

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).

that of Germany. But it is also strongly altered by the development of a "Milanese conurbation" which has the possibility to involve even Turin and the rest of the Piedmont. This situation risks reproducing the same problems of unbalance felt in France and Great Britain, at territorial scales closer to the British than the French. A policy and strategy of strengthening the urban systems in this area of the country could have the effect to improve the situation to avert the above said risk.

In the Mezzogiorno, on the contrary, the starting scenario of the urban structure is more similar to the French one, even if at a reduced territorial scale. There is a hyper-centralisation and congestion of the conurbated area of the "capital", Napoli, and its metropolitan hinterland,⁷ and a relative "desert" interrupted by some relatively important urban centres such as Palermo, Catania, and Bari. However in the Italian case, the territorial dimension of the peninsula renders the accessibility of the desert less grave than in France, and the problems connected to the creation of alternative urban systems, therefore, are less insoluble.

From an examination of the distribution of existent urbanisation and the most evident problems in the four countries, the study suggested a strategy (and a consequent scenario) for the territorial urban reorganisation in each, supported by many statistical relationships among urban density and territorial surface that we will recall only in the large scale.

Anyhow the occasion is still propitious to recall that the statistical data from which we can extract these statistical relationships are strongly conditioned by the statistical base used, that is, the administrative statistical units in every country. Normally they correspond very rarely to the appropriate units for data collecting, measuring and planning which our research has emphasised, and for which a pre-definition is indispensable in giving a more meaningful sense to the discourse on urbanisation, de-urbanisation, sub-urbanisation, and even counter-urbanisation which we are currently making.

1. Data which is more meaningful in this sense could be obtained in two different, but converging, ways:
 - a) the creation of homogeneous (and therefore, comparable) units of data collecting at a European scale. Even the urban system suggested by the proposed scenario could already be a statistical base for measuring urbanisation that could furnish more meaningful data than that currently in use;
 - b) territorial data collecting of some localised phenomena (for example, residential areas and even all types of natural or anthropic resources) through information and/or telematic technologies (satellites etc.) which scholars, on behalf of their committed institutions, still have difficulty accessing despite the incredible progress of the technology.⁸

⁷ Archibugi (1998).

⁸ On this point, the European Commission and particularly DGXII, in co-operation with other sectors of the commission (other DGs, Eurostat, and the environmental agency), could do very much.

3. The Proposed Territorial Reorganisation in its Historical National Context

3.1 The French Case

The proposal of reorganisation that concerns the French territory is strongly conditioned by the old, but always alive, problem of the imbalance between the area of Paris and the rest of France. Successive spatial policies in France (overall, those that have been carried out by Datar),⁹ have been dominated by this problem and have always constituted a response to it (even if of different and sometimes opposite natures).

Thus during the 1950s and 1960s, France started a policy of *metropoles d'équilibre* (metropolises of equilibrium). This policy has been an attempt to strengthen the larger French cities peripheral to Paris in location,¹⁰ and to make each a pole of attraction for a wide territory, therefore mitigating the attraction capacity of Paris in respect to their own territories.

This policy - together with other initiatives of decentralisation of public and private investment - registered some results in the first period after the Second World War (established by the French team report as the 3 decades between 1945 and 1975). The growth of the Paris region (*Ile-de-France*) compared with the rest of the country registered some decline of rhythm and some negative migration balances were even registered. The creation of new jobs permitted a superior proportion of families, that otherwise would have migrated to Paris, to remain in the areas of the *metropoles d'équilibre*. But even if some success in development took place due to the expansion of the industrial investment (on which government had some ruling influence with its regional policy), it has been contrasted by the nature of tertiary evolution in employment which, being based on urban development, always had Paris as the privileged seat of effective settlements.

In fact, in the field of urban development and its centrality, the policy of the *metropoles d'équilibre* did not have the same success as the decentralised industrial investments. The hinterlands of such *metropoles* were too vast to make possible a real shift of their gravitation from Paris to the new *metropoles*. Being definitely larger than a "daily size", the hinterlands of these *metropoles* continued to gravitate towards Paris with the same difficulties and distortions (but yet the same advantageous reasons) as before.

Thus the French policy became aware of this scarce city effect, uncompetitive with respect to Paris, in the *metropoles d'équilibre* policy and also of the impoverishment that the concentration of public effort in the *metropoles* had on

⁹ Of which there is an appropriate critical panorama in the French national report (PSC (1996), vol. I-B, France).

¹⁰ It was a matter of six metropolises; Lyon, Marseilles, Strassbourg, Nantes, Toulouse and Bordeaux.

the medium and small cities of the general French hinterland.¹¹ The French *metropoles d'équilibre* policy has since been integrated (according to some) or shifted (according to others), into a policy of the *villes moyennes* (from 20,000 to 100,000 residents). Thus a policy of assistance and promotion of this new territorial unit has been inaugurated; a policy that, although wishing to be integrative to that of the *metropoles d'équilibre*, in practice sings the requiem of it because it creates systemic conditions contrasting to its success. In reality, a policy aimed at satisfying everyone (at the territorial level) has been set up, but it is unable to satisfy anyone because the policies annul each other for a lack of systemic consistency.

On the other side, the intermediary cities were not sufficient to satisfy the condition of urbanity or city effect, even if they were strongly helped by investment in infrastructure and economic privilege. Their sizes, mainly the size of their catchment area, were too modest to stimulate an increase of the superior services that produce the city effect. If the policy of the *metropoles d'équilibre* was wrong by territorial excess (which, as we know,¹² impeded the daily accessibility), the policy of the *villes moyennes* was wrong by territorial deficit of catchment area (which impeded the birth of appropriate superior services). The stalemate between the two policies, and the "spontaneity" that followed from it, could not but continue to privilege the Paris area.

And if, in some way, a "decentralisation" of Paris has occurred over time, it has occurred not from political and rational choice, but from the natural "spillover" of the local overloading; transferring the problems of the overcharging from the core of the metropolitan city to its peripheries.

After the Yom Kippur war in the mid 1970s, everywhere in France the hope of governing development collapsed. And in the peculiar zone of French territorial policy, the re-conquest of the concentration of Paris against any foolish aspiration of re-equilibrium occurred.

The institutional-regional strengthening - that had a certain effect in this period - has served to remove certain responsibilities for choices concerning territorial ordering from the national level. It served to make any decision even more decentralised - and in this case, more chaotic. The problem of an urban policy, essentially a problem of a re-equilibrium of the city effect at the scale of the national territory (especially in countries such as France that are strongly unbalanced under this profile), has become a regional problem, meaning that it has been cancelled as a problem.

The problems of an international and European "competitiveness" have contributed to creating the basis for a theoretical justification of the *laissez faire* of the Parisian hyper-concentration. Some problems of "*prestige*" and "*grandeur*", together with the presumed greater competitive effectiveness (at the international scale) of the large dimensions, justified the concentration of the "*Grands*

¹¹ Impoverishment has been manifest through the loss of efficiency of these intermediary services already in place in the small and medium sized centres in the past.

¹² See Chapter 5 on the concept of the "urban system" and Chapter 12 on "the requirements of the modern city (or urban system)".

