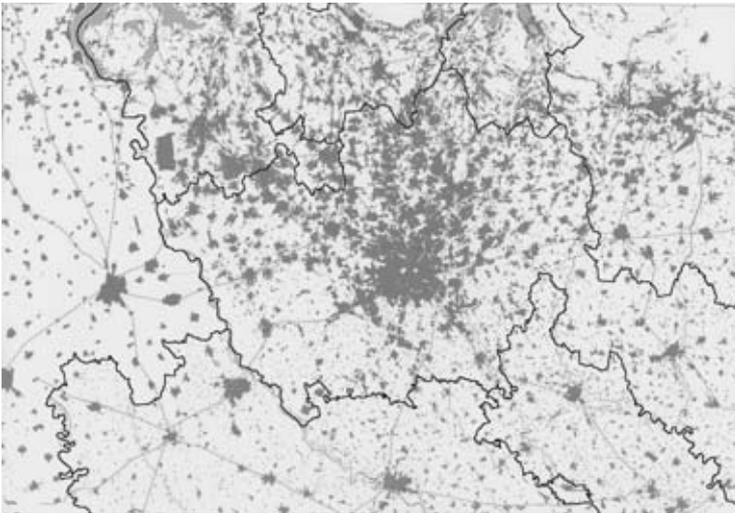


Fig. 1: Milan metropolitan area (Source: Casabella 2001).

showed an overall increase in mobility of 5,4%, with a decrease in movements within the boundaries of the core city (-16,8%) and a parallel increase in movements from other municipalities toward Milan (+18,9%). At the same time, the data showed an increase in movements from the core city toward the external communities (+8,8%) and a strong increase in mobility between the external communities (+35%).

The region we can observe today (Fig. 1) is not just a core city that has been affected by a process of sprawl. On the contrary, a geographical analysis has provided evidence of many different urban formations within this area. A multiplicity of settlement patterns can be observed, the most remarkable of which are the following:

- the axis of Simplon near Malpensa Airport in the Northwest, around the urban core of Legnano-Busto-Castellanza;
- the North of Milan, which thanks to the great amount of available land to be re-developed, is becoming a new pole of attraction for the information and communication technologies sectors;
- complex linear urban development (particularly along the Comasina and along the mountain path between Como and Lecco), in which a unitary system of centralities and textures of connectivity can be defined;
- dense and strongly interconnected webs of significant urban centers (particularly the central area of Brianza Milanese);
- webs of urban centers that are partially conurbated and which present a morphological configuration of the Christallerian type (partially in Saronnese, in Magentino, and in Vimercatese, but

also between Varese and Como, around the pole of Olgiate);

- punctual urban development of a small dimension (South of Milan).

One outcome of population and activity movements is a core city that absorbs the entry of about 900 000 cars per day.

In the absence of any effective policy of price control for private housing, as public housing became residual, and as a result of very weak policies of traffic control and public transport, the city is experiencing a growing divergence between the population that *uses* it either during the day and during the night, and the population that *resides* in it. The latter is an older population that is strongly polarised in social terms: on the one side marginal subjects and protected social categories that live in the residual public housing, and on the other the upper and middle class that still lives in the historical center.

The combined effect of these processes is on the one hand a decline in sociability and the density of relationships, a weakening of the city's cohesion, and on the other hand the growth of problems related to quality of life and security. In general, there exists a conflict of interest between those populations that live in the city transiently and those that steadily reside in it.

We can easily think of the pollution problems linked to massive commuting, or to problems related to an uncontrolled growth in the number of night-clubs and restaurants in parts of the old town that used to be typically residential. Or we can analyse the penetration of new economic sectors like fashion, design and advertising in the industrial periphery of the city, with a beneficial

impact on the local economy, but with connected problems of gentrification and congestion of the same areas.

Similar type of conflicts show up in the external areas that have been the destination of migratory processes of the more dynamic population or of the population that has been pushed outside by the tendencies of the property market. These are suburban areas where new conflicts are triggered by the location of new shopping malls, leisure infrastructure, garbage dumps, and treatment plants, which all upset the residential conditions of these areas in terms of accessibility and congestion.

2 Attempts to Establish a Unitary Form of Government at the Regional Level

2.1 The Experience of the Milanese Inter-communal Master Plan

When the frantic period of post-war reconstruction began to slow down at the beginning of the 1950s, the Municipality of Milan proposed to the Ministry of Public Works the institution of an *inter-communal Master Plan* (Piano Intercomunale Milanese) to include 79 municipalities around the central city. The main justification for the initiative was the difficulty of making planning decisions without influencing the surrounding territories from which problems often originated.

After a long phase of negotiation, in 1959, the Ministry decided to assign to the Municipality of Milan the task of preparing an *inter-communal Master Plan* including only 35 outer municipalities. Since the decision had not been agreed through negotiating with these outer municipalities, some of them opposed the Ministerial decision, regarding it as interference by the central city with their powers.

In 1961, the conflict led to the constitution of a *voluntary consortium among all the municipalities of the Milanese area* – the Piano Intercomunale Milanese (PIM) – organised around a general Assembly of Mayors and an Executive committee to enforce its decisions. This fresh start guaranteed the same

rights concerning planning decisions (and veto power) to even the smallest municipalities. A technical group was established, with a staff funded by the municipalities, assuming the role of designing an inter-communal plan to be approved by all municipalities.

The area of the PIM was extended to 94 municipalities in 1963. Between 1963 and 1965 a very intense debate about the future form and character of the metropolitan area took place. Different planning schemes were developed and proposed by personalities who also represented different political orientations, which led to more conflict.

First, it became evident that a consensus on a "unique general Master Plan" for the area would not have been reached through discussion among technicians or within the Assembly of Mayors due to many conflicting interests and objectives. Second, the conflict was attributed to the *voluntary character of the institution* that was obliged to follow the unanimity principle of decision making. Therefore, it was evident that the only way of having a Master Plan for the metropolitan area was to solve the profound weakness of the PIM by creating a new directly elected intermediate institution, with power over territorial planning, following the model of British structural planning. Meanwhile, the attempt to solve practical problems in the short term developed in two directions:

- reducing the expectations from a general Master Plan adopted by all the municipalities to a *series of guidelines* capable of gathering a general consensus in the Assembly of Mayors; and
- giving more weight to the formal vertices of the organisation – the board of directors of the internal technical staff and the Executive committee of PIM – that were quite strictly controlled by political parties.

In 1967, a document was approved by the Assembly of Mayors entitled "*General Scheme of Plan and Priority Implementation Guidelines*." This was not so much a compromise between the opposing schemes, but rather a less ambitious attempt to move in areas of general consensus among the conflicting parties and to set general objectives for

the metropolitan area development pattern. The consensus was also reached because most of the real choices were postponed to a successive phase of detailed planning that would not be realised in the end. The Plan of 1967 remained as a kind of general statement that was not followed by any kind of formal decision, and this was seen by all the actors as a failure in accomplishing the mission of PIM. This failure opened a new phase that began at the end of the sixties, characterised by different levels of effectiveness of PIM, if only at an informal level.

While the internal technical structure was engaged in a never ending process of producing the new metropolitan plan, the same structure played an important, albeit informal role, in reviewing the local plans of the municipalities and trying to implement the general indications of the General Scheme of Plan. At the same time the technical structure of PIM was capable of promoting a series of sectoral projects. Among others it is relevant to mention the following:

- the *Passante ferroviario* – a railway junction between all lines arriving at the city as the basis for a regional railway transport system;
- the various proposals for the creation of metropolitan parks;
- the constitution of a new consortium for planning and managing areas for low-income housing (CIMEP).

The technical and political staff of the PIM have always considered these roles of assistance to municipalities, promotion of new ideas and projects, and of establishing a new culture of planning among administrators, merely as *by-products* of the main activity of designing the plan to be formally approved. But PIM was also the place where, through top political and technical management, political parties negotiated informally and behind the scenes the opportunities for development that were put forward at the metropolitan level.

2.2 The Search for a Homogeneous Development in City-regions: The Rise of the "Compensori"

Briefly saying, the experience of a voluntary institution for planning and gov-

erning the city-region, namely the PIM, has all too quickly been liquidated. Yet at the same time and within the same institution, many informal co-ordination activities that produced interesting effects of governance were developed. The two tendencies are contradictory and even conflicting. The structure of PIM allowed for the creation of a *new intermediate institution* named *Compensorio*, which could assume, among others, the powers of planning.

During 1975, important changes were observed:

- the left-wing parties acquired more and more weight and won the administrative elections of June not only in the majority of the municipalities of PIM but also in the Municipality of Milan;
- a regional law was prepared and approved by the Region of Lombardy that started the *Compensori*; PIM was identified as *Compensorio* number 21 and its technical structure became the Planning Bureau of the new institution; and
- given the perspective of the new institution, the process of elaboration of the new Plan accelerated; the new proposal was voted on by the Assembly of Mayors in April of that year.

However, the informal activity of integrating the decision-making process, operated particularly by political parties, continued and strengthened. Also, the new equilibrium between political parties of the left and centre imposed the need for negotiation. Until the beginning of the 1980s, PIM was at the center of these rather schizophrenic processes of attempting to give form and content to the new intermediate institution and the process of informally offering an arena for negotiation among the political parties and between the public and private sectors.

2.3 Early 1980s: Failure of the "Compensori" Experience

The new decade marked a deep change in both of these roles. In keeping with the deregulation ideology of the time, in 1981, *Compensori* were abolished and PIM lost its institutional position, being obliged to revive the voluntary organisation to survive. In the po-

litical and technical debate, the stakes were no longer planning the city-region. The concern for Milan and its metropolitan area came to keep pace with European competition. This required policies for the development of infrastructure, urban projects capable of sustaining investment in the inner city, and moving away from the logic of decentralisation and central planning of which PIM had been one of the main supporters. Another important change at this time can be represented by the multiplication of institutions that were active in the process of governing the city-region: legislation of the 1970s created new institutions in many different fields. Governing city-regions has now become a process of fusing many different actors and institutions, something which at this time was impossible to centralise in a pluralistic society such as that in Milan.

The experience of PIM has been imitated by many other metropolitan areas and in some cases limited results can be seen. Throughout the country, the 1980s saw the end of many ideas relating to the problems of governing city-regions: the first idea was that of *equilibrium*, a concept which had informed all attempts to shape and plan metropolitan development. From around 1973, core cities began to lose population and activities and the myth of decentralisation lost its basis. The second idea was that of *new metropolitan government* being the only way to design and implement policies for city-regions; because in many situations it became evident that the traditional single-minded planning institution is not necessarily the solution to the problems of co-ordination and cooperation among institutional actors.

2.4 The 1990s: The Attempts of Reinforcing the Provincial Government and of Establishing Provincial Planning

The national Law 142 of 1990 not only proposed to establish a new level of government in the Italian metropolitan areas *città metropolitana*, but also re-established planning competences for the Provinces, i.e. the ancient intermediate institutions which were considered inadequate for planning purposes during the previous period. Briefly stated,

this law gave new powers to the provinces.

This was also coupled with the creation of new provinces like the Provincia di Lodi, which was detached by the Provincia di Milano and led to the coincidence of the Provincia di Milano with the core of the metropolitan area.

While the establishment of metropolitan governments has not been realised, at least two complete attempts of concluding a process for the formation of a provincial plan have been accomplished by two provincial governments in the 1995 to 1999 period and afterwards in 1999 to 2003.

The first attempt conducted by the center-left government was along the mainstream of inter-communal planning. The planning office and its consultants engaged themselves in a heavy analytical process in order to issue a Provincial Plan that had to decide upon all the structural aspects of provincial development.

This led to strong conflicts not only with the municipality of Milan, but also with most of the more active municipalities of the area that did not want to be cut out by the decision-making process regarding development opportunities and infrastructural policy.

The second attempt is still under way and started in 1999 upon the failure of the previous one. It has been based upon the recognition of spontaneous forms of cooperation among municipalities with which to develop a common framework addressed to the preparation of a strategic plan. Many tables of work have been established throughout the province, but given the very different maturity of the bottom-up forms of cooperation, this has created a very complicated machinery of consultation that is now exposed to the risk of a general stalemate in the overall decision process.

2.4.1 The Attempts to Establish "Città Metropolitana"

The so-called *città metropolitana*, introduced by the Law no. 142/1990, was an umbrella law with 65 articles attempting to establish a new organisational model for local authorities. The Italian legislators aimed at creating a

two-tier form of government: in the first tier the *città metropolitana* formed the authority for the whole metropolitan area; the municipalities constituted the second tier. Milan was among the ten metropolitan areas under the law.

For the ten metropolitan areas identified by the legislators, each region had to define its boundaries. The law only gave guidance: a metropolitan area being the main city plus all the other cities that have close interrelations with it in terms of economic activities, social services and basic facilities, cultural relationships and territorial homogeneity. Despite this ambiguity, the law implicitly indicated a preference for a correspondence between the metropolitan area and the boundaries of the existing provinces. The existence of such a preference can be inferred because the law declared that *provinces in metropolitan areas changed status, becoming città metropolitana*. In the few cases where metropolitan areas did not correspond to province boundaries, new provinces were to be created.

So from the institutional point of view, the *città metropolitana* became the new name for the province in the metropolitan areas. As far as its functions were concerned, it would take some competencies from both the provinces and the municipalities. The law defined its functions as follows:

- metropolitan planning;
- public transport and infrastructures;
- protection of cultural and environmental heritage;
- waste management, hydro-geological and soil protection;
- energy and water use management;
- economic development facilities;
- commercial planning;
- all metropolitan services in the health, education and training sectors.

Following the introduction of this law, an interesting potential source of new conflicts related to the relationships between *città metropolitana* and the municipalities arose. According to the law, not all municipal territories had to form part of the *città metropolitana*. "Close integration" was the main criterion to identify a metropolitan area. So, the law implicitly recognised that not all the

municipal territories had such strong relationships. It was envisaged that new municipalities could be formed in a number of ways: part of an old municipality could be absorbed by the *città metropolitana*; other parts, perhaps those less integrated with the metropolitan core, could form new municipalities, or merge with others.

The law also fixed a well defined calendar for the constitution of the *città metropolitana*: within one year after the approval of the law, the regions, having consulted the appropriate provinces and municipalities, should have defined the *città metropolitana* boundaries. If this was not realized, the national government could itself define the boundaries after 6 months. After consulting the involved municipalities, within the next 18 months regional governments should have reorganised the territory of the municipalities that would form part of the *città metropolitana*. Within two years, the national government should declare the formal constitution of the new institutions. Revenues for the *città metropolitana* would come from local taxes and national government contributions for the services offered.

The new law generated conflicts in several directions:

- Regional governments feared that the *città metropolitana* could build direct relationships with the national government, which were stronger than those links formed by single municipalities, by-passing their role in many functions. Moreover, some lawyers considered the possibility of substituting regional governments with national government in defining boundaries of the *città metropolitana* to be very questionable; because this would impose a *top-down solution* against the will of the subject responsible for most territorial governance – for the Italian constitution;
- provinces were worried that their power would be reduced in the cases where the boundaries of the *città metropolitana* did not correspond to the boundaries of the provinces. They were worried that the new authority could become too powerful a rival;
- small municipalities had similar worries: existing fears of core city interven-

tion increased with respect to the *città metropolitana*, and thus could take away some of their powers.

As mentioned, no *città metropolitana* has been constituted. However, despite this “legislative disaster,” city region governance is still on the agenda of local and national debate. Meanwhile, new powers have been given to the local level (starting with the direct election of mayors), and a move towards a more federalist organisation of the State seems inescapable.

2.4.2 New Reform Law

A new reform law for the relaunching of the metropolitan government has been approved in 1999 (n. 256). In broad terms, the law provides the assemblage of provinces and municipalities in a *conferenza metropolitana* (Metropolitan Conference), so as to decide the boundaries of their *città metropolitana* jointly. The main difference from the previous law is that decision is left to the local level rather than the national or regional levels. This means that the ten metropolitan areas defined in the Law no. 142/1990 as *città metropolitane* together with their surrounding municipalities are no longer designated as such. Alternatively, metropolitan conferences can be instituted. Provinces and municipalities within the boundary of a conference are not obliged to take part in it, and participation is open to other neighbouring municipalities or provinces. Thus, *the voluntary nature of participation* in the metropolitan conferences is another important point.

The procedure to be followed in these conferences is as follows: the president of the province and mayor of the main municipality must call the first meeting of conference. In this meeting, a president is elected using majority rule as the basis for decision making. Within 180 days, the conference decides the boundaries of the metropolitan area according to the same criterion set out in the Law no. 142: *the main centres plus all the surrounding areas that have close economic, social, cultural and territorial relationships*. If this deadline is exceeded without taking any decision, in the next 60 days the regional govern-

ment traces the boundaries of the metropolitan area, taking into account the views of the involved municipalities and provinces. If this deadline passes without action, the metropolitan area will be traced using provincial boundaries. Once the metropolitan area is instituted, the following functions will be developed at this level:

- metropolitan planning;
- public transport and infrastructure;
- co-ordination of transport planning at municipal level;
- survey of air pollution;
- programming and management of hydro-geological protection;
- water management;
- waste management;
- planning of large commercial structures;
- co-ordinating and programming of cultural activities; and
- time planning (planning of public and commercial services timetables).

All these functions should be developed in a consensual way together with the new agencies participating in the municipalities, utilizing the mechanisms of consensus building among public bodies (i.e. *accordi di programma, conferenze di servizi*). The conference will decide how each function will be performed, although these may later be institutionalised through regional law, also providing compulsory forms of consortium among municipalities. Beyond these functions, regional governments can give metropolitan areas other functions, including: regional protection and exploitation of cultural and environmental heritage, health, planning, education and training. The conference can transform itself into a *città metropolitana* with a majority vote of two-thirds of its members. If the conference does not transform spontaneously after the initial 18 months, the regional government has the power to institute a *città metropolitana* for this to be the case; however, there needs to be an almost the two-thirds majority vote by the municipalities in favour.

As a result, comparing the two situations – namely the one proposed by the Law no. 142/1990 and the other regarding the establishment of metropoli-

tan conferences – the latter seems to propose more autonomy to the localities in the constitution of the *città metropolitana*. Moreover, this procedure has a voluntary nature, rather than being an obligation. Yet, as stated before, this type of metropolitan governance has not been realized.

3 Governing the Core City

Until now we have looked at what happened at the level of the region with the difficult and uncertain attempt to establish new means of governing and planning this extremely dynamic area. It is equally appropriate to examine what was going on within the core city Milan at the same time (Balducci 2001).

3.1 The Physical Development Strategies of the Master Plan of 1976

The statutory plan that even today rules the city transformations is the Master Plan of Milan, prepared in 1976 (Piano Regolatore Generale). The goals of the Plan (PRG) were the protection of the residential character of the city centre and especially of the middle and low income groups still living there; the protection and also the development of the industrial character of the city against the pressures of the property market, and, in parallel, the strict containment of service industry development and of any new expansion of the urbanised area in favour of a policy of decentralisation. It attained the final approval by the Region of Lombardy until 1980, exactly the same year in which profound changes seemed to occur in local government attitudes.

From then on, its goals were seen to be ideological; it was accused of preventing the strategic action needed to remain in the mainstream of international metropolitan competition, and was attacked for its inability to adapt to the rapid changes typical of a post-industrial city.

All these arguments were also supported by a new vision of the role of planning in the city: no longer the creation of a public, equitable city protected against private speculative interests, but on the contrary the encourage-

ment of all opportunities for co-operation and partnership with private developers and the business world in general.

3.2 1980s Onwards: Planning by Individual Projects

The new recommended approach was defined by local politicians themselves as a policy of "planning by projects," presented by the local government as the right solution for steering urban change. What was considered important from then on was the creation of large-scale intervention capable of boosting infrastructure levels in the city centre.

The projects undertaken at the beginning of the eighties were on a vast scale: Garibaldi-Repubblica (a new business district), Portello-Fiera (a new trade fair centre), Cadorna and Vittoria (the redevelopment of disused city centre railway land), Bovisa and Rogoredo (old peripheral urban neighbourhoods where extensive vacant industrial sites provided an opportunity for relocating important urban functions like universities, congress centres, etc.), and the implementation of the Pirelli-Bicocca private-enterprise zone (to become the city's new technological centre).

Meanwhile, the attempts of 1980s had certain implication on metropolitan governance: The encouragement of all opportunities for co-operation and partnership with private developers and the business world in general, was supposed to be the only way to beat *public sector inefficiency* and to *compete against other cities internationally*.

Therefore, the support of legitimate private interests was considered one of the main objectives of planning activity in Milan. It was certainly not a strange change of attitude by local political leaders, but was part of the wider deregulatory wave of the 1980s, that brought about the phase of "planning by projects," presented by the local government as the right solution for steering urban change. The task of providing a framework for urban policies was entrusted to non-statutory tools of a sectoral nature, such as the *Documento Direttore* (type of strategic guideline) for

the *Passante* project (urban railway junction) approved in 1982 and the *Documento Direttore* for the redevelopment of abandoned industrial areas, approved in 1985.

Both these instruments proved to be highly fragile and the local authorities had trouble managing such unorthodox planning operations. The public administration in general appeared unable to gear informal planning tools to meet the task and a piecemeal approach re-emerged as the only alternative to traditional planning.

The "coherence" of the city's urban policies relied on various types of communication, such as newspaper interviews with those responsible, and programmatic statements from the city hall, in which the image of "Milan as a European city" or of the "public-private partnership" was projected as a solution to the problem of administrative inefficiency.

The implication of this process on the government is a move from a strategy of decentralisation that involved a multiplicity of institutional actors at the city regional level, to a strategy of re-concentration of policies within the boundaries of the Municipality of Milan.

The implementations of the period did not imply major effectiveness per se; the problems were:

- the instability of the political consensus of the administration;
- the weakness of the technical bureaucracies;
- the presence of many interested subjects expressing conflicting objectives around each of the major territorial issues; and
- the complexity of joint action and an incapacity to handle the conflicts.

Vis-à-vis these problems, each of the projects was handled separately with little disclosure of information. Due to the structural weakness of the local government civil engineering and technical departments, and the frequent crises, this type of management tended to result in repeated interruptions over the final details of projects, owing to the absence of any stable central actor or arena for negotiation; it also favoured the development of neighbourhood opposition

groups, which tended to display a marked NIMBY syndrome. The hidden conflicts therefore re-emerged systematically, became rooted, and paralysed the efficiency of the weak government coalitions. It should be noted that, until the 1993 elections – the first one after the electoral reform with the direct election of the mayor – the governing coalitions counted on a weak majority of just 41 out of 80 seats in the City Council of Milan.

After more than 20 years, some of these projects have been and are being implemented, even though the results are very different from the original proposals. The first to be implemented was the project promoted by the company Pirelli at Bicocca, although the ambitious idea of developing a new technological centre for the city and region was abandoned. Given the difficulties in bringing the interested parties together, Pirelli concentrated more on traditional office and residential development and in the end the success of the initiative was guaranteed by substantial public sector funding for decentralisation of the Milan State University.

The expansion of the Fiera di Milano (trade fair) at Portello, an area next to the existing premises, is only the partial implementation of an ambitious project to restructure and decentralise this important activity by moving it outside the city; Rho-Però, a project that has been continuously postponed, has been re-launched in the last few months by the Regione Lombardia following the pressures of the business community.

The decentralisation of a relevant part of the Politecnico to Bovisà, a district on the northern outskirts of the city, has been partially realised and is still under completion. It should have started a much more complex project of renewal in the area, given the high level of infrastructure investment in the underground railway link line project.

3.3 The Context of the 1990s and Early 2000s

What can be observed with all these projects over the last few years is that those which have been completed had a

single strong actor capable of pushing them through with minimum interference and little need for co-operation with other actors. They are projects which were easily reduced to simple goals and in fact turned out to be quite traditional development projects, rather than the great strategic urban projects they were originally intended to be.

Thus the transition from the Master Plan to projects did not seem to bring about any change of attitude or paradigm in public administration; there was merely a shift in scale – from the general Plan to projects or sectoral policies.

3.3.1 Direct Election of Mayors: The Period of Lega Nord in Milan

The 1990s have witnessed significant changes in Italy's political set-up and leadership at both national and local levels. At both local and national level, the electoral rules were changed with the introduction of direct elections for mayors and a majority system in the national parliament. This dramatic change of climate has seen the emergence of boisterous new right-wing political parties such as the Lega Nord (Northern League, an independent Lombardy-based movement), and the more recent Forza Italia, a party founded by the media mogul and former developer Silvio Berlusconi, who had been elected head of the national government for a short period in 1994.

The Lega Nord gained a landslide victory in the Milan local administration elections of 1993, and its candidate was elected Mayor. The four years of his administration were generally speaking a grey and strange period, in which the new leadership tried to do exactly the opposite of what had been done in the past, replacing public officials who had had links to traditional political parties and interest groups. The result was a general difficulty in producing public policies.

As far as planning was concerned, the idea of the Lega Nord administration was to concentrate public and private investment in a series of abandoned industrial areas in the city which could become either large new urban

parks and development sites. The 1993 to 1997 period saw therefore both the implementation of some of the projects from the previous phase, but without the speed and innovation expected of the piecemeal strategy employed and also a new attempt to design a general strategy without using the tools of a general statutory plan.

3.3.2 A New Planning Instrument for the Milan Municipality: the Framework Document for Municipal Urban Policies

In 1997 local government changed again: a right-wing coalition won the administrative elections with a new Mayor from the Forza Italia party. After an initial settling-in period, the new local administration commenced a series of activities in the field of informal, non-statutory planning.

In the first year, the Mayor launched the States General of Milan, with a programme for very wide-ranging consultation of *all the relevant interest groups and associations in the city.* The idea was to gather information and proposals from civil society in order to trace a strategy for the future of Milan. What kind of conclusions the City Hall drew was not clear, although it did have the positive effect of showing the administration's intention to consult and involve civil society in the definition of urban policies.

In 1999 a second important decision was made. The Region of Lombardy enacted a law (*Law no 9/1999*) to introduce some degree of flexibility into the planning system.

Despite his opposite political leanings, the right-wing government appointed professor Luigi Mazza to draw up a new strategic document to lay down guidelines for planning policies in the years ahead, depending on this recent Regional Law. In recent years, Luigi Mazza had been propounding the idea of re-organising planning tools in order to overcome the problem of effectiveness connected with the legal rigidity of Italian versions of a General Plan. His proposal was to re-define the General Regulatory Plan as an instrument mainly for regulating the conservation of the ex-

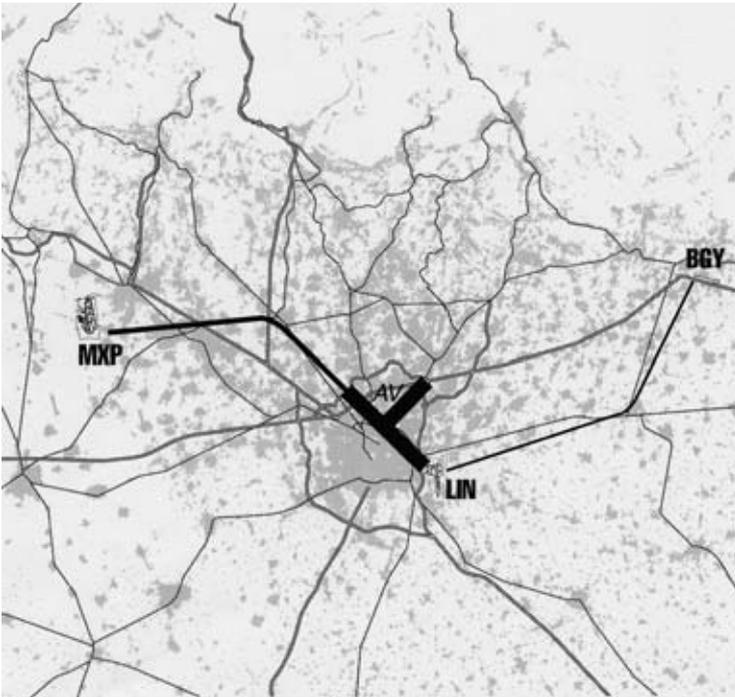


Fig. 2: Framework Document, approved and published by the City Council of Milan in June 2000.

isting city as it is, and to introduce a new more flexible document for the design of strategies in areas where transformation is required. The nature of this document must be informal, political and easy to change. The intention is to provide a framework for taking strategic decisions that could go beyond the incremental character of ordinary city transformation.

The Document (see Fig. 2) was approved and published by the City Council of Milan in June 2000. The Framework Document (*Documento di Inquadramento*) was intended to structure a series of new "integrated" urban projects (*Programmi Integrati di Intervento*) that go beyond the General Regulatory Plan. The proposal made by Luigi Mazza is to re-organise planning activity along the lines of his view, to make a sharp distinction between a rigid tool to govern the conservation process, and a very open new tool of a strategic character for governing change in the city.

The document has been the product of a limited interaction between the consultant, the head of the planning office and his technical staff. Before the official presentation to the local government, there has been a very short phase of consultation with some professional and economic associations. Even the discussion in the City Council has been quite superficial.

In the local debate the Document has been criticised out of fear that its great flexibility might conceal a strong dereg-

ulatory approach. It has also been accused of providing a very simplified image of an urban strategy, too narrowly concentrated on infrastructures, business and the property market. It must in any case be pointed out that it represents another attempt to fight the ineffectiveness of general planning.

The Document describes certain strategies for the development of Milan, but it is regarded to be only a first step towards the formulation of a strategic (master) plan. To be a strategic plan, it is said to require the formation of urban coalitions behind these strategies, to make them more selective and clear. However, it can be treated as the point of departure for the possible constitution of a coalition to support the drafted strategy.

The experience of 1980s and 1990s has demonstrated that one of the major weaknesses of piecemeal project-by-project planning is found precisely in the absence of a framework that could in the long run legitimise different initiatives and public commitment to them. The point is that it is extremely difficult if not impossible to transform this kind of framework into a law as the General Regulatory Plan pretends to do.

The strategy must therefore be informal; it is a way of shaping the attention of the various actors trying to build coalitions around priorities and to construct consensus in local society around selected common goals. From this point of view the *Documento di Inquadra-*

mento seems to be the fruit of a long period of experimentation.

The informal planning document does not seem to lack statutory powers, but rather the capacity of the business and political community to form a coalition around a development perspective.

Milan has always been a plural and fragmented city, the *Documento di Inquadramento*, and the use that is made of it, is just a mirror of this plurality: fragmented powers that are at the same time lively but unable to engage in more ambitious projects.

The last years have witnessed not only a relaunch of the city in economic terms (+2,4% of active enterprises between 1999 and 2000, a strong increase in enterprise births, a strong decrease in the unemployment rate) but also the start of great redevelopment projects (*Programmi di Riqualificazione Urbana*) that have invested in the major abandoned industrial areas of Milan (Maserati, OM, Fina). These projects, which were perhaps the last great opportunity to change relevant parts of the city, have been interpreted in a very traditional way: residence and office-space around a new commercial centre. This is linked to a new attractiveness of the city for residence, perhaps not independent from the incredibly high cost of commuting.

On the one hand, Milan has lost another opportunity to re-shape itself, but on the other hand, the property market is performing very well and this distributes benefices to many actors.

3.4 Governing in an Environment of Change

It can be inferred that the traditional institutions of city region governance are all in a situation of marked weakness if we assume the objective of designing a strategy and of guiding the process of change, or the objective of promoting strategic projects in the area. Traditional political parties that had been crucial actors during the phase of metropolitan development have been swept away by the deep changes that are crossing Italian society. All the parties which presently hold governmental responsibilities did not exist 20 years ago, or at least were under a different

name and composition. But the changes that have affected political parties are even deeper rooted: they have lost their organic linkages with sectors of society and have been transformed into predominantly opinion parties. Even those that have a strong popular tradition such as the Democratic Party of the Left, the direct descendent of the powerful former Italian Communist Party. These changes have produced a great fragmentation of political actors that mirrors the fragmentation in society. There has been an explosion of political subjects. All the traditional forms of societal organisation are being challenged: the trade unions, the associations of enterprise owners, and so forth.

There is evidence that, up until now at least, this process of fragmentation and decline of traditional actors and policies is not part of a general decline of the social and economic system. Despite this period of very poor public policies, wide spread corruption and an absence of planning, the city-region of Milan has become one of the world capitals of the fashion and media industries and has absorbed almost complete restructuring of its economy, leaving behind some 15 million square meters of abandoned industrial space. This has been achieved by a society that is very entrepreneurial, by a tertiary sector that has begun to supersede many areas of public policies, and by a civil society that is very pragmatic and self-reliant. From this observation, it is possible to conclude that the strong vitality within and around the city is able to use the fragmentation and the multiplication of subjects and institutions as resources for incremental but significant change.

4 Bottom-up Inter-communal Planning and New Forms of Cooperation

4.1 The Changing Planning Environment: Fragmentation, Instability and the Pulverisation of Demand

Briefly speaking, especially from the 1990s onwards, Milan has fully completed the process of change leading to organization of urban systems around a

core city and to large urban formations covering very wide areas, where the traditional configuration of neighbourhoods, towns and cities is undergoing a deep redefinition, as explained above.

At the core of these issues takes place the term *fragmentation*: It has been used for a long time to refer to the break in the connections between the parts and the whole in contemporary cities and society. On the one hand, it is a category referring to an inability of theory to deal with new complexity, while on the other it appears to be the only effective image capable of describing phenomena which invest social, political and government institutional spheres as well as the spatial configuration of cities. It is no longer possible to understand the development of the urban space through traditional centre-periphery models, nor the patterns of old centres can be maintained.

This process has been accompanied by intense residential mobility that has resulted in concentrations of the elderly population in specific areas, polarisation according to socio-economic class and the emergence of pockets of marginalisation often linked to the acceleration of immigration from poorer countries; and this has all occurred in a wide variety of spatial patterns. Metropolitan areas like Milan have been heavily affected by this kind of phenomenon that tends to change urban social organisation from within.

As mentioned, the category of fragmentation can also be employed to interpret actual physical transformations in the morphology of the city today. Observation of Milan and central Lombardy shows that the area has become largely uniform in character, as far as residential and economic use is concerned. Increased use of private transport and a capillary network of road infrastructures has moved the front line of urban growth further and further out from the heart of the metropolis to reach areas such as the Alpine foothill belt in the North and agricultural areas to the South on the Po Valley plain, which were once completely on the margins of urban life. There is, however, also great demand for housing in central areas

due to the spread of offices into residential stock, the fall in family size and increased immigration of poor populations. The outcome of these migratory processes is the shaping of one large urban formation covering a very wide area in which the traditional configuration of neighbourhood, town and city centres is undergoing redefinition, with new centres linked to the infrastructure system, to new shopping centres and large leisure centres.

The fragmented nature of new urban space therefore poses problems of interpretation even within the boundaries of the actual city itself, because the generative principles and rationalities that determine spatial behaviour patterns bear no relationship to the old political boundaries. In this context, identifying the City of Milan within this urban formation is becoming more and more difficult.

The concept of fragmentation must also be seen in the context of another characteristic of recent social, economic and political processes, that of *instability*. The culture of planning was born in periods characterised not only by clearly identifiable unitary traits, but also by strong stability. Traditional methods of planning and programming run up against the combined effects of the fast acceleration of change and the increased variety of issues and problems to be dealt with. There thus seems to exist the need to rethink forms of public intervention that were basically designed to function in a stable and slowly changing society. A quick look at the past tells us that new information technologies are in the process of changing the entire world economy in the course of just a few years, while the so-called post-industrial era lasted 25 years and the industrial age before that about a century. The pace of change is increasing exponentially.

4.2 New Forms of Co-operation vis-à-vis the Demands Emerging from the Fragmented City

A look at recent years quickly shows us that the list of problems that local governments are required to deal with has become longer and longer. Coming to

the current era, one of the new demands from local governments is related to the complex issue of *support for local economic development*, a problem which until very recently was dealt with as a national and regional sectoral policy or, at the local level, by the simple allocation of land for use. De-industrialisation processes and the fragmentation of the economy have given local governments a series of difficult tasks in the area of economic leadership:

- guaranteeing territorial competitiveness by means of urban marketing policies and attracting infrastructure investment;
- co-ordinating economic development processes through a series of policies designed to keep the economy flexible and varied;
- organising training programmes to provide a rapidly changing labour market with new skills.

Another new demand is related to the *field of land use transformations* for leadership of complex redevelopment initiatives in areas of the city that have lost their function: industrial plants, schools, hospitals, railways, military barracks, and so on. The demand here is twofold, to build and maintain consensus around development schemes and to ensure public sector action essential for the feasibility of schemes.

The implementation of major urban private projects undoubtedly depends on huge public sector investment (universities, congress centres, museums, theatres, light railways, etc.) that must be guaranteed both financially and politically, conditions that are extremely difficult to meet and forecast.

Other new demands are for *improving the quality of the environment* after the functional era of the past where only numbers in housing, transport and employment mattered. There are demands for the care of public spaces and for the quality of the environment in town centres as well as in the outskirts of towns. These are made not only by residents, but also by businessmen who are starting to consider the quality of the environment as an important factor in the location of new businesses in addition to the traditional question of mere access.

There are demands for *leisure and culture*, due amongst other things to the crisis of traditional methods of socialisation. Related to this are demands for changes in urban timetables and for a wider range of choice for citizens.

A new category of demands of growing importance concern the problems of *social exclusion and poverty* that have worsened due to the weakening of primary assistance networks. Problems include access to housing and services for workers who become permanently unemployed in middle age, for single-parent families in economic difficulty, for the elderly and for the huge numbers of immigrants.

Also new, and strongly emphasised in the media in recent years, is the demand for *law and order policies*. The question is at times raised without justification by some political parties, but the demand is rooted in processes of isolation of individuals and families that erode sociability and a sense of security. All these are demands for new policies in which the spatial dimension is either completely absent or is linked to decisions of a management character.

One last area of new demands made on local government is that of the need to *compete for European Union or national Government funds*. Transfer of these funds is becoming less automatic and more competitive with funding going to integrated projects which are also able to attract private sector funds. It is a demand that selects local administrations on their ability to grasp opportunities rapidly as they arise and to abandon traditional and bureaucratic attitudes in favour of business practices and skills in complex project management.

Meanwhile, local governments are also supposed to carry out their usual tasks. Thus, they find themselves in a contradictory position. On the one hand they are called upon to widen their range of action to cover much broader fields; and on the other they are equipped with total resources (ability to plan, available attention, technical resources, financial resources) that are either stationary or decreasing.

All these have brought about the ne-

cessity to search for alternative ways of local government. Hierarchical models of the past seem to be insufficient to meet the mentioned demands. The so-called theme of "territorial co-operation" has come into being so as to improve the capacity of a local community in the involvement of the local development process. Such experiences of co-operation have put the attention on the forms of partnership between different public and private actors.

The *bottom-up inter-communal planning* must be considered among the new forms of co-operation in which a multitude of actors are oriented to build an urban policy discourse within a participatory framework. In other words, the inter-communal planning is a process where multi-level governance is to be experimented, vis-à-vis the new demands from planning.

It is not possible to cite all the examples of cooperation that are developing in these different areas from economic development (Euroimpresa, CRAA, Sviluppo Brianza, CAAM, Agenzia Sviluppo Nord Milano) to the management of different type of services (training of the work force, managing common cultural policies, participating in European Union tenders). Usually starting from a sectoral interest, many of these new forms of cooperation evolve toward more general aim.

To better explain this form, the case of the North Milan Development Agency is to be handled as follows.

4.3 The Example of North Milan Development Agency

The North Milan Development Agency has been founded very recently to help the *redevelopment process of the industrial abandoned areas* of four municipalities lying at the border North of Milan; namely Sesto San Giovanni (formerly called the "Italian Stalingrad" for the strong tradition of working class associations), Cinisello Balsamo, Cologno Monzese and Bresso.

The four municipalities gave birth in 1995 to ASNM, the Development Agency with the specific mission of developing projects for the regeneration of

industrial abandoned areas. This started to work with the idea of attracting to Sesto San Giovanni new firms mainly in the sector of high technology and multimedia, which already happened spontaneously, since the enterprises of the new economy found cheap and available land with great accessibility. ASNM tried to drive this process identifying pilot projects (incubators for new firms, research centers, service centers), raising funds from the European Union for the retraining of the labour force, developing ideas to link the re-development in Sesto San Giovanni to the television sector of Cologno and to the opportunities of developing specific projects in Cinisello and Bresso, helping the public administration and the private owners of industrial land in the preparation of projects of new green parks, which should become important means to improve the image of the area.

In a matter of only a few years, a new demand for *strategic planning* emerged. It is not enough to be successful in raising funds from European Union or National Government, nor in developing projects, nor in creating new partnerships for the development of enterprise zones: the main problem goes far beyond this; it is the *problem of re-defining a development model*, of designing a new identity that without losing linkages with the great industrial tradition of the past could be capable of reinterpreting it in the light of new trends and opportunities. The main issue, for ASNM as for the main local actors, is to try to govern the intense but fragmented process of new growth.

In this perspective the great part of the problems to be addressed have not municipal boundaries – local economic development, the restoration of the environment, the co-ordination of projects regarding infrastructures – but can be treated in an effective way at least at the level of the North Milan area. There is a need for co-ordination that cannot be treated through the institutional system, nor, as it was in the past, through the political parties and their hierarchies, not only because they are in a deep crisis, but also because they still follow the centre-periphery model that the new di-



Fig. 3: Strategic Plan Milano Nord.

rectly elected mayors, with their great visibility and power, are not willing to accept any more.

The four municipalities together are a city with a population of 230 000 inhabitants, 15 000 enterprises (95% with less than 10 workers), 3 millions of square meters of available land to be re-developed, a great potential equipment of parks and green areas, a great University (Università di Milano Bicocca) in the bordering areas of the Municipality of Milan, and an excellent system of local services due to the "red" tradition of the local authorities and of the working class organisations.

The strategic planning process has been a completely informal process in which the four Mayors, the technical staffs of the municipalities and all the relevant local actors have worked together in two steps: the production of a "Strategic Agenda" with the main issues to be addressed in the first phase (February to November 1999) and the preparation of the "Strategic Plan" (see Fig. 3) in the second phase (February 2000 to March 2001). This last phase has been characterised by the activity of five project groups gathering all the relevant actors:

- Environment, landscape and Agenda 21;
- Infrastructures;
- Strategic areas;
- Employment and training;
- The new mission of North Milan in economic development.

5 Conclusive Remarks

The above discussion has been shaped around *the evolution of the city-region Milan and the metropolitan governance experience in the Milanese area*. Depending on the case of Milan, some general inferences can be made, which seem to be relevant also to other city-regions:

First and foremost, the *key issues*, directly or indirectly related to the city-regions, come into the picture as new subjects, rapid change, crisis of the traditional political parties, crises of traditional territorial identities, multilevel governance problems, new interpretations of the inter-communal government, new configurations of the city, and new demands for sustaining economic development, maintaining the environment, and the management of complex projects.

Most of the new demands on policies that emerge as an outcome of the fragmentation and evolution of the city-region do not have municipal boundaries.

It is more and more important to interpret the city region not just as a core city with an urban sprawl but as a series of different "urban formations," starting from which it is possible to design relevant territorial strategies.

In such a situation a *new demand for planning* emerges, very different from the traditional vision of a planning activity that is able to give a spatial order in a complex situation; rather it is a demand of helping a process of sense-

making, common understanding of complexity that could help in selecting opportunities, facilitating the formation of new coalitions, and sustaining innovative actions.

The *participatory character* of this type of planning is strictly linked to the tasks that it must accomplish.

Many of the problems that have prevented metropolitan governments from being effective or even coming into existence are positively solved when there is a bottom-up aggregation of municipalities and actors.

The new demand for general spatial planning is therefore basically tied much more to the problem of constructing and legitimating choices than of certifying rights; of making action possible rather than of imposing choices based on rational technical principles. It is rather a demand for reference frameworks to facilitate co-operation and agreement in unstable and highly fragmented situations. It must therefore be dealt with in strict relation to a strategy of consensus building.

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