Boundary Issues in New Metropolitan Cities

Boundary Issues in New Metropolitan Cities. In the last decade, the focus of Italian politics aimed at the definition of metropolitan cities and independent associations of municipalities has become increasingly important. With regard to legislation, the issue has been considered since the 1990s, but despite several debates and legislative reforms there have been no real results. The only approach used was political-institutional, anchored in obsolete patterns and unable to deal with existing realities. Urban Planning and Urban Studies materialize the political choices in operational programs and control the evolution of urban and territorial transformations. These disciplines represent the starting point to reflect upon the process of identifying increasingly permeable boundaries. In this regard, the present work traces the current experiences of new metropolitan cities and the definition of ‘Liberi consorzi di Comuni’ in Sicily that are taking interesting forms and generating transformations and conflicts in the strategies of territorial government.

Keywords: Metropolitan cities, criteria, legislation

The identification of new urban structures and their government are among the current issues arising from the ongoing processes of globalization and from the increasing complexity of contemporary society.

In recent decades our territories have indeed suffered many radical changes, and the discipline of Urban Planning, created to remedy the consequences triggered by the industrial revolution, has been once again called to find new approaches and innovative solutions to a territory radically different from that of the nineteenth century.

The current settlement processes have in fact invalidated the classical taxonomies and, far from being identified by rigid boundaries and easily governable (Clementi, Dematteis & Palermo 1996; Camagni & Lombardi 1999), they are experimenting with new approaches (Marcelloni 2011).

In this regard today, also in Italy, the metropolitan dimension has returned in auge, this time even more disconnected from its Greek etymology of expansionist ambitions and distant from the exclusive dimensional features of the city in continuous expansion.

The new rules are the result of the provincial authorities’ reorganization, the outcome of political choices for the reorganization of public finances (Calace, Sbetti 2012).

These arrangements, far from representing
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...territorial relationships between spatial and socio-cultural instances, until now reflected an exclusively political-institutional approach, as outlined in the following paragraph. The same administrative necessity to define boundaries has been satisfied, again, exclusively from quantitative criteria without questioning which variations to take into account in order to identify and govern the new structures (Mariano, 2011).

Beyond the real intentions that have given rise to these many dispositions and as many postponements for implementation, the territories, increasingly porous and fringed, have been trying to discuss and experiment with new convergences to better govern a territory in constant evolution. Across Italy, actions and proposals to better understand the space of contemporary society and to direct processes have been initiated.

The Sicilian case, according to these aspects, is an interesting example because the response to legislative enforcement has been an expansion of provincial limits at the request of the inhabitants and more than a few public institutions; between many juridical uncertainties and still more institutional conflicts, they seek to define new ways forward for their territories.

1. The Italian approach to the issue of metropolitan dimensions

Far from its Greek etymology, the “metropolitan” concept—and especially “metropolitan areas and communities”—was born in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and in particular in the United States. The American metropolis was different not only for its dimensional features, but especially for its economic role that, in continuous growth, had an impact on the neighboring urban reality. Gras, an economic historian at Harvard University (Gras, 1922, 14) described how “the large town, the outsanding town (...) slowly grew into the economic metropolis”. The American metropolis, in contrast to European ones, took shape in an area devoid of large pre-existing urban systems; this feature resulted in a free expansion on the area without administrative constraints, giving it an advantage for its implementation and governance (Martinotti, 1993; Mellano, 1993).

Also in Italy, the need to introduce issues of wider concern than the town was born in the 1960s in the industrial triangle and, in particular, in the areas of Milan and Turin. Those areas gravitating around the city, able to attract many new residents and especially many commuters, were identified as “metropolitan areas”. This same location, after years of debate, became legislatively binding with the national law 42/90 on the “Ordinamento delle autonomie locali”.

In that period Italy followed the route laid out by Europe for coming to grips with the issue of governing vast areas. Italian declination, an imprinted characteristic of our country, along with the habit of defining new authority with legislative value, led lawmakers at the time to superimpose new forms of government on those that already existed, causing confusion at the administrative level and establishing a stalemate across the entire national territory (Schilleci, 2008a).

The criteria defined in those years reflected a rigidity in territorial governance, which even then was beginning to change, but that the politics alongside the discipline of Urban Planning was not able to handle, overlaying metropolitan areas upon already coherent provinces. While other European countries were experimenting with the new structures, in Italy, maybe due to the overlap of skills, or perhaps a general managerial incapacity, the topic fell into disuse.

In 2012, economic and financial requirements have forced the government to once again take up the question of territorial reorganization. In a few months, therefore, the issue of metropolitan areas will be in vogue again, this time evolved into “metropolitan cities” that will above all serve as substitutes for certain provincial entities, which for the most part will be dismantled.

The conversion of law 135/2012 law to D.L. 95/2012 on Spending has in fact initiated a reorganization of the 86 provincial entities,
establishing 10 metropolitan cities and aimed on the reorganization of the remaining 76. A judgment of the Constitutional Court 220/2013, however, once again has postponed the rearrangement. Structural reforms such as the reorganization of the provinces cannot, in fact, be dealt with through provisional and emergency instruments like the decree-law. The “natural” course of reform therefore continues to slow down and, after further legislative steps, it has come this year to the Law “Delrio” 56/2014.

15 years have passed since the earliest discussions of the definition of metropolitan structures, characterized by a considerable number of measures, some declared unconstitutional, others more or less accepted by the regional authorities. The Delrio Law appears to be, once again, a missed opportunity to reform the government of our territories.

While it is true that the policy has reignited the debate on the issue for economic and financial reasons, the political class could have taken the opportunity to reform a national territory that needs a real innovation to govern a territory that is constantly changing. The Delrio Law, along the false lines of the foregoing provisions, transforms parts of the former provinces into metropolitan areas, and it commissions a large part of this while awaiting reform of Title V of the Constitution.

But above all it parcels out governance of the territory, creating unstable governments that put regional planning, understood as land management, in jeopardy. The reform therefore seems forgetful of the need to recognize the socio-economic dynamics and processes of aggregation and spatial spin-off.

2. The wide-area planning for new metropolitan structure. Some Italian cases

From most parts of Italy over the years, public actors, but also private, have tried to discuss and experiment with the convergence of governance over a territory that is clearly changing. In recent years many debates have become more heated; we hope that, in the end, the path of reorganization can put integrated territorial policies and planning at the center of reform, (Calace, Sbetti, 2012).

In the region of Tuscany, for example, discussion of the metropolitan area emphasized territorial planning even before the reorganization of local authorities began with law 142/1990 (Alberti, 2012). Already between the 1950s and 1970s some proposals had been raised by the mayors of municipalities to the west of Florence to coordinate territorial government and, in the 1980s, the Region. On the advice of Giovanni Astengo, they proposed a structural scheme of settlement, economic, and social keys the result of an overall vision of the territory between Florence, Prato and Pistoia. In those years, however, the absence of a political and administrative director able to support these choices belittled the strategic vision.

Today, the new legislative provisions have reconfirmed the desire to construct a ‘wide area’ scenario. However, regional planning arrangements have, since 1995 with the regional law 5/1995 and then with the 1/2005, excluded all reference to inter-municipal planning, exclusively preferring vertical and horizontal cooperation and consultation. This approach to planning, although innovative and decisive of punctual issues, is a step back towards the unique idea of area/metropolitan city. The image it gives of the new urban structures, in fact more than a systemic set, recalls a polycentric reality that, due to the continuous legislative provisions deficient of key ideas and models, lends itself to many interpretations (Alberti, 2012).

In contrast, an approach that seems to be able to propose physical interpretations, breaking up the pre-existing structures, is ecological-relational. In Tuscany, in fact, the systemic interpretation of ecological and environmental factors is defining new territorial post-urban morpho-typologies, termed “bioregional-urban” (Magnaghi 2000).

The identification of the bioregion takes into account different criteria used in inter-scalar
modes: morpho-typological peculiarities of settlement and territorial systems; relations of ecological balance and reciprocity between urban systems and agro-forestry open spaces; and the polycentric connotations of urban systems. Through the evidence of these new elements the group of Tuscan territorialists has identified a “metropolitan region” of central Tuscany, describing it as a polycentric urban bioregion and successfully defining a strategic vision.

If Tuscany has for years followed bioregional planning practices and is trying to resultless adapt their experience to the legislative field, the case of Lombardy, specifically in Milan, instead goes hand in hand, constantly intersecting with the ongoing provisions.

The City has in fact launched the project “Milan metropolitan city” (Corvi, Sacchi, 2012) in collaboration with other institutions and with the economic and social forces of the territory. The project consists in fact in the activation of a process of knowledge that is able to start a discussion that is aware of and able to address the emergence of the new institution.

The themes until now discussed mainly concern a balanced and coherent body of new features because, in addition to the actual declination of the new functions assigned by law to the metropolitan city, the legislation opens up the possibility of providing additional mechanisms to redistribute functions that are by nature both top-down and bottom up. In this regard, different actors are working together: from the Prim Study Center to prepare dossiers and statutes, to the Polytechnic University for the parts concerning planning, and the Bicocca and Catholic Universities for the legal parts. On September 30, 2014 elections will be held for the Metropolitan Council; this is the first step to constituting Milan, the metropolitan city.

The two Italian cases highlight how experiments, openings to private actors, and the desire for governance are actions arising from a structural reform that is controversial and difficult to realize, and which the contemporary territory requires.

3. The issue of metropolitan areas in Sicily

Sicily is a precursor in the Italian scenario for the metropolitan issue. Already in 1986, coinciding with the establishment of regional provinces, the law established the criteria to identify and to lay out metropolitan areas, understood as aggregations of independent consortiums. The legislative provision already defined the functions and objectives to be carried out (Chapter IV, Regional law 9/86) and resolved the issue of overlapping of territorial authority, subordinating the metropolitan areas to the provincial entities. The criteria to identify the areas were mostly quantitative: the resident population had to be \( \geq 250,000 \) inhabitants and aggregated around a city of at least 200,000 inhabitants. However, a reflection was already evident, albeit on the margins, on the necessity for criteria relating to the functioning of essential services, transportation systems, and economic and social development.

The transposition of National law 142/90 with Regional law 48/91 and the need to establish, as early as possible, the new metropolitan structures have characterized the choice of exclusively quantitative criteria to identify of metropolitan areas in Sicily.

![Fig. 1](Sicilian Metropolitan areas according to the Regional law 48/91 Source: Schilleci, 2018, 47)
perimeters proposed for the metropolitan area of Palermo, Catania and Messina, beyond administrative and dimensional criteria, did not make reference to economic characteristics or even spatial, environmental, infrastructural or settlement implications (Di Leo, 1997; Schilleci, 2008a). The identification of areas in the 1990s did not have an operative continuation and the topic, including planning, fell into disuse (Schilleci 2008b).

In recent years the issue came back in style: Regional law 8/2014 not only established the new metropolitan cities, but, in the eye of Spending Review, the regional provinces are replaced by independent municipal consortia (Art. 1).

Once again, the main identification criteria are territorial continuity and the number of inhabitants: >= 250,000 for metropolitan cities and >= 180,000 inhabitants for the independent municipal consortia.

The interesting innovation worthy of note, however, is in articles 2 and 9. These create the possibility for each municipality to adhere to a neighboring metropolitan city, to another independent municipal consortium, or even to constitute a new one. Leaving aside the approval process of different proposals to replace provinces with metropolitan cities and independent municipal consortia, it is interesting to analyze the debates triggered by the possibility of proposing new arrangements.

For the first time, in fact, debates about the real purpose and potential of territorial reorganization has been triggered in the territories covered by the legislative provisions. The heated debate has made evident the need to rethink their territory according to approaches that take into account historicity, sense of identity, and the functional system of both mobility and basic services.

One example is represented by the southeastern area of Sicily. In this area the possibility to propose new consortia has triggered the reorganization of territories which at this time show and promote their specificity beyond, for reasons of interest and action, their traditional administrative boundaries and usual jurisdictional reach. In the territory of the ex-provinces of Ragusa, with its 320,003 inhabitants (Istat data, 2011) and Syracuse, with 404,271 inhabitants (Istat data, 2011) was born from the bottom the proposal for the Val di Noto consortium.

This new consortium would bring together the municipalities of Modica, Avola, Scicli, Noto, Pachino, Rosolini, Pozzallo, Ispica, Palazzolo Acreide, Canicattini Bagni, Portopalo Capopassero, Ferla, Buccheri, Buscemi, and Cassaro for a total of 239,837 inhabitants (Istat data, 2011).
Beyond the success or failure of this institution, finally a newly created association like ALCSE, Liberi Comuni del Sud Est Val di Noto Porta d’Europa, driven by an interest to better govern its territory, has debated the criteria necessary to think about an area as a system of joint governance. The reasons for the Val di Noto consortium’s proposal are to be found in the desire to pursue a strategy of common government, which sees in those territories many elements functional to a single system.

There are few doubts that Val di Noto’s socio-cultural background is founded on a commonality between the areas of the Contea and Syracuse, two territories which, until the beginning of 1900, were also institutionally linked.

A careful analysis, however, shows that the south-east area has a unique economic system, the only one continuously growing throughout the island. The global affirmation of agricultural products such as chocolate from Modica, IGP carrots from Ispica, Pachino tomatoes, Nero d’Avola wine from southeastern Sicilian vineyards, fish from Portopalo and Pozzallo, firstfruits from Scicli, and almonds from Avola are just some of the peculiarities which sustain the territory and upon which it wants to leverage territorial growth. In addition to the cultural level, the image of Modica, Scicli, Noto, Marzamemi, and Portopalo di Capopassero lead back to a shared image of a unique, if heterogeneous, territory.

Regarding the current operation of the territory there are controversial opinions. On one hand, at the infrastructural level the reticular structure is evident, strengthened and encouraged by the funded motorway network of Rosolini and Siracusa-Gela. On the other hand, the continuing cuts in public spending have made this territory dependent at the judicial and sanitary level.

Similarly, debates in progress are questioning the economic sustainability of a territory which depends on a number of services and that would contain not even 240,000 inhabitants. We’ll have to wait a few more months to really understand if the Val di Noto consortium will succeed or not to build itself up; meanwhile the Sicilian experience can, once again, lead the way for future territorial redefinitions.

4. Reflections in the margins: boundaries needed?

The political need to mark administrative boundaries, for legislative obligations and for better governance, once again in the history of our cities comes up against a heterogeneous and complex reality in which instituting new limits means redefining the relationships of the communities that actually exist in that territory. Even with the inclusive and enlarged perspective dictated by the current political system, one wonders what criteria should redefine an administrative territory that respects its citizens sense of belonging to a place and, at the same time, contemplates being part of a larger whole.

The issues are obviously manifold, but it is clear that our lawmakers should evaluate with greater reason the application of new structures. The criticism is certainly not intended as a desire for a paralysis that would not help anyone, but wants to act as a starting point to understand that behind a simple pen stroke, which delineates a boundary, a division is defined that decrees the destiny of an entire territory. Institutional reform could be a project shared among all participating municipalities, forming a pact based on free consent, shared responsibility on equal participation to the costs and benefits, a number of things that require a sort of solidarity pact between the territories concerned, and that can be understood only with an eye to a territory constantly changing. Soon the fate of our territories will be decided: new boundaries will
be traced or redefined to emphasize, perhaps, once again that despite the metropolitan epoch (Chambers, 1995) there is a constant struggle to take root in the spatial specificity that allows us to once again find a point of reference for memory and collective identity (Soja, 2000).

Sommaio
Nell’ultimo decennio, l’attenzione della politica italiana finalizzata alla definizione delle città metropolitane ha assunto sempre più importanza. A livello legislativo, il tema è stato affrontato fin dagli anni ’90, ma si è dato avvio solo a numerosi dibattiti e riforme legislative, senza reali risultati. L’unico approccio utilizzato è stato politico-istituzionale, ancorato a schemi obsoleti e incapaci di fare i conti con le realtà esistenti. La disciplina urbanistica, chiamata da sempre a essere una scienza civica e concretarsi in programmi operativi rappresenta il punto di partenza per riflettere sul processo per l’identificazione di confini sempre più permeabili. La delimitazione delle città metropolitane non può essere identificata secondo esclusivi criteri demografici e geografici. Le esperienze in atto di metropolitizzazione e di definizione dei liberi consorzi avviati in Sicilia stanno assumendo forme differenti e generando trasformazioni e conflitti nelle strategie di governo delle città. L’esigenza politica di marcare dei limiti amministrativi per obblighi legislativi e per una migliore governabilità si scontra infatti, ancora una volta, con una realtà eterogenea e complessa in cui istituire un nuovo limite significa ridefinire anche i rapporti relazionali delle comunità realmente esistenti in quel territorio. Il presente contributo analizza l’adeguamento alla recente disposizione siciliana e approfondisce le dinamiche da essa scaturite.

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