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The Scattered City: Descriptions for a Project

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This paper focuses on problems and approaches concerning the scattered city, with reference to the Italian territory. Even so, it provides elements that can be appropriate for other contexts. The transformation of the territories of the scattered city into new urbanities must be based on structural elements, such as centralities, pathways, and open-space system. These elements need to be linked to preexisting territorial structure, such as historic urban centers. We consider large-scale project as a valuable instrument for these territories. This approach will be explored through three topics: scale, urban form and existing context. A project explaining such elements will be given at the end of the paper.

Introduction

This paper concentrates on an European-spread urban phenomenon that has been defined as “scattered city”. This phenomenon concerns 70% of the Italian territory, with several negative effects. These territories are often considered as a *manqué* city; interpretations diverge; however, a deeper knowledge of this phenomena is therefore necessary. Knowledge and transformation are in this case elements of the same process: in our approach, analysis and design are linked to each other, which justifies the title “the scattered city: descriptions for a project”.

Our investigation focuses on the Italian territory; its characteristics make it totally different in relation to American urban sprawl, considered as “primary model that has colonized open space, but also urban time, out of foundation cities, with no historical references, and leading to a feeble and discontinuous urban fabric” (Purini, 2012; p.242). On the contrary, our case-study territory is based on “endogenous growth dynamics of rural territories based on dense network settlements, little and medium-sized urban centers, inherited infrastructure” (Lanzani, 2012; p.171-172). Concerning the Italian case, this kind of scattered city is to be detected mainly in diffused productive districts, in valley tracks and coastal contexts.

These phenomena have given rise to Francesco Indovina’s *Città diffusa* (Indovina, 1990), whose primary characteristics are as follows:

- low-dense housing and a multiplicity of open spaces (streets, widenings, rural areas);
- multifunctional typologies;
- auto-referring construction;
- absence of territorial hierarchy;
- loss of relation with context and local architecture.

During the 90s, another typology of settlement has been grafted on these territories, in spite of local peculiarities. This phenomenon is composed of: mono-functional centralities (multiplex movie-theaters, shopping centers, discotheques, fitness centers, research facilities) that refer to large-scale territory; of huge productive constructions, and intensive housing; fast-flowing roads that do not take into account of pre-existing connections.

In this way, the Italian *città diffusa* has been transformed in a more complex settlement, that has originated several interpretations. The term *città diffusa* itself has been replaced with new words, that take into account of this evolution: infinite-city, continuous-city, metropolitan area, city-of-cities, metropolitan archipelago, within-city, city-out-of-the city (Bonomi, Abruzzese, 2004; Morandi, d’Emilio, 2010; Indovina, 2009; Sieverts, 1997; Fantin, Morandi, Piazzini, Ranzato, 2012).

How to look at scattered urbanization

It is clear that operative intervention in these contexts need to be prepared with proper knowledge and tools; indeed, the existent instruments are rather inappropriate, and have even emphasized the mediocre quality of these territories. Concerning scattered urbanization, two positions emerge currently:

- execute a total substitution of settlement elements, using modern town-planning categories and models;
- consider these settlements as the future settlements, and therefore accept them as they are.

These views are only apparently conflicting; in fact, both positions refuse to consider these settlements as containing a potential able to produce urban and social qualities. We therefore propose a third view, which is based on accepting scattered urbanization - though with awareness of the need of intervention on these territories - in order to confer the complexity of European urban-living tradition. Therefore, we need to deal with a city that belongs to urbanity for what regards its culture and praxis, but without spatial and ar-



chitectural qualities of the historic city.

Francesco Indovina remarks that, for the first time, we have to deal with a fracture between urban culture and urban morphology (Morandi, 2012). We observe a city that hasn't found its spatial expression yet. Scattered urbanization isn't then a representation of the future, rather an occasion to shape it. Therefore, it is appropriate to start with what already exists: spaces, architecture, life-styles, encouraging their development in order to assure the definition of a new urban space, capable to respond to social and environmental needs of today's life. Knowing and recognizing new realities of scattered settlements constitute the first step to achieve a new design, able to transform them.

Meanings and values related to these territories can be explored through the observation of how they are used in reality. Through use and practices, value is given to space (Morandi, 1996); a new identity of the inhabitant of scattered territories is defined. Referring to the inhabitant of these territories, Indovina uses the term liquid identity, that "as water, he/she doesn't have his own shape, but changes along with circumstances, enjoying crowded places without prejudice, considering its territory as composed of different things waiting to be experienced, accepting diversity (of people and places) as an experience possibility" (Indovina, 2005, p.69).

The construction of this identity is therefore done through heterogeneous elements, such as centralities, pathways, and open-space system. We'll rapidly go through their characteristics, in order to define our approach to transform scattered territories into urbanity. Referring to each topic, it is appropriate to compare town planning propositions with the wider problem of recomposition of two territorial systems. These two aspects are nowadays still separated: on one side, the theme of scattered city - referring to proximity-scale - and the metropolitan system - referring to large-scale - on the other side.

Contemporary territorial centralities

The territories of scattered urbanization lack in centralities; this term refers to places that are characterized by a plurality of functions and a multi-scale fruition. In fact, existing centralities in the scattered city are mono-functional and used only by part of the population. An example: leisure and space-time centralities (malls, multiplex movie-theaters, wellness centers, discotheques), which are accessible only through fast-flowing roads: which are not part of the proximity accessibility system. An opposite example: neighborhoods of council housing. In this case, local micro-centralities are attended by inhabitants of the district, and do not concern large-scale dynamics.

In this situation, the inhabitant determines a complex centrality inside himself, linking together different places he has detected. In this way, an individual space-time centrality is created, to whom physical places do not correspond necessarily. Yet, commercial centralities, thanks to their popularity and their image, can represent new references for scattered territories and smaller centralities, and can contribute to build new urban fragments (Morandi, 2006). On the other hand, council housing districts can become new centralities, thanks to their morphological coherence and to the presence of high urban design standards (Di Biagi, 2008; Hetzfeld & Moutton, 2006). In both cases, urban design must provide a system of local connections, that can often be based on ancient rural areas.

Historic centers

If maintained as complex centralities and sources of collective memory, small historic centers, can also become part of scattered urbanization. The point is to avoid their transformation into mono-functional places (commerce, or either monument contemplation), in order to let them become available for activities typical of the scattered city.

In this sense, it is appropriate to develop an urban analysis capable able to consider relations within different typologies and their use in a historical and contemporary perspective (Morandi, 1998), in view of potential characterization of open spaces and morphological qualities of historic centers.



Urban pathways

Crossing is the principal activity in scattered urbanization. Thanks to this activity, inhabitants recompose within themselves the lack of complexity that distinguishes every single urban fragment. Extreme mobility is therefore a fundamental characteristic of metropolitan life: “we do not only live in places, we also live in the flux that links different places, that generates new places of its own” (Rullani, 2004, p.70). These mobile fluxes change in time and in space, and connect territories on the basis of a network configuration. Movement is, in De Certeau’s words, “contemporary practice of assignment of meaning” (De Certeau, 1990, p.134); thanks to pathways observation, it is possible to redefine urban structure in the scattered city.

In this case, design must focus on letting the urban system – basically a functional system - become a spatial and morphological-based system. In this sense, a contribution can come from the observation of local uses of the whole displacement system, both referring to proximity relations and hubs within local and territorial networks. On this basis, localization and design of connections can take place at the same time, in order to provide a unique and intelligible open space system. The aim therefore becomes the development of urban pathways, meant as “synthesis between pathway spatial configuration and personal values and interpretation conferred by inhabitants” (Morandi, 2003, p.18).

Thanks to flux analysis in the scattered city, including their interpretation, it is possible to achieve knowledge of values and meanings that seem to be lacking in these areas. This analysis can lead to a connection design able to involve all vacant places of the scattered city.

Open-space system

Urban wastelands in the scattered city are numerous and often unused. Using them, doesn’t mean to build them, rather to keep them as a reserve of available and convertible space. They can lend themselves to temporary uses, in order to insert spontaneous practices in urban context. In fact, these activities are more and more prevailing in inhabitant’s everyday life¹.

Functionalist conception of open space as collective space, has been recently replaced by the concept of common space (Di Giovanni, 2010), the latter being able to contain multiple uses, and to include all urban elements, including contradictions. Therefore, common space can be defined as

“an open zone, continuously changing, exposed to transition and pause, to fast crossing and exchange (of languages, experiences, projects). This space is fluid, contingent, not necessarily provided with a precise function” (Lazzarini, 2011, p.168).

In this view, a new idea of collective space can be developed, in order to go beyond a static interpretation and to achieve a dynamical vision, already detected by Benjamin in Parisian *boulevard* as “being always restless, always in movement”. In this perspective, open spaces meant as common spaces become “with no belonging identity, with no symbolic cohesion nor coercion, without assuming any form of representation” (Nancy, 1999, p.52); this refers also to Bauman’s thought, as he focus on social relationships which do not necessarily entail the belonging to a particular *milieu* (Bauman, 2001). In this way, collective space can be inserted in flux system of the scattered city.

An important role is assured by agricultural spaces. Scattered urbanization are full of confined agricultural fields. It is known that these spaces have always been considered by town planners as a reserve for new urban enlargements. In order to develop urbanity in the scattered city, it is appropriate for these fields to remain agricultural spaces. Nowadays, many researchers think about possible roles for these spaces in contemporary city (i.e. Donadieu, 1998). On this topic, we will just remind the potentialities concerning food supply and employment.

1 We remind therefore the exhibition “Post-it city”, that took place in Madrid during 2011. In this exhibition, many examples of temporary uses of urban wastelands are presented; another example could be the United States Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale (2012).



To face with the topic concerning wastelands, or even empty spaces more generically, it is also proper to develop some considerations about urban fabric density. Often, it is considered as opportune to densify the scattered city, in order to re-build an urban image, and to limit the waste of land. Nevertheless, it is necessary to face with this topic reminding that a demand of low density mono-familiar housing exists, and does not deserve an *a-priori* response. This demand relates to individual needs, typically ignored by reformist town-planning; yet these needs can take part into urbanity construction.

The problem of individuality has been recently examined by some French researchers (Bourdin, 2005; Ascher, 2009), who didn't let themselves intimidate by anti-individualist rhetoric. Concerning this point, Indovina remarks that "in developed countries, defense and value of individuality, and not of individualism, needs to be increased: it is necessary to clearly determinate elements of individual and social life that make people free to express and fulfill their desires (collectively defined as licit). It is maybe the absence of value of individuality, that leads people to individualism, a state of mind which is, by the way, fomented with conservative and reactionary politics" (Morandi, 2012, p.138).

In order to fulfill individual housing demand, it is suitable that "designers examine low-density examples, to propose (...) new urban forms (...), non-intensive neighborhoods and typologies that do not necessarily end up in sprawl solutions. In other words, design solutions must be equipped with qualities as ecological allotments, urban centralities and transport systems. We need to produce low-density and high-quality spaces" (Ascher, 2009, p.44).

Project criteria for a project in the scattered city

We will conclude this paper with an example of design experience that is meaningful referring to its methodology, which is to identify potentialities in a district of the Italian scattered city. This experience aims to design a new urban centrality and to activate new relations and connection systems. First of all, we will nevertheless provide general criteria for this kind of situations.

We must consider that we explore a large-scale phenomena. This approach does not take into account of administrative boundaries: it occurs that they often are not in no way related to real uses of territory. At the same time, the reorganization of these territories involves local-scale projects, which can be more likely to be recognized by inhabitants, and respond to their immediate demands. It is opportune to verify "the possibility of using the critical mass of little and average spaces, which are not exploited or are emptying; these spaces can be a lever in a settlement re-composition hypothesis, in order to support housing, accessibility and development demands" (Zanfi, 2011; p.105).

Architecture is also a related topic. In the scattered city, we observe an increasing fragmentation of architectural interventions; an increasing gap between architecture and context; an increasing exhibition of each building, regardless of scales and quality levels. We need therefore to focus more on the urban dimension of buildings. Recently, Gregotti has outlined that, referring to the topic of scattered city, all life-styles and spatial phenomena are systemically denied by architectures that refuse to face the urban spatial system, "emphasizing the singularity of architectural esthetics, denying the value of the space between things, their relations, combining objects randomly" (Gregotti, 2011, p. 81). Every architectural object in the scattered city, from the ordinary to the most refined, is designed and lived as being centripetal, since it doesn't consider what is outside itself (Magnelli, 2007).

We underline once again that our approach takes its origins from existing phenomena: the aim is to confer urban quality to the existing city, rather than to build new realities unrelated to the context. In conclusion to these remarks on methodological aspects, we would like to provide further characteristics in order to renovate the scattering city. Elements can be found in large-scale project, meant as a process that deals with urban history, and which is able to take into account open space as well as urban fabric renovation, focusing also on morphological aspects. Working with urban large-scale projects enables us to acknowledge transformation as a structural element of the scattered city, since connections depend on proximity rather than a preconceived order; in this way, space becomes the result of crossing mobile and multi-functional entities

(Abruzzese, De Michelis, 2011). In fact, urban large-scale projects can contain possible transformations that can take place in the course of time, by a plurality of individuals; in designing phases as well as in constructive phases, it could take into account of evolutions in demands or uses (Durand, 2012).

A project exemplification: designing a new urban centrality²

The following outlines concern a district of the Florence-Prato plain, between the Calenzano rail station, on the railway line from Florence to Prato, and the Gigli shopping center. The aim is to design a new centrality through the renovation of existing fabric and the connection and valorization of existing open spaces, green areas and pathways.

The design of the new centrality is based on the following principles:

- a strong image value, based on architectural structure and typology of Gigli shopping center, and the quality of its internal spaces. This characteristic allows the creation of an attraction dynamics, and can provide spatial uses that go beyond shopping activity, introducing serendipity;
- the Marinella stream, as well as its appurtenances areas, represent a green mark that can be linked to the existing Gigli park, through the parking areas;
- the surrounding industrial warehouses can be transformed in service and commercial areas;
- the observed change of functions concerning the railway areas (from industrial to services) should be sustained;
- the renovation of the urban garden opposite to the railway station, as well as the presence of a housing estate next to the station building, must be taken in account.

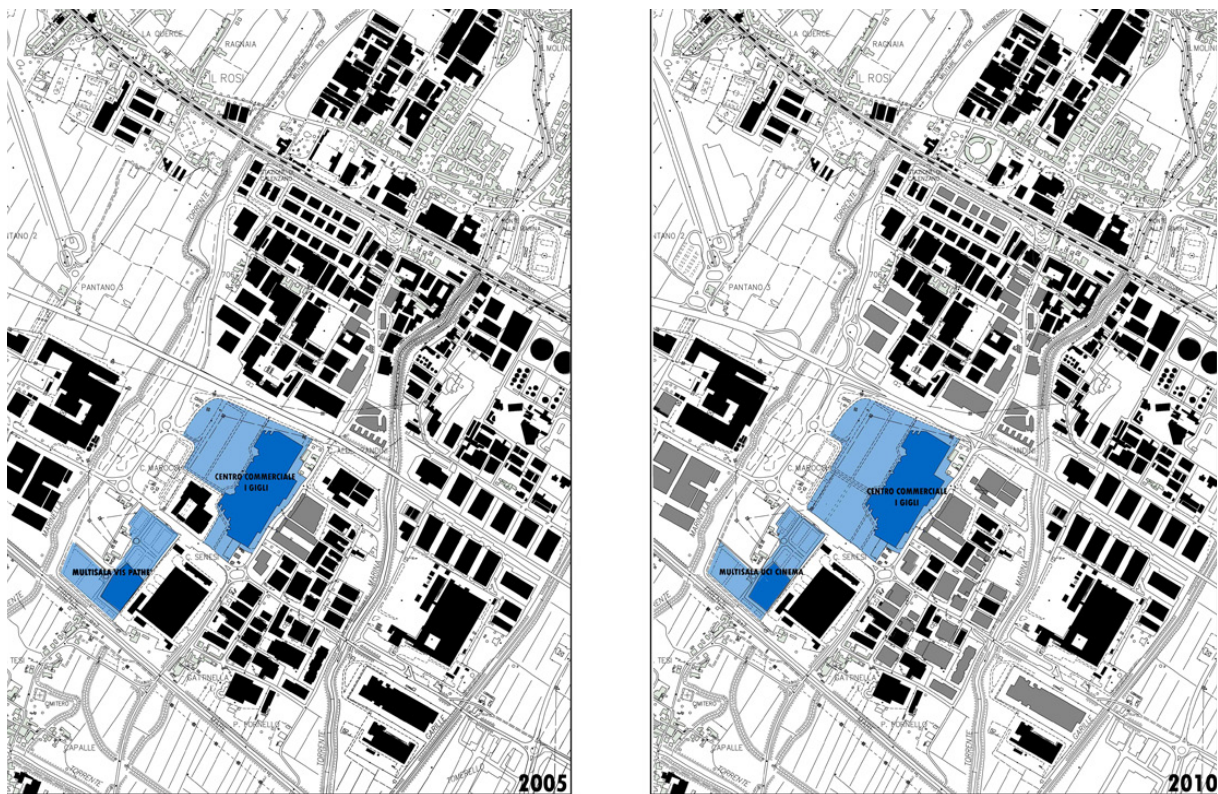


Figure 1 | Functions evolution (2005-2010). In black, industrial production; in gray, commercial facilities; in white, housing. In blue, Gigli shopping center and multiplex movie-theater

² This paragraph has been written with reference to a project accomplished by M. Morandi, F. Bai, D. Screpanti.



The design of the new centrality is based on the following actions:

- confirming the iconic value of the Gigli shopping center, in order to let its insertion in the territorial system become more continuous. This action leads to integration with the multiplex movie-theater, connections increase between the shopping center and the existing park, thanks to green paths in the parking area.
- Extending the Marinella stream park up to the railway station; in this way, the green system can supply the industrial warehouses in the North, and can take part of the new urban centrality.
- The actual transformation of industrial warehouses in commerce facilities cannot be limited to supporting the existing phenomena. The industrial identity has provided a chaotic, careless and narrow spatial organization. Every lot is introverted, appurtenances areas are the only existing open spaces; the road system is conceived exclusively for car traffic, with no spaces for pedestrian flux. Therefore, a complete reorganization scheme is needed, in order to create new commercial typologies related to the street, as well as the design of open spaces centered on pedestrian priority.
- Concerning the industrial area close to the railway station, an urban renovation is not necessary. In fact, morphology of the streets makes pedestrians and cars coexistence possible. Concerning the littlest warehouses already transformed in commercial facilities, a typological renovation is preferred.

Based on existing road system, an urban *boulevard* can be created, through qualitative interventions; this pedestrian *boulevard* could go across the industrial district, connecting Gigli shopping center to Calenzano railway station and to the housing scheme next to it. On a larger scale, the project consists of a central linear system composed of two elements: a long urban pathway conveniently renovated, linking different functions (commercial, facilities, residential and territorial connexion), and a naturalistic pathway including the park and the Marinella stream.

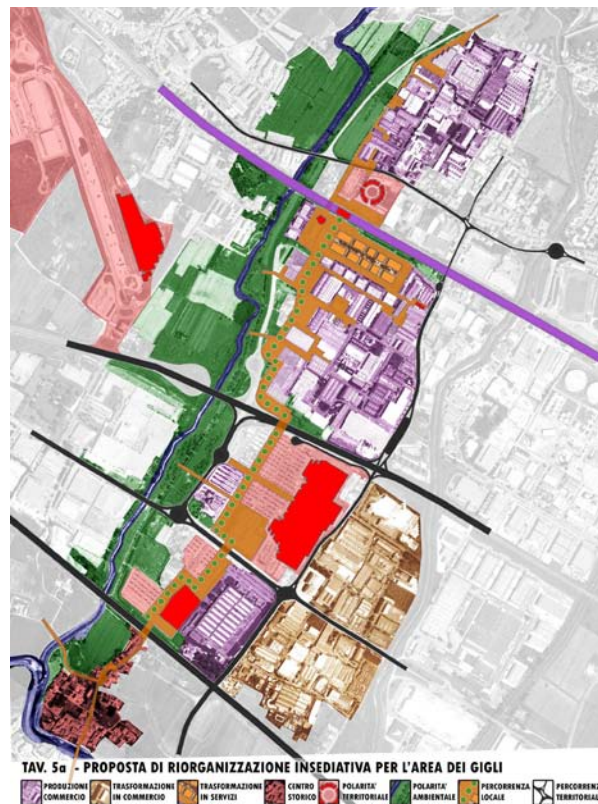


Figure 2 | Design proposition

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