

# A new urban question<sup>1</sup>

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During the last twenty years I had the opportunity with Paola Viganò, to study several European cities. By studying I mean that we tried through some projects to improve their situation, solving their main problems, and giving them a vision for a possible future. It was a long research by design; a long trip in different situations.

Each one of these cities is different: some are small cities, others are large metropolitan areas; some are southern cities, others are situated in the different context of Northern Europe; they have different institutional frameworks, different social structures and different economies. But they have something in common, something that is very general and probably concerns the entire western world. I'll call it «a new urban question».

## The urban question defined

Let me start with some banal concepts: many observers agree upon foreseeing an important urbanization process that will involve the world population in the near future when most of it will live in large metropolitan areas or, in any case, in highly urbanized regions. This process coincides in fact with an important spatial distribution of the population. Individuals and social groups with different cultural backgrounds will more and more mix together especially in highly urbanized regions.

What the words «highly urbanized» will mean is not very clear; there are, on the planet, many and different areas that are highly urbanized. These areas have developed in different periods and they are both different and contemporaries. Some emblematic examples are Paris, the XIX<sup>th</sup> century icon, as London, Vienna or Berlin. These cities are different from New York or Hong Kong and the other vertical cities that are the icons of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. All these cities are, on the other hand, very different from the North-Western Metropolitan Area, the vast area of the diffused urbanization located between Lille, Brussels, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Amsterdam. My first hypothesis is that all these metropolitan areas and regions must face, in the near future, similar problems, that, however, will be differently defined and articulated according to different spatial morphologies as well as different, social, economic and institutional morphologies.

Many observers also agree on the consequences and the risks of climate change and especially global warming. The in-

*I processi contemporanei di trasformazione della città, come la concentrazione di larga parte della popolazione in aree altamente urbanizzate, il trade-off tra costi ambientali e vantaggi sociali della crescente mobilità e il legame tra nuove forme di deprivazione multipla e segregazione spaziale, mostrano come si possa definire una nuova questione urbana e come questa richieda sforzi di ricerca e sperimentazione non solo in campo urbanistico. Nel passato, altre trasformazioni dell'economia, della società e del territorio hanno indotto ad elaborare metafore innovative per la comprensione dei processi di urbanizzazione. Anche sulla base delle notevoli esperienze di analisi e planning come quelle di Grand Paris o della regione veneta, Bernardo Secchi sottolinea come queste metafore possano essere il mezzo per generare e trasferire conoscenze attraversando le differenti discipline chiamate a fare fronte alla nuova questione urbana*

Parole chiave: questione urbana; territorio contemporaneo; interdisciplinarietà