

UD&EP, Urban Development & Environmental Protection - A project to plan and design European urban regions

Antonella Contin, DiAP - Politecnico, University of Milano, Michele Sbacchi, DISPA - University of Palermo

When future regional plans are developed, urban growth will risk outgrowing the maximum admissible soil use. This will foster the rate of urban areas in almost all European regions, where there is a conflict between urban overgrowth and a need for sustainable construction, respectful of environmental contexts.

The UD&EP project (Urban Development & Environmental Protection) has addressed the issue of how to plan and to rule urban regions developments, trying to provide a less generic definition of the notion of sustainability, by means of the introduction of the concept of "metabolic sustainable development". The term Metabolism is rather close to what in the European Community is thought of as cycle of life". The use of these ideas has brought (led) us to discover the existence of problems prompted by technical conflicts between different levels of governance of the environment. These conflicts usually turn into political conflicts. The issues at stake are both the renewal of previous actions on the physical world or new appraisal and development of resources, by means of new maps able to integrate various information in order to establish local attraction in the cosmopolitan dimension of ERA-NET.

Evaluation of grades of compatibility between resources and use of land is the first step to take. It is linked to the view of a shift in the urban pattern. This change is targeted also at a new way of production and consumption.

This study of compatibility use/resources is related with the elaboration of a set of rules and laws both at the landscape scale and at the urban scale, both communal and regional. Eventually a European scale has to be considered.

But what we want to stress here is that, apart from this technical output, what first needs to be sought are political and administrative strategies. They will integrate all the technical production in order to define plans articulated in space and time.

Communication as well as a new cartographies are essential tools to operate in order to make or recover attractiveness of places.

In the UD& EP project it was central the issue of making or remaking attractive a local reality, the city and outskirts as well as the agricultural environment of Canicatti in Sicily. The final proposal encompasses a balanced development between "natural" and "built" environment. Connections between agriculture and construction are rather important to consider and properly understand the reality. Urban fragments are in Canicatti actually scattered all along the landscape and, on the other hand, rural pieces or situations are by now sort of built within the city. This mix, if properly seen and channelled, rather than being a negative confusion, can turn out to be a richness. We have set new formal rules for a unit, which we have labelled "agrouurban". It implies a very important reflection on the points of connections between different scales.

Concentration and/or diffusion of special resources together with the connection between infrastructures and productive soils are two of the main themes on which the study has been focused.

But we have also dwelt upon a new aesthetics of urban landscape as well as of landscape as such. For this purpose we have elaborated new visions.

Further development of the project is grounded on the examination of economic growth now in progress in some European regions. This situation claims sustainability: metabolic sustainability is our proposal.

Energetic consumption is getting different by turning from traditional urbanism to a Net-City pattern kind of development. Metabolic urban growth can become a powerful theoretical tool to think about the future of cities as a tie between local and global. In this view local and global will not be opposite elements but they will merge one into the other in a comprehensive new notion.

The next natural development of the research project is that of a simulation of development sociological, economic and political, by means of actual operation on the city.

By a comparative study of cases of metabolic growth, at the different scales of the city we have tried to propose substitutions, refurbishments and transformations. This has been applied to the city of Canicattì but cries out to be tried elsewhere.

In order to further develop the study we want to consider similar cases under circumstances that can be applied to the Mediterranean area. Attractiveness of places will become a rather complex notion that is based not only on quantitative issues but also in characters that are shaped both by qualitative and quantitative parameters. Immaterial networks, as well as material ones, will be considered in a perspective of Net-city.