Cities between Integration and Disintegration; Opportunities and Challenges

Interpreting the breakdown of the urban model: three Italian case studies
by Patrizia Gabellini

Opening: the point of view
Given the vastness of the questions arising from the subject chosen for this issue of the review - Cities between Integration and Disintegration; Opportunities and Challenges – it is necessary to decide an approach and declare a point of view.

My intention is to refer to the breakdown in the models that have characterised the urban scenario, to the processes of disintegration which, affecting the thousand-year urban space, have generated a new contemporary city and the multiplication of the physical forms and lifestyles that accompany it, making it increasingly difficult to recognise the boundaries between city and countryside - dynamics that do not substantially differentiate metropolitan areas from cities, cities from towns and towns from urban areas. But with regard to this general condition my intention is to underline the "granular" nature – i.e. the persistence or the re-creation of episodes in urban development, of variable consistency, that have their own physical and social prerogatives and require, in addition to an ability to observe and interpret, also an ability to construct intervention instruments and ad hoc technical products.

I will examine an urban region (Milan), a medium-sized city in Northern Italy (Bologna) and a small city in Central Italy (Jesi). Through these three different Italian case studies[1] I will focus attention on several theoretical and technical work opportunities which open up for the urbanist and the planner. Milan, with an anomalous Provincial Strategic Plan (the Province being an administrative division between the city and regional authority which, since 1990, had the task of governing the territory with the formation of a territorial coordination plan) and Bologna, with a local structure plan, have looked at the question of the plural city. Jesi, through a joint urban and strategic operation, has looked at the processes of territorial integration and environmental sustainability.

In each European country the problem of disintegration has had its own connotations and has been interpreted and dealt with in specific, though not substantially dissimilar, ways. This is also due to the role carried out by the European Union in constructing spatial scenarios and promoting and funding intervention programmes at urban and regional level.

In Italy, the phenomena that are relevant here have been recognised by experts, administrators and politicians - by experts through examining the forms of disintegration (in the territory, economy, society, political system) and by administrators through placing attention on problems of coexistence and governing conflicts. Although the signs of change were identified at an early stage, the construction and application of new urban planning instruments and urban policies which are adequate to deal with the questions generated by the various territorial conditions have proceeded slowly, with discontinuity and without a national framework. After an initial phase, more or less during the 1980s, in which the legislative apparatus in force was dismantled and new forms of intervention were tried out in the cities (a period marked throughout Europe by the success of the urban project), there was then a phase of constructing new regulations for territorial government. This still does not cover all Italian regions and has created considerable differences, so that in

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[1] These are three cases on which researchers from the Department of Architecture and Planning at the Polytechnic of Milan are working as a result of the agreement drawn up with the local administrations – Milan Provincial Authority, Bologna City Council and Jesi City Council. The coordinators are Professors Alessandro Balducci (Milan), Patrizia Gabellini (Bologna), Patrizia Gabellini and Alessandro Balducci (Jesi).

Lombardy, Emilia Romagna and the Marche – the three regions under consideration – the work of the urbanist and planner is carried out within different legal and procedural frameworks.

"City of cities": urban living
"City of cities" is a phrase that is found in both the Strategic Plan for the Province of Milan as well as in the Bologna City structural plan. It is a short, descriptive way of expressing the joint presence of very different living conditions that involve different populations, bringing together urban forms that function in different ways, of greater or lesser complexity, introverted and extroverted, forming part of networks of varying dimensions. Each urban form requires its own strategies.

The eclectic archipelago that has become the territory of contemporary Europe can be observed in various coexistent aspects: in the degree of building concentration and rarefaction, thus the presence of natural environments and extensive cultivated areas rather than complete artificiality; in the level of productive specialisation, thus the repetition of similar buildings rather than variety; in differing density of infrastructures, their quality and type, thus the different degree of segmentation of the territory and the presence or otherwise of barriers; in the varying origins, varying layouts and states of conservation of buildings, thus bringing together districts and enclaves, signs of social history and signs of innovation.

But differences consist not only of the territorial assets available and their composition. The level of services is just as important in indicating divisions. Physical and functional services (legibility, accessibility, operability , timing) and services that have nothing to do with the value of the use of the territory, but rather with identification and belonging (aspects that involve memory, perception and the significance given to places) reflect upon the people who live there, on the forms of organisation and on social relations.

After at least two decades dominated by the call for urban and territorial competition, which has centred attention on the functional nerve centres of the territory, the question of habitability reappears, and it has shifted attention onto the relationship between space and society and onto places and ways in which this relationship is achieved. The habitability of the territory in all its aspects is considered to be a condition for attracting innovative businesses, populations and well qualified human capital - in particular young people – in order to encourage creative skills and social cohesion.

If the question of competition has led to a reasoning about new hierarchies among the cities of the world, considering cities (whether capitals or otherwise) as unitary entities in an abstract global network, habitability looks at places and their unyielding internal dynamic, at social practices which functional reasons are unable to completely explain. This shift in view point leads to an interesting examination of the archipelago of building forms that already accommodate or can accommodate new co-existences between different populations, whether they be permanent or temporary, native or immigrant, populations who have varying demands and requirements, but also entirely new possible answers. In this respect, the disintegration of the city appears as a multiplication of urbanity and of the very opportunities of the urban condition, as generator of a new habitability.

In fact in Milan, as in Bologna, the question is one of living in a city of cities.

The ten cities + one of the Milan urban region
Strategic, voluntary and informal planning has enjoyed particularly good fortune in Italy for several years, in that it seems to satisfy the need for sensible frameworks for a myriad of initiatives that otherwise have no form to them, also because of the difficulties in which traditional general urban planning finds itself. Thus, the first metropolitan area strategic plans (Turin, Florence, Genoa, Venice) were joined by others for medium sized cities, spread throughout the country (La Spezia, Trento, Barletta, Pesaro, Verona, Bolzano, Jesi, Piacenza). And the list continues to grow.

"The lack of quality of life, mediocre environmental quality and the absence of a solid and cohesive social context, represent a notable point of weakness for the metropolitan area of Milan: by limiting its attractive and competitive force, there is a risk of compromising the prospects for future development". In this way, at page 13, the Strategic Document "*La città di città. Un progetto*

strategico per la regione urbana milanese" ("City of cities. A strategic project for the urban region of Milan") of 2006, justifies the operation in which the Province of Milan has committed itself. "This project seeks to produce a vision that is able to guide the policies of the Provincial and Local Authorities, but also to offer an occasion for creating a network for projects promoted by a variety of authorities and to put into operation a series of new actions" (idem, p.33).

The strategic plan involves an area of 1,980 sq.km, of which 37.7% is urban, with 3,775,000 inhabitants who have daily contact with other provinces: Lodi, Pavia, Varese, Lecco, Como and Bergamo in the Lombardy region, Novara in Piedmont and Piacenza in Emilia Romagna. It is a territorial area that is no longer adequately described by the concept of metropolitan area and it is for this reason that another expression has been coined: "regione urbana milanese" (urban region of Milan).

The concept of habitability (meaning: home living; moving and breathing; sharing spaces; creating and using culture; promoting a new local welfare; innovating and doing business) has been chosen in order to provide a framework for the proposals attracted by a specially formulated project competition. The use of the project competition is a distinctive aspect of the initiative, a characteristic way of getting to know the territorial area in greater depth, getting away from specialist circles to understand and demonstrate, to create awareness among possible implementers and to mobilise energy. The 400 projects received, currently under examination, demonstrate latitude and fertility of approach but, above all, highlight the varied and interconnected range of policies that are necessary for habitability.

The Strategic Document has provided as a guideline the description of the various cities forming the urban region of Milan.

The dynamics of the territorial area of Milan seem to have received great attention from observers and academics. And it was a research commissioned at the beginning of the 1990s by the Associazione Interessi Metropolitani - AIM – published with the title *Il territorio che cambia (The changing territory)* which described the great changes that were taking place and, through various interpretations of urban phenomena, built up a new image. Other works followed in the wake of that ground-breaking study and the strategic plan under construction builds upon and develops that inheritance.

The 7+3+1 cities which, by a variety of criteria, are recognised as environments "differentiated by building forms, landscapes, features of the local model of development and forms of social organisation … in part … resulting from the interaction between processes of diffusion of urbanised areas and the historical and topographical characteristics of the territorial area; … structured arenas and defined physical supports which provide opportunities for a variety of people to live together… a most important aspect for many policies regarding habitability" (p.84) are only notionally related to the boundaries of the 195 local authority areas. In addition to the urban heart, largely coinciding with the area of the capital city, are two families of cities. The first consists of the 7 cities that make up the new Province of Milan, while the second consists of the 3 cities of the new Province of Monza and Brianza. The plan provides a short description of each city, a view of scenarios and trends taking place and a project vision for the purpose of building up a "platform for projects and policies on habitability". The 7 cities, from the planning point of view, are presented as follows: the South-East, for water and health; the area of Magenta and Abbiategrasso, city on the River Ticino; the North-West, city of sustainable development; Upper Milan, centre of production, logistics and knowledge; North Milan, central hub of the urban region; the South-East, a "window onto the sea" overlooking the irrigation plain; Adda Martesana, city with sustainable infrastructures and strategic resources. The other 3 cities: Vimercate, a quality area for the new economy of knowledge; Monza and the hills of Brianza, hub of polycentric development; the multiple centres west of Brianza based on environment and landscape. The city of Milan is presented as the heart of the urban region and hub of the city's overall network.

The seven cities of Bologna

The expression "City of cities" also includes a local authority area such as Bologna which is compact and has a planning continuity. Around 375,000 inhabitants live there in a territorial area of around 140 sq. km.

Bologna is developing its first structural plan for the city as part of the new development plan provided under the recent Emilia-Romagna urban planning legislation (no.20 of 2000). Under the regional law, the structural plan has the task of laying down strategic choices for the layout and development of the entire city area, to protect its physical and environmental integrity as well as its cultural identity.

Through a detailed interpretative programme set out in the *Quadro conoscitivo* (*Introductory framework)* of June 2005, and a wide process of consultation between individuals and institutions which concluded with the *Documento preliminare* (*Preliminary document* of the Structural Plan), December 2005, the varied nature of the forms of urban settlement which are a feature of Bologna today have been progressively illustrated. "Bologna city of cities" and "Bologna metropolitan city" are the images through which this fundamental interpretation of the contemporary city have been communicated.

In the work that is still being carried out to define the Structural Plan, these images, which were still vague, have been translated and referred to particular areas which are emerging in comparison with the rest of the territory in terms of concentration of projects, policies and actions proposed for them. They are areas upon whose transformation the restructuring of the regional capital and the metropolitan area depend. "The 7 cities of Bologna" are figures by which it is sought to highlight differences that are already present and "make visible" strategies that guide projects and policies of varying kinds in space, time and in terms of those involved. The 7 Cities, each interconnected but distinguishable by reason of their history, their existing characteristics and future strategies, each have a their own series of spaces dominated by certain populations and social practices, where living styles change. These are the differences through which the richness of a great contemporary city can be recognised. The utility of a structural plan is measured by making best use of such differences, not involving the territorial area in a uniform manner but concentrating and diversifying interventions.

In Bologna, like Milan, it is possible to recognise "families" of cities: 1+ 4+ 2, but also 3+4. In the first case, isolating an international city (the Ferrovia), from 4 metropolitan cities (Tangenziale, Reno, Savena and Collina), and by 2 city-cities (Via Emilia West and Via Emilia East). In the second case, by emphasising the uniqueness of 3 cities (Ferrovia, Tangenziale, Reno) and the twin qualities of the other 4 (the two cities of the River Reno and Savena and the two cities of the Via Emilia). It would appear seemingly to be a game, but in reality it is a way of indicating the distinguishing criteria. In the first case, attention is placed upon the status of the city, its population and stakeholders, including institutions, who are involved in the transformations; whereas in the second, it is concerned with the urban characteristics and the type of problem to be dealt with. In fact, as with Milan, description and planning image are the fruit of various criteria. But unlike Milan (also because here we are concerned with a structural plan for a city and not a strategic plan) the profiles of the 7 cities have a clear physical basis and relate to urban planning operations for which it is possible in part to foresee the spatial outcome.

"Città della ferrovia" (City of the railway) identifies the series of urban spaces (station, airport, expo centre, business centre) that provide accommodation for international relations, where maximum accessibility and concentration of highest quality functions bring together the many various populations that distinguish the contemporary demographic mixture. It is the city which over the next few years will see the most important transformations, where a re-composition will take place to the building developments that have grown up both before and after the urban and industrial revolution – historic Bologna and the Bolognina district, separated by the stretch of railway. It is the urban figure that stands at the centre of the restructuring projects that the Structural Plan seeks to oversee, which will provide a new image of Bologna in Italy and in the world.

The "Città della Tangenziale" (City of the By-Pass Road) identifies the sequence of developments that lie on either side of the great barrier to the north of the city. They suffer all the inconveniences and can achieve improved habitability only through a system of links (intersections, car parks, cycling and pedestrian ways) and open spaces that provide green areas as passageways in the landscape where the road cuts through the city and as mitigation and agricultural wedges on the city limits. The progressive inclusion of the great barrier occurs with the multiplication of the places directly linked to it - areas of new urban development and places to redevelop which, overall, represent the range of metropolitan uses and practices.

"Città della collina" (City of the hills) seeks to give a new identity to a part of the metropolitan city that has been subjected to a process of progressive privatisation and reduction in its use (almost entirely luxury housing), to break the taboos (hill areas to be kept as they are now) and to establish a new "habitability statute". Therefore: reconstruction of a system of links (corridors, footpaths, car parks) for public use, the identification of places to be designed so that the hills become a "mosaic" of ecological, agricultural and semi-urban environments that are available for various types of living.

"Città del Reno" (City of the Reno) acknowledges the importance of the river that flows to the west of the city as a unifying element in a discontinuous metropolitan city, consisting of developments that are mainly residential. It is a city to be recognised as such and to be redeveloped by working above all on the pedestrian and cycle links across it, on the centrality of existing areas, and on relations with the "more powerful cities" (Railway and By-Pass)

"Città del Savena" (City of the Savena) once again takes the theme of the river park (to the east as well as the west) which is already a part of Bologna's urban planning. Here, however, the emphasis is shifted to the constructed parts of the park, highlighting the difference between the environment of the Savena and that of the Reno, and therefore the differing role that open spaces can play in the two different contexts. To the east, the new Lungo Savena road, the high speed railway, the areas of new urban development in the Bologna city area and neighbouring districts have created a new metropolitan city in its fullest sense, where residential areas, quality manufacturing and service areas are developed together, interspersed by open parkland and agricultural spaces.

The two "Cities of the Via Emilia" bring attention back to the historic centre, providing, through the regeneration of the Roman road on which the city was built (which is possible through a new system of public transport) the conditions for regaining habitability and the creation of new central points. The Via Emilia connects places of historical importance with firmly rooted identities, but at the same time gives rise to the more negative effects (pollution, pockets of physical decay, the concentration of immigrant populations). Differences in the transport systems and differences in the buildings that have been developed to the east and the west suggest different planning strategies. The metrotramvia (subway) to the west and the filovia (trolleybus) to the east, with their space requirements (special road lanes) make it necessary to physically and functionally re-plan the road and move car traffic away. These would also be momentous occasions for launching a process of redevelopment along the whole urban stretch of the road and for regaining neighbouring and transversal links that have for some time been interrupted.

An activities park in the Esino Valley

Jesi provides a different case. Here it might hastily be described as that of a "sprawling city" (a form of development that is common in many Italian and European river valleys and plains). However, it demonstrates a growth … by blocks rather than molecules.

In this central part of the Marche region the cities still maintain their outline but it is stretched and deformed by the formation of substantial additional developments (industrial areas, logistical and transport platforms) which each occupy tens of hectares and spread across the territorial area. In the valley of the River Esino, through which the dual carriageway and the Ancona-Rome railway pass, Fabriano (in the upper valley), Jesi and Chiaravalle (in the middle reaches), Falconara and Ancona (on the coast) are recognisable cities, even though they are now profoundly integrated into

economic development processes, involving daily links with an overall population of around 300,000 inhabitants who live not only in the valley but in numerous hill towns and on the coast. It is an area that could be 1,000 sq.km (the boundaries are not clearly defined but are presumed on the basis of what is a generally held estimate) and, for the businesses operating there, it is a major hub for national and international networks, especially to Eastern Europe.

Jesi City Council has played a fundamental role in launching a strategic operation that has gradually involved this whole territory (see the review *Urbanistica*, n. 128, 2005, and the website http://www.planum.net/journals/documents/urbanistica/128.zip).

The City Council has decided to build a strategic plan in addition to a new development plan and at the same time to launch the Agenda 21 process, examining projects, policies and actions - which are usually looked at on a separate basis - within one single decision-making process. Among the first actions, when work began in September 2003, was an endorsement, jointly made by the working groups of the urban plan and strategic plan, of documents relating to the decision to transfer the railway goods depot, which is now based in the district of Falconara, into the Jesi district, close to the interport Marche (a decision that had been reached by way of outline agreement in 2002 between the Italian State and the Marche Regional Authority). From that moment, transformations began to be observed which spurred discussion about the image that still existed of Jesi as a "small modest city", an image that had influenced the drafting of the previous development plan in the 1980s. The arrival of the interport and then the railway goods station, the substantial expansion of the industrial area, the growth of the nearby airport at Falconara, with its new metropolitan railway station, the multiplication of major commercial and sports structures, the setting up of management centres by several banks, the increase in traffic of people and goods on the dual carriageway, the strong pressure on housing, seemed immediately to be phenomena typical of "molecular territorial capitalism" which Aldo Bonomi (the well-known expert on Italian industrial districts) recognises in the city region of Ancona as in Milan and Bologna. This spread of high quality functions, this "web of value" entitles Jesi to play a full role in the transformation process in Central Italy and, more particularly, in the corridor connecting the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian seas. But it also poses a series of considerable environment problems, due to the using up of wide tracts of high quality agricultural land, the occupation of the river and hill areas affected by flooding and erosion, the compromising of historic landscapes consisting of villages, monuments and fragile traditional cultures.

The Idea Plan, approved by the City Council in March 2005, provided a structural and strategic framework for urban policies in the new development plan adopted on July 2006 and did so in conjunction with the Strategic Plan (approved on July 2004). The Idea Plan and Strategic Plan both share the vision of Jesi as capital city of the Vallesina and, calling for the need for a "project site for the Esino Valley corridor" as indicated by the Marche Region's territorial plan at the end of the 1990s, they have created the conditions for an extensive operation over a vast area.

Thus it has been possible to take advantage of the initiative provided by the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructures entitled "System project-Territorial complexities", with the aim of encouraging 11 "target-contexts" in the northern centre of Italy to strengthen links between the major infrastructure networks and the city systems. Indeed, Jesi City Council has been chosen as co-ordinator for the Esino area, which represents – according to the Ministry – the principal intersection between the Adriatic coastal system and penetration links into the Apennines, where there is the highest concentration of interchange nodes and infrastructural links of regional and national importance. For this connection area, the "Esino Corridor", the Ministry has indicated a major programme for territorial policies.

The executive programme of the System project Esino Corrridor, approved in February 2005, identifies the need to establish a development strategy that is capable of dealing with the many critical aspects of this area without abandoning the exploitation of the fine local heritage. The specific objectives are:

- re-aggregating, improving and supplementing the introductory framework, with reference to:

profile, services, impacts and compatibility of existing and planned infrastructures; environmental values and critical aspects; opportunities, problems, performance and development scenarios of the local economic and productive system;

- defining a high-quality planning portfolio, moving away from a sectorial logic in order to build a framework of interventions that are feasible and modulated according to an overall design;
- to link up and finalise projects and actions currently being carried out, promoted by different entities, which are not always mutually compatible.

The underlying objective is to focus, for the first time, upon the Esino Corridor as a planning area.

At the conclusion of the first stage of examination (which has produced an *Atlas* of plans, projects and programmes, collected together dozens of interviews with leading experts and promoted technical and political debates) the opportunity has been created to look once again at the image of the corridor, insofar as it is too heavily linked with the problem of infrastructures and restricted to the valley area, penalising the possibility of valuing the differences and co-existing needs between the landscape of the plains and the hills. There is a move towards the idea of an "activities park" as the image that most closely meets the objectives. While maintaining the centrality of the river and the corridor that it cuts through, this makes it possible to create a network of relationships, diversification of activities, development models and forms of habitability.

Park is a key word that underlines the decisive presence of natural features and wide open spaces and the many European experiences have shown a multiplicity of possibilities. Economic activities dominate the Esino Valley (industrial – traditional and innovative - , crafts, logistical, agricultural, tourist-based and cultural), but the growth of the first threatens the others. Co-existence - "harmonious" if possible – presupposes the maintenance of a "just distance" between business structures and the cities and between the business structures, with wide ecological corridors and natural reserves, as well as restoring proper transversal relationships between the hill areas on either side, plans and projects "directed towards a park" of those parts that are developed and those that are rural. This is a prospect that can only be followed by creating a dialogue with all concerned, creating therefore a "federate" park, which can be achieved piece by piece, by individual and relatively autonomous initiatives and held together by a pact on a shared planning strategy.