

Chapter 14

A Tentative Scenario of Spatial Reorganisation (By Urban System) in the Four Countries Studied

1. Premise: Meaning and Limits of the Formulated Scenario of Urban Reorganisation

As we have said repeatedly (see Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 11), the research has been oriented to providing a first attempt at a reorganisation of urban land use, inspired by the application of the findings, on the theme of optimal centrality in the territories of the four countries studied.

And, as we have also said many times, since the initial research project¹ this first attempt has had the exclusive objective of a "definition of the operational framework of the urban policy", through a reorganisation of the centralities which bears in mind the two following goals:

- a) elimination of the possible overloads of the centralities acquired by the great cities;
- b) modes of acquisition of centrality for the medium to small sized cities.

In effect (and even this has been said more than once), in the Italian case, the research group at the Planning Studies Centre had an easier time with this research because of the existence of previous studies developed within the framework of another project (Project "Quadroter" of the Italian National Research Council). Therefore the Italian team has already faced and implemented a deep analysis from this point of view. As a result, the proposal for Italian land use and urban reorganisation, inspired by the same principles emerging from our current research, has been facilitated by this already acquired knowledge of the situation. It is deeper than that made possible for the other teams of our research group by the time and means at the disposal of this European research.

However, even for the other countries studied (France, Germany, and Great Britain), it has been proposed since the beginning of the research to close with a tentative scenario which could be an example of the future work to be developed, with more care and attention, inspired by the criteria, principles, and indicators of optimal centrality emerging from our current research.

¹ See Chapter 1 of this book.

Each country's scenario is contained in the national reports found in the Actvill report (PSC (1996), vol. III-B). Here we will only illustrate very synthetically the most meaningful and global aspects that from the comparative analysis of the results; results strongly conditioned by the structural and morphological diversities of the urban framework in the four countries.

We will discuss later - in the next chapter of this general report on the third phase or operation of this research - the principles and methods of application of the strategy for urban land use and reorganisation such as they emerge from the research work, including the tentative building of design scenarios as a first approximation.

2. The Structural and Morphological Diversity of the Urban Framework Inherited from the Past in the Four Countries Studied

The structural and morphological diversity of the urban framework of the four countries studied are well known and have been largely treated by the geographical and town planning literature,² among which even many studies promoted by the European Commission.³ Here we will make a summary based on the analysis of our research, referring to individual national reports (see vol. III-B of the Actvill report, cited above).

What emerges immediately is the great diversity in the relationship between the national territory as a whole and the distribution, on the same territory, of the urbanised areas.

For *France*, the territorial distribution of the non-urbanised areas is the largest in absolute terms, and the concentration level of those urbanised areas is, equally, the largest.⁴ Therefore, keeping in mind the level of critical demographic mass (valid for any country and any kind of urbanisation) which the research has highlighted in order to obtain an acceptable level of urban life (i.e. the *city effect*), a strategy of territorial reorganisation, in terms of territorial redistribution of urbanisation, seems destined to meet the largest obstacles, i.e. the greatest historical "impediments". And these obstacles can be so large as to suggest that we introduce into the general logic developed in our research (the logic of the *urban system*, i.e. some territorial units self-sufficient for all superior urban services), the idea that a certain amount of the territory must be, necessarily, subtracted by a systemic functionality. This land must be considered a "no mans land", reserved almost exclusively for natural or historical/cultural conservation, but not annexed to any existent or programmed urban system.

This suggestion would evidently contrast with the general logic of the research (that of a urban system policy), but it would be an almost obligatory solution, adapted to the peculiar characteristics of the French territory. But this scenario of

² A selective reference could be made to Cheshire and Hall (1987), Burtenshaw, Bateman, et al. (1991), Hall and Hay (1980), Maimardi, ed. (1973), Rautsi, ed. (1993), van den Berg, et al. (1998), European Institute of Urban Affairs (1992).

³ European Commission (1991; 1994; 1996; 1997).

⁴ PSC (1996), vol. III-B(1), France; see also Merlin (1976), Scargil (1983).

the abandonment of large portions of the French territory would create, in any case, many other difficulties from another point of view. Such difficulties emerge from the fact that we would force an exodus of the population still settled in these areas (in order to assure even to this population an acceptable level of urban life).

An alternative - of which the French report shows a scenario - is to imagine some of these as urban systems, with little towns within wider and deserted territories which are most critical in terms of the relationship between catchment area and accessibility. Hence these systems can achieve their difficult take-off much later in the future. They are the systems defined as being of uncertain consistency and capacity to be implemented.

An analogous situation to the French one does not exist in any of the other three countries examined⁵ (except for some areas of very limited dimensions: for example, Scotland and some areas of Wales in Great Britain, and the *Mezzogiorno* in Italy). These areas - even if more limited in size- have reproduced the scarce acceptability of the relationship between catchment area and accessibility. But their most important limitation makes the presence of an urban system of doubtful consistency and capacity of implementation more acceptable in this scenario, reducing them in absolute number and giving them an uncertain future.

Thus *Great Britain* - as for France - is marked by the urban hyper-concentration of the capital region in comparison to the rest of the national territory, with the other connected and well known problems which derive from this.⁶ But given its minor territorial extension, Great Britain did, however, register the existence of other wider areas of metropolitan conurbation, such as that of the West Midlands and the Northwest which, even at different scales, show this same problem of hyper-congestion. Consequently, the adoption of the same kind of strategy as the London area is suggested. The minor territorial extension of the country, furthermore, makes the infra-systemic accessibility problems less difficult (for those urban systems that are territorially "forced", present even in Great Britain).

In *Germany*, oppositely, a strongly balanced scenario (in the sense of the criteria and principles elaborated in our research) of urban structure was already offered at the starting point. This balance could possibly be improved only for the conurbated regions of the Ruhr (and even here it presents some performance indicators superior to that which we would expect, thanks to the good policy control of environmental impact which is practised in this country). But problems could be created for the Berlin area if its development, re-launched after the reunification of the country, would not be in the spirit of the equilibrium criteria and polycentrism suggested in this research. As a whole, we cannot avoid thinking that the relative balance of the German urban framework could have been an important factor in the elevated performances in this country in the last decades.

Italy presents two very different situations in regard to the urban framework, one in the centre/north of the country and the other in the Mezzogiorno. In the centre/north, the situation of the distribution of the urban structure is similar to

⁵ PSC (1996), vol. III-B, Germany, Great Britain, Italy.

⁶ PSC (1996), vol. III-B, Great Britain; see also Robson (1986), Simmie, ed. (1994), Cuthbert (1986), European Commission (1996), Hall and Hay (1971).

