

## **Towards an URBAN for the "dispersed city"**

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## **Towards an URBAN for the "dispersed city"**

The paper<sup>1</sup> is based on a research that considers the necessity to develop active policies for the so-called "dispersed city".

Our analysis will focus on the integrated project, and more specifically the European Community initiative program URBAN. The hypothesis on which we will build our reflection is that the experience developed by this instrument for interventions of integrated urban rehabilitation in dense, "traditional" urban fabrics can advantageously be transposed to the less "traditional" fabrics of the "dispersed city". This hypothesis rests upon the idea that the new territorial dimension of the urban has not yet been taken into account by such integrated policies, which remain dependent on a traditional, dichotomist vision of the city-countryside relations. Thinking of an URBAN for the "dispersed city" allows us to surpass this vision, in a moment in which the EC's interest and dedication for the urban issues seem to reach a crucial stage, as is acknowledged by the adoption of two fundamental documents, the European Spatial Development Perspective (adopted by the E.U. in 1999) and the *Framework for action for sustainable urban development in the European Union* (published in 1998).

### **Terminological considerations**

The field of the analysis on which is based our reflection was voluntarily restricted. A series of terminological restatements are consequently necessary.

A first clarification concerns the expression "dispersed city". By using this expression, we do not intend to refer to the broadly accepted perception that describes the contemporary city as a whole as "exploded", "sprawled" or "fragmented" [ASCHER 1995, MONCLÚS 1998, MAZZA AND ALII 1988]. The expression "dispersed city" will be here used in a more restricted way, by referring specifically to the territories of dispersion, of low density – to the "diffuse city", to take up the famous expression developed by Indovina to describe the urbanized territories of the Veneto [INDOVINA 1990].<sup>2</sup>

Generally and simplifying, one can associate the territories that cover for us the expression "dispersed city" to the metropolitan functional urban regions<sup>3</sup>. Just like these, they are very difficult to define and delimitate. We will not linger here on this issue, which raises fundamental questions of definition of the phenomenon (should the "dispersed city" include the urban peripheries or not? where does the "dispersed" city stop, and the "compact" city start? and so on...)<sup>4</sup>.

More specifically, our analysis deals with the territories of what Heynen, Loeckx and Smets have called the "reticular metropolis", characterized by a non hierarchical polycentric structure (the metropolis of the Po, the Randstad, or the Brussels-Antwerpen-Gent triangle in Belgium form part of this phenomenology) and that these authors oppose to the "cobweb metropolis", centralized and hierarchical (phenomenology of which Rome and Paris are good examples) [HEYNEN, LOECKX, SMETS, 1990].<sup>5</sup>

A second clarification concerns the specific sub-phenomenology of the "dispersed city" we will focus on : the "included village". The generic term of "dispersed city" covers extremely diverse realities, and is not as homogeneous as it may seem at a first glance (contrary to a superficial perception that sees the european "dispersed city" as a copy on reduced scale of the american "urban sprawl"). In fact, aside from obvious phenomena of homologation

or convergence related to a certain "metropolitan way of life", the main specific feature of the European "dispersed city" is that it developed on non-virgin territories, in which preexisting structures strongly influenced the forms of dispersion [BOERI-LANZANI 1992]. These structures can either be natural, built or cultural, and are usually strongly linked to their specific context, as they are the result of local historical sedimentation; yet, their combination creates recognizable patterns, which can be assembled by similarity and organized in typologies.<sup>6</sup> One of these typologies in the case of the reticular "dispersed city" is, without any doubt, what can be called the "included village", a historical rural or semi-rural core that polarized the developments and got absorbed into the dispersed city's fabric. In most cases, the "included village" presents all three stages of "urban development" (pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial), a characteristic that tends to create situations often problematical in terms of land uses and of reconversion of industrial heritage, i.e. This problematical nature, joined to the size and scale of the "included village" – between the traditional village without equipment and the small city – make it a particularly adapted context to work on the transfer of the integrated urban rehabilitation's instrument's experience to the "dispersed city".<sup>7</sup>

### **"Dispersed city" and urban rehabilitation**

Reflecting on the topic of urban rehabilitation for the "dispersed city" involves raising the question "why?" : why an urban rehabilitation policy for the "dispersed city"? This question can be considered at two levels:

- a first level relates to the "dispersed city" as a context that is often perceived as a "happiness island" in the archipelago of the contemporary city; if one understands almost intuitively the conceptual base of the URBAN program which states that the urban rehabilitation policies should apply to the "pockets of poverty", to the "*quartiers en crise*", proposing to intervene on the "dispersed city" may appear more obscure; proposing to reflect on this topic means that one questions the common perception of the "happy suburbia", by stressing the problems that it conceals;
- a second level relates to the instrument taken into consideration, the so-called "integrated urban rehabilitation politics". This instrument has now imposed its hegemony on the other traditional planning instruments for practically two decades. Reflecting on its use in new contexts as can be those of the "dispersed city" means that one recognizes them a certain efficiency, and that this efficiency can advantageously be applied to these contexts.

#### *1. The dispersed city is not a "happiness island"*

The common perception which sees in the "suburbia" a kind of eden, of carried out Utopia, is based on a long modern tradition of man's liberation through the return to nature and the negation of the compact city, place of moral depravity and promiscuity. This vision is obviously of the order of the myth, a particularly fertile myth both in Europe and in the United States throughout the XXth century<sup>8</sup>. Unfortunately, the reality does not live up to that dream; the "dispersed city" appears to host a whole series of problems, connected to a large extent to the absence of planning, which generated major legal and administrative complexity in this type of context. These problems vary from one country to another, and of course even within the same metropolitan area; nevertheless, one can gather the problems specific to the contexts of metropolitan dispersion in three main categories:

- a first category concerns the environmental dimension, mainly involving problems related to infrastructures, networks and transportation, but also problems of waste management and environmental protection. This dimension is closely connected with the context's density of population, in that, as a general rule, the congestion (which constitutes a particularly acute side of the problems evoked here) tend to grow when density increases (it is the case of the Milanese metropolitan region i.e.). It also must be stressed that these environmental problems are strengthened by the frequent presence in the "dispersed city" of closed down factory sites and of various industries for which the respect for the environment is often not yet a priority; in a way, one can say that the "dispersed city" suffers from being the "junkyard" of the contemporary city (a junkyard organized in pockets), as its growth is often the result of random and opportunity in the overall processes of delocalisation;
- a second category concerns the housing dimension, relating to the quality of residential built heritage and open spaces; the contexts of dispersion often present a relatively old and partly deteriorated built heritage, depending on the period of development of the context under consideration (the development peak is generally located around the 1960s, but can move until the 1980s or 1990s, depending on the specific context), of the type of residential development (one-family house, social housing districts, etc.), but also of recent developments (transformation of second residences into first, recuperation of historical cores, reconversion of industrial heritage, etc.). Concerning open, public spaces, as a general rule, they are poor and all but urban in the common sense of the term (which sees the city as characterized above all by its public spaces and the continuity of building fronts). This "non-urban – non-rural" character represents undoubtedly one of the main resources for the affirmation of an identity specific of the "dispersed city". The presence of important natural open spaces can in this way be seen as an innovation resource in terms of scale and nature for the design of a new kind of public spaces;
- a third category concerns the social dimension, with marginalization problems related to the homogeneity of the typological offer (i.e. shortcomings in terms of rental market), to the scarcity of local employment (connected with the character often monofunctional of the "pockets" of the contexts in question –"dormitory districts"... ) and to a general tendency to the ageing of the population of the suburban contexts. One can summarize this third category by relating it to an unquestionable tendency to social fragmentation in the spaces of the contemporary city (the city taken as a whole, compact and dispersed)<sup>9</sup>.

These issues fall within a general context substantially characterized by the absence of recognition and of identity, and therefore of appropriation on the part of the inhabitants, of the contexts of dispersion (apart from a conflict-based identity of a still fundamentally mythical nature - the myth of the "traditional village" - in the case of the "included village" [LANNON 1996]). This phenomenon is clearly connected to the actual increasing and generalized tendency which see the shrinking of the individuals' social sphere and of the social practices of solidarity (spatial expressions of that phenomenon are commonly described with the metaphorical expression of "fortress"). This tendency is obviously not specific to the "dispersed city", but it sure is this type of contexts that offers its more complete spatial translation (sufficient enough would be looking at the one-family houses, always more closed and more protected) and its most advanced consequences in terms of social fragmentation. If this phenomenon is not negative in itself, and is connected to new, "metropolitan" ways of using the urban territories [ASCHER, 1995]<sup>10</sup>, many of its

manifestations are problematic and conflictual (mainly in that it creates conditions of inclusion/exclusion); the recourse to integrated urban policies must be seen in this optic as a way to enhance the consciousness of "being part" of a territory and the opportunities to see it and use it as a common good.

## *2. The integrated policy of urban rehabilitation, an instrument adapted to the "dispersed city"?*

If the "dispersed city" is not a small earthly paradise, does it really "deserve" the attention of urban rehabilitation policies, primarily developed to break the logics of marginalization of the "*quartiers en crise*"?

The first element of reply we would like to advance in this respect is that accepting the invitation involves a change of glance on the urban reality which can be of essential importance today : thinking of an urban rehabilitation policy for the "dispersed city" means that we recognize the urban character of the latter. Such a recognition would be symbolically, but also politically, significant.

More specifically, the very nature of the urban integrated policies appears highly adapted to tackle the problems specific to the "dispersed city" that we listed above. In this way, one of the major strengths of the tool of the integrated policy for urban rehabilitation, its ability to work efficiently in complex, entangled administrative situations, acquires crucial significance when thinking of applying it to the contexts of dispersion, as these are characterized by such administrative complexity. Yet the main argument for exporting the integrated policy experience to the "dispersed city" lies definitely in its capacity to create the conditions for local projects to emerge in a consensual, open sphere often absent in these contexts. In fact, since its essence is to rest on local resources, the tool of the integrated policy tends to strengthen the territorial anchoring and identity building of actors and context involved (the means coinciding with the goals). Accordingly, the "included village" appears as a privileged place for experimentation on new forms of integrated projects, this mainly in that it combines to the specific characteristics of the "dispersed city" a certain form of centrality favourable to the development of the integrated approach (the "critical mass").

Transferring the experience of integrated urban policies to the "dispersed city" also means a change in the focusing of such policies. Their goal cannot anymore be restricted to the only fight against exclusion by working on rehabilitating the physical (built) and social living conditions, as it is for the existing URBAN program. As a matter of fact, this objective has already been partly reduced in URBAN itself during the years; the postulate of a targeted, local intervention on which it is based, which sees in the local action the way to solve the overall problems, and the capacity of the instrument of the integrated policy to solve social problems as a whole, are being challenged [TOSI 2000].

Today, it appears to us that an integrated policy of urban rehabilitation for the "dispersed city" has above all to work on strengthening the two key elements of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), namely rebalancing the european urban system and sustainability. The social issue is to be included in this dual objective.

### **The European Union and the "dispersed city", a growing awareness**

The political project on the urban environment of the European Commission was presented in a document of major consistency, the *Framework for action for sustainable*

*urban development in the European Union.*<sup>11</sup> This document, which dates back to 1998, stresses the centrality that the urban dimension should occupy in the policies and initiatives of the Commission. It represents the conclusion of a growing awareness towards urban issues, which developed from the beginning of the 1990s with the *Green Paper on the Urban Environment*, at a time when urban issues were still considered of the only competence of Member States and Regions. The importance of the urban question, represented by its demographic weight within the E.U. (with more than 80% of urban population), and the need to optimize the efficiency of European investments, combined to considerations concerning the responsibility for the European institutions in terms of sustainable development in the respect of the principle of subsidiarity, pushed the European Commission to draw up its *Framework for action*.

One of the major interests of this document from our viewpoint is the will to develop a coherent framework to the Community projects around the concept of sustainability, in parallel to the development of the European Spatial Development Perspective. This desire for consistency leads to sectorial integration of territorial policies and actions, and to surpass the sterile separation between rural and urban environments, which is of primary importance in the recognition of the phenomenon of urbanization which constitutes the "dispersed city". The document stresses in particular the need to simplify the institutional framework, key problem in the metropolitan contexts (where one often witnesses institutional blockings connected with the maladjustment of the structures to the new realities)<sup>12</sup> and where the role of European institutions as a thruster can be of fundamental importance.<sup>13</sup>

The document also contemplates major integrations between rural and urban environment within the programs of the Commission, including URBAN and LIFE, and in the reform of the common agricultural policy.

## **URBAN II**

As a general rule, the *Framework for action* remains above all a document of intentions, without real concrete repercussions.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, some of its guidelines can be found in the URBAN II program, which introduces a major attention to the metropolitan territories by shifting its priority from the "*quartiers en crise*" towards the small and average cities.

The launching of the second phase of URBAN has been very difficult. The European Commission itself appeared divided on the need to continue a program criticized for the absence of criteria for selecting the areas, for the vague character of its objectives, for the difficulty of measuring the effects (the analysis of the results is still in progress)<sup>15</sup>. The need for the Commission to lead this type of initiative was questioned, in particular by the European Court of Auditors, for which "... *these projects could equally have been carried out under existing Community measures, thus avoiding the creation of new procedures and expensive management structures*" [OJEC, 2001, paragraph 64].

These criticisms seem shared by the Commission itself, which does not state in any specific way in its *Framework for action* the need to continue the program; although there is a clear reference to URBAN in the objective concerning the promotion of equal opportunities, social integration and rehabilitation of the urban areas, it is only in relation to a prime objective which aims to strengthen economic prosperity and employment in the cities, in which it is recommended to seek to incorporate expressly the urban dimension into the programming of the Structural Funds, and therefore in the regional plans and the

operational programs (action 1 of the *Framework*). As Marco Cremaschi underlines, the Community appears doubtful on the road to choose : "*the orientation of the Community still appears undecided between two intentions hitherto expressed in different places: "melting" the urban problems in the more robust financing channels intended for development and for social cohesion... or facing the urban question with specific measures, as the URBAN's renewal seems to suggest. (...) It seems that both options are to verge in the programmatic statements, and be opposed in the selection of the interventions* ".<sup>16</sup>

It is finally the European Parliament that pushed for the continuation of the program for the 2000-2006 period,<sup>17</sup> on the basis of an argumentation that stressed the need to preserve the acquired know-how, and more specifically the local know-how in the management of the Community funds (in this case the Structural Funds).

URBAN II reflects these hesitations, in that its overall budget was reduced (from 900 to 700 million euros), with responsibility for the national states to supplement it if they consider it useful, and the innovative dimension is reduced while a major emphasis is set upon the aspect of "transfer of experiment and best practice". As was said, the program also moves its interest from the only "*quartiers en crise*" to the metropolitan areas, acknowledging the relative failure (or at least a significant shift...) of the postulate seeing the overall problem resolution by local actions: as is stated by the Commission, "*this initiative could not hope to completely solve a major problem of contemporary society, i.e. the serious social and economic problems of neighborhoods in many European cities, some of which could even be described as ghettos.*"<sup>18</sup>

### **Towards an URBAN for the "dispersed city"...**

The orientation taken by URBAN II appears therefore to be joining the hypothesis according to which the URBAN's experience can advantageously be exported to the territories of the "dispersed city". The role of initiator of the European Union in this field seems primordial to us. We will enounce here a series of considerations on the nature of an URBAN specifically devoted to the "dispersed city", considerations which will be based on three key elements: know-how, insertion in an overall framework and experimentation.

#### *1. The "know-how" element*

The principal element in the export of the URBAN program to the territories of dispersion remains the methodological aspect, which is related to a specific "know-how". This "know-how" appears particularly necessary in the contexts of dispersion for several reasons:

- *the administrative and institutional complexity* of these contexts, which often appear like genuine "free zones" of regional planning;
- *the deeply "urban" and "democratic" component of this know-how*: URBAN methodology is fundamentally "urban" and "democratic" for the fact that it rests on the concept of concertation as a "public space" and allows the coming out of latent problems and projects; this dimension of "democratic urbanity" is willingly often absent, in particular in the contexts of "included villages";
- *working with/on local resources* : the integrated approach allows concrete development, centered on the local resources – a type of development to some extent local, therefore differentiated, and ideally "sustainable" [MAGNAGHI 2000];

- *the link to the territorial context*: to get support from a “centralized”, or “coordinated” know-how, allows to take into account broader issues and the integration of the local context into a broader territorial whole.

It seems rather obvious that to fill this aim of "transmission" of know-how to the local level, the concentration of the funds in a few targeted operations – a central feature of URBAN, which aims to increase the interventions' efficiency by avoiding the "sprinkling" of funds –, is unsuited; the export of the URBAN model to the context of the "dispersed city" would involve re-examining rising the budgets that one could devote to, whether it is by activating different funds (national or others) or by envisaging a reorientation of the Community funds<sup>19</sup>. This obviously involves political decisions, but it should be possible for the Commission to carry them ahead, if the *Framework for action* has to have a political and operational meaning.

## 2. Insertion in an overall framework

It appears today that the improved quality and efficiency of the interventions in the urban environment that marked the "season" of the "integrated programs" went alongside a loss of sight of the systemic vision of the urban problems, to the benefit of a fragmentation of the interventions. Where it exists, strategic planning appears reduced to a mere tentative to coordinate the various policies and existing integrated programs on a given territory, policies and programs often pushed by opportunities (URBAN being described by certain by the term of "lottery" in this framework). If the instrument of the integrated policy appears thus to be efficient on a local scale, one can question its efficiency on the scale of the urban system, by the tendency it presents to displace the imbalances instead of solving them, thus contributing to the later fragmentation of the urban system (think of the phenomenon of gentrification, i.e.). In a way, given the very nature of the "dispersed city", namely its spatial and social fragmentation, the integrated tool keeps all its value in its specific contexts, the "collateral effects" being certainly less harmful than the positive effects of constitution of strong local entities. However, the need to incorporate the local integrated development initiatives into a broader structure appears essential, on the wake of the French experience of the "*contrats de ville*", and also in vision of the implementation of the European Spatial Development Perspective.

The efficiency of an URBAN in the "dispersed city" will depend greatly on its complementarity with projects of a higher scale (regional or territorial); URBAN could even become a trigger for an overall integration of territorial and urban policies by inserting this dimension in its criteria of selection, in line with the recommendations presented in the *Framework for action*. It appears to us in this way that the concerns related to social cohesion should be subordinated to concerns of urban and of regional planning, in the spirit of the underlying argumentation of both the *Framework for action* and the ESDP.

## 3. Experimentation

An element that appears weakened in the last version of URBAN is the aspect related to experimentation. This element was essential in the Urban Pilot Projects, and then in URBAN I; URBAN II appears more concerned to lean on the asset of these previous experiments, in particular by stressing the development and exchange of experiences and "best practices", as well as the publicity to be given to the experiment and to its results (the budget for these activities being proportionally increased).

If the experience of URBAN has to be exported to the contexts of the "dispersed city", it is obvious that the innovation and experimenting dimensions will on the contrary remain primordial.

Experimenting, here again, is seen above all as a possibility of affirmation of an identity specific to the contexts of the "dispersed city", but also of implementation of a "metapolitan" culture, to take up the term of François Ascher. It must be stressed that if "metapolitan" contexts obviously present important endogenous or "spontaneous" innovation manifestations (these territories have a long transformation and "proper life" history), it does not spare in any way the benefit that these contexts could get from a public policy, mainly in terms of collective investment but also of affirmation of a public culture in the joint participation of private and public sectors in an innovative project. Experimenting, beyond the component related to the adaptation of integrated policy methodologies of urban rehabilitation, can be understood from three main perspectives:

1. *a perspective related to public spaces and infrastructures* : experimenting is here understood as a reaction to the two tendencies now dominant which see on the one hand the re-proposal of the image of stereotyped urbanity, so much in the traditional operations of urban renewal of the historical cores (pedestrian streets, embellishment, etc.) than in the carrying out of new ex-novo centralities (shopping malls, etc.), and on the other hand the imagery of surmodernity, on show in most contemporary car-linked buildings (new commercial and industrial compounds, service-stations, etc.), imagery as simplistic and reductive as the first one, and not as "obvious" or "spontaneous" as its functionalistic touch would like to suggest. To this end, the need for an integrated and innovative approach in the infrastructure project [SMETS 2001] is also thinkable and desirable at local level. Moreover, and mainly in the case of the "included village" in reticular metropolitan context, the need for intermodality has to be underlined, as it constitutes a fundamental dimension in the development of a balanced and "sustainable" urban system, objective of the ESDP. In this way, the project of infrastructure also becomes an important element in the struggle against social exclusion, by the possibilities of interchange and integration it offers from the territorial to the local scale.
2. *A second perspective related to the landscape dimension* : this perspective, that one can connect conceptually and functionally to the first, is a key element in the spatial and functional innovation specific to the metropolitan landscapes, the natural space being a fundamental and, to a certain extent, threatened heritage and resource of the "dispersed city". The productive dimension of the natural space, which often presents unsuspected dynamics and flexibility [BODSON – BODSON 1999], within all its conflictual aspects in relation to the residential uses of the territory, is of course part of this perspective.
3. *a third perspective related to the typological dimension and to new "ways of life"* : this dimension is of primary importance, and concerns the introduction of a greater typological variety into the offer of houses and, in a more general way, into the search of social integration through the habitat. At this dimension refer the exhortations to "densify" the contexts of dispersion, which obviously do not take on the same importance in all realities (one thinks of the Milanese metropolitan context, which has extremely high densities, i.e. if compared to the Flemish Brussels-Antwerpen-Gent triangle context, where the local government is imposing a politics of densification to fight urban sprawl and landscape destruction). One could also in this respect hope for a bringing together, at least from an intellectual point of view, the URBAN and EUROPEAN initiatives (we think more specifically, for the problems specific to the

"dispersed city", at the EUROPAN 6 competition devoted to the theme of the "in-between-cities" areas).

As a conclusion, we would like to quote François Ascher, who in his book *"Metapolis ou l'avenir des villes"* calls for an active transformation of the "metapolis" by these words: *"The "local" will obviously not only change with laws and decrees, even if they are necessary. Its revitalization will require the conception of new modes of representation, of participation, of confrontation, of negotiation, of management, adapted to the specific characters of the social and spatial metropolitan forms. (...) The future of the metapoles depends on the possibility of generating a genuine "urban governance", i.e. a system of government which articulates and associates political institutions, social actors and private organizations, in developing and implementing processes of collective choices, able to provoke an active adhesion of the city residents".* (Ascher 1995, p.269)

We do believe that the hypothesis developed in this paper goes in that direction.

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<sup>2</sup> the thesis of Indovina is that the territory of the Veneto is passing from a phase of "diffuse urbanization" to the constitution of a genuine "diffuse city", *city* in its functionality, *diffuse* in its spatial organization: "*The criticism according to which this "diffuse city" is missing intensity and continuity does not seem founded to me, in that if the territory under consideration also had these very characteristics, it would be a city (or a metropolis, or whatever else), but not a "diffuse city". This terminology (...) indicates a new territorial phenomenon*". (p.16, translation V.B.)

<sup>3</sup> the notion of "Functional Urban Region" is at the center of the debate on the delimitation of the metropolitan areas, which can be dated back to the early 1950's with the definition of the *Standard Metropolitan Areas* by the US Bureau of Census – see [PUMAIN AND ALII. 1991]

<sup>4</sup> this issue is related to the wide-ranging problem of the delimitation of the urban regions, realities still and evermore presenting a "variable geometry", a problem which was described at a statistical level (for the development of a harmonized European statistical system, in particular with a view to comparability) by Denise Pumain and the P.A.R.I.S. team of the C.N.R.S: "*The various phases of the history of urbanization, although common to all the european countries, and increasingly simultaneous, could produce urban fabrics that are difficult to characterize by similar measures, whether it is in terms of population, house or activity densities, in terms of continuity of constructions, or of organization of the districts... Additionally, the European states and their statistical institutions worked out varied instruments to determine at various times the city concept.*" [PUMAIN AND ALII. 1991, p.7] (translation V.B.)

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note the direct relationship between the "reticular metropolis" and the famous "blue banana" [BRUNET 1989], especially in the sense that the latter study certainly informed importantly the formulation of the hypotheses of the European Spatial Development Perspective.

<sup>6</sup> a systematic work of typologization of the phenomenon of dispersion at a european level does not exist, to our knowledge; such a typologization would be useful not only to give an account of the european dispersed city's diversity, but to develop comparative analysis's of contexts which share a certain number of functional, socio-economical and spatial characteristics (type of demographic evolution, structuring element, morphological configuration, etc.) .

<sup>7</sup> the variety of these contexts within the "dispersed city" and their inner endogenous characteristics convert them into very good case-studies to consider a local action aimed at developing a more balanced european urban system: "*The typologies of the European urban governance should be able to refer to the various territorial forms (nodal, reticular nuclear power fragmented, etc.) that the urban phenomenon takes nowadays, that even independently of the dimensions, delimitations and preestablished geometries. The important thing is to recognize that to each one of these forms correspond sociability circles connected with daily life, which find their "plug" under certain specific conditions of the local environments. Such frameworks would constitute the only relatively stable territorial supports for local collective actions able today to resist the destabilising pushes transmitted by the overall networks, and to interact with them.*" Dematteis G., "Représentations spatiales de l'urbanisation européenne", in [BAGNASCO - LE GALÈS 1997, p.91] (translation V.B.)

<sup>8</sup> for a general panorama on this myth in relation to the contemporary city, see [VIGANÒ, 1999]; for a descriptive essay on the particular case of Belgium, whose government developed a conscious policy of spreading the working class in the rural territories since the very beginning of the twentieth century, based on a strong railway development and private housing programs, see [DE MEULDER AND ALII 1999]

<sup>9</sup> in relation to this aspect, a very important issue one has to be aware of when working on the "dispersed city", and on the "contemporary city" as a whole, is the scale of observation and of description, for many expressions and concepts used are often misleading – we can think of terms like "mixité", "fragment", "social exclusion", and of course "density" (see [AMPHOUX AND ALII, 1999]; this whole issue can also be related to that of the statistical tools, see [PUMAIN AND ALII, 1991]).

<sup>10</sup> "*In the métropole, solidarity, collective practices, consciousness of common interests are only established in a very little proportion on the basis of proximity... Conditions are satisfied so that the neighbour can become a "foreigner". And it is in this possible but non necessary indifference, that metapolitan "urbanity" is being built, conceived as a social and physical framework which, by maximizing the freedom of each individual, opens the possibility for neighbours of sharing places, and of sharing or not practices or opinions.*" [ASCHER 1995, p.150, translation V.B.]

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<sup>11</sup> document COM (1998) 605-def – In the introduction to this document, the Commission explains the context in which it was laid down: “*In May 1997 the Commission adopted the communication “Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union”(COM(97)197) launching a wide discussion on urban policies and stimulating a great deal of interest from EU institutions. The Ministers of Regional Policy and Spatial Planning have welcomed the move by the Commission. The European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee have adopted opinions that urge the Commission to take further action. Local government associations and individual cities and towns have also responded favourably. To follow-up and reflect this discussion, the Commission has decided to present a European Union Framework for Action for Sustainable Urban Development.*”

<sup>12</sup> this leads to the very important issue of government and/or governance of the metropolitan areas (see i.e. the discussions for setting-up “metropolitan areas” according to the law 142/1990 in Italy).

<sup>13</sup> “*In the economic, social and environmental order, one witnesses a rapid development of the links existing between the cities and the regions which surround them. When they present major inertia, the institutional structures can badly be adapted to these various changes. It is essential to improve cooperation between municipalities and to take integrated approaches, based on the needs and the possibilities of the functional urban areas, if one intends to achieve the objectives arising to durability and to improve the effectiveness of the interventions of the public sector at the level of the EU.*” in *Framework ...*, “Annex: Challenges to take up for the European cities”

<sup>14</sup> see the opinion of the European Court of Auditors on the URBAN program, OJEC 2001/C 124/01, paragraph. 27.

<sup>15</sup> all these criticisms are connected, in a way or another, with one of the major strengths (which of course is also a weakness) of the program : its deliberate will to remain open and flexible.

<sup>16</sup> Cremaschi M., in [INU/MINISTERO LAVORI PUBBLICI, 2000, P.31] (translation V.B.)

<sup>17</sup> decision of 28 April 2000, see OJEC 2000/C 141/04

<sup>18</sup> Conclusions and recommendations of the Commission's replies to the Court of Auditors' special report on the URBAN initiative, paragraph 65

<sup>19</sup> in this way, the *Framework for action* of the Commission referred, concerning the LIFE program (interested in natural environmental issues), to the necessity to consider “*...expanding the scope for urban projects, especially innovative and demonstration projects which encourage integrated approaches and contribute to sustainable development including actions to measure and reduce the ecological footprints of urban areas, to convert areas of urban sprawl to sustainable suburbs (“retro-fitting”) and to reduce transport demand in urban areas*” [EUROPEAN COMMISSION 1998, action 19, p.27]; it has not been done when the revision of the LIFE regulation took place, in 1999