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**edited by / sous la direction de
Rosa De Marco & Cristina Mattiucci**

TERRITOIRES EN DÉBAT

Discussing landscape(s)
in contemporary metropolitan realities



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About mountains becoming cities. Relationships between the city and the hinterland of Trento

by Corrado Diamantini

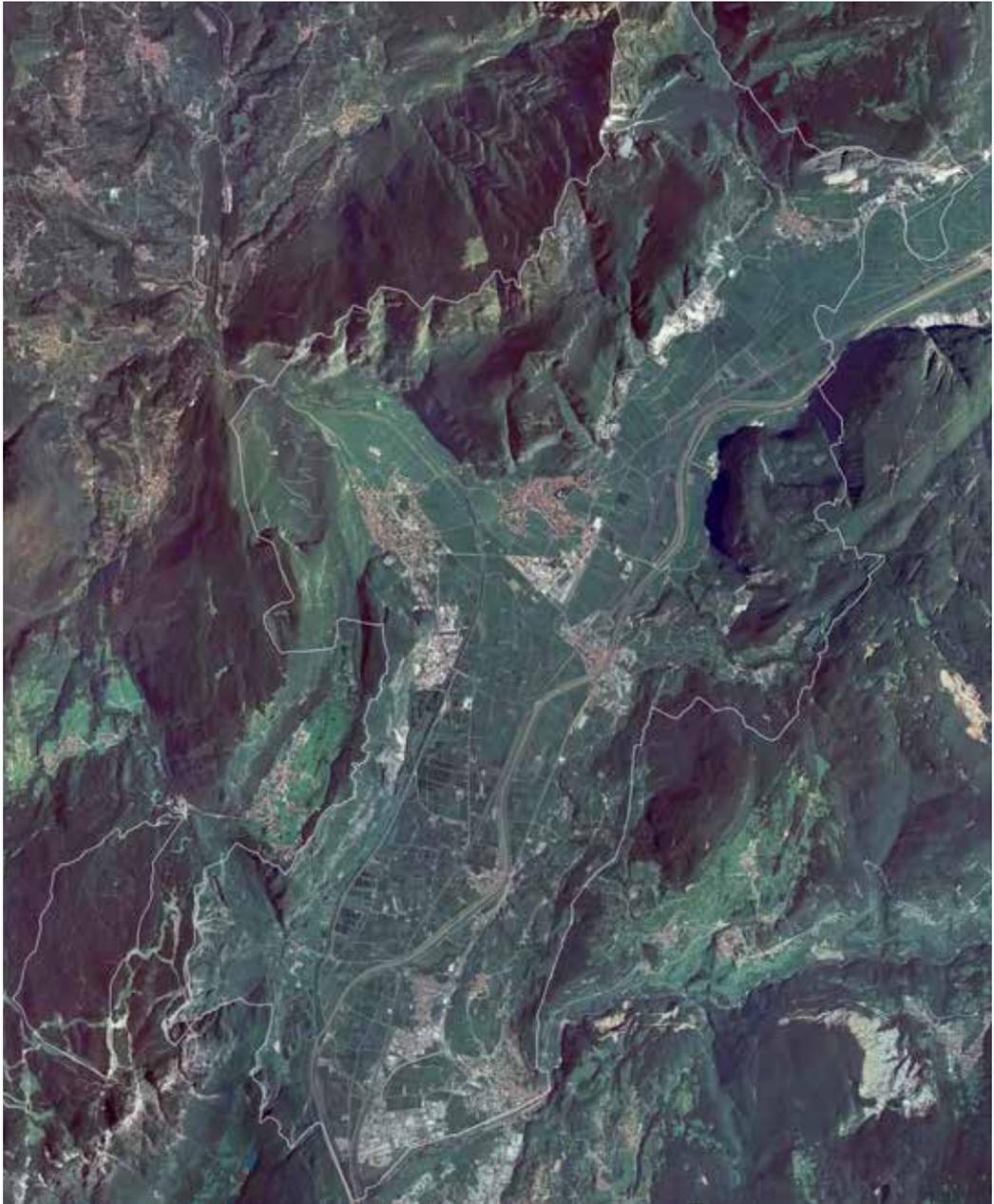
In a recent essay De Matteis (2010) identifies the rapid advance of the effects of global change, the accelerating dominance-dependency relationship between plain and mountain and the drop in the population in many mountain contexts as triggers for processes able to radically and rapidly transform the development conditions of alpine systems.

According to De Matteis, it is no use resisting these processes with a closed mind. The responsible role to adopt should, on the contrary, be one of openness, entering into negotiation with the agents of change. On condition however that the mountain communities remain firmly in control of the threads of this negotiation. The aim must be to achieve independent local-centred development in which it is essential for the mountain to become at the same time city. A perspective, the latter, shared by many other authors (M. Perlick, P. Messerli, W. Batzing, 2001; M. Perlik, P. Messerli, 2004, C. Fourny, 2005; Nared, 2010).

In confirmation of the significance of this perspective, De Matteis recalls that the mountain which still continues to withstand is the mountain where there are cities like Trento, Bolzano, Innsbruck, Chur, Lucerne, Bellinzona, Grenoble, Briançon, adding that these cities are mostly located in territories with (and capable of exercising) a certain degree of self-government, which has allowed (and allows) autonomous policies to be implemented. This self-government has also made it possible to develop and express at local level both a vision and an ability to plan and programme, without which this openness and negotiating capacity would lose effectiveness, if not also sense.

In this framework, however, some authors emphasize the need for the Alpine region to create different cities from the ones produced by the processes of contemporary urbanisation, meaning that the Alpine city should be able to express own distinct characters, if not a new urbanity.

In these notes I will be examining two of these themes. On the one hand, the fundamental importance of negotiation founded on self-government and, on the other, the desirable distinction between the Alpine city and the contemporary city, with reference to the Trentino region, which



11.1. The Rotaliana Königsberg District (source: Autonomous province of Trento)

has demonstrated in the course of some decades its capacity not only to withstand in front of global change, but also to carve out an important role in an international context.

These two themes act on two different scales: the former, the theme of negotiating capacity, involves the supra-local (if not supra-national) dimension of the relationship with global change; the latter, that of a different urbanity, involves mainly the spatial dimension of the relationships between the city and its hinterland. The two themes are in any case interacting, as both are related to the common link of local governance. It is, in fact, the nature of the relationships between mountain and plain and, with regard to the mountain, between city and its hinterland that can sustain the construction of a different urbanity.

Self-government and negotiating capacity

Trento Province has a special statute of autonomy, sanctioned by a constitutional law which gives it specific legislative and administrative powers, functions, structures, personnel and relative financial resources, by reason of a centuries-old tradition of self-government based on the direct management of its own resources (Cerea, 2013). It is above all because of this autonomy that, at the beginning of the 1960s, the Trentino successfully initiated a development process characterised by marked territorial diversification, solicited in turn by public action.

Factors contributing to this diversification include, on the one hand, the cities (Trento and Rovereto) with their subdivision of urban functions and on the other, a number of local contexts which have specialised in either agricultural and food production or tourism, backed by an efficient infrastructural network, an adequate offer of services and the widespread presence of small enterprises, in many cases held together by a deeply rooted cooperative system (Diamantini, 1996). When necessary, this development process has successfully interacted with the changes at both national and international level, in particular north of the Alps, successfully guaranteeing the entire region a level of well-being not just high, as shown by numerous indicators, but also solid, as confirmed by the considerable resilience of the local economy at a time when growth in Italy as a whole has levelled off, if not regressed.

It should therefore come as no surprise that the planning and programming capabilities of this area are constantly aimed at reinforcing the conditions behind this growth, with priority in particular to innovation, and at correcting some of the negative externalities introduced principally by global change.

In a context characterised in any case by metropolitan-type strong points, such as local control of the credit system and control of hydroelectric generation (Aaster, 2009a; Bonomi, 2010), it is worth emphasising the way in which the Trentino has since some time been going down the road suggested by De Matteis, Perlik and Messerli mentioned previously, with

the aim of creating an Alpine city, in which the network of metropolitan functions is anchored in the local context, in particular as regards research and development in sectors such as energy production from renewable sources, environmental protection, high quality agricultural production and soil defence.

For example, although a small university dating back to the 1960s, Trento University is constantly at the top of the national classifications for research and internationalisation and is also well positioned at international level. Also occupying leading positions are research institutes such as the Bruno Kessler Foundation and the Edmund Mach Foundation and cultural institutions such as the Trento MUSE and the Rovereto MART.

But it is in correction of the negative externalities introduced by global change that the role and negotiating capacities of the Autonomous Province emerge, pointing out various actions and attitudes coherent over time and a refusal to accept decisions imposed from outside.

This is particularly true in the sector of major infrastructure, which has for some time been one of the crucial themes in the entire Alpine space (Molitor et al., 2001; Arnaud, 2003). An emblematic case is Pan-European Corridor I. The section of this corridor going from the lower Inn Valley up the Sill Valley, then down the valleys of the Isarco and Adige rivers is perhaps the most problematic. This is due on the one hand to the morphology of the areas it crosses which makes construction highly complex and costly and on the other to the potential damage which could be caused to the places it crosses, in terms of both loss of agricultural land and the effects on the environment.

It must be said that the objective of creating a fast rail link between the Inn Valley and the Adige Valley goes a long way back in time, when the aim was to create the conditions necessary to reinforce the links and exchanges between the mountain communities along these valleys. And again, shortening of the distance between the areas located on either side of the Alps in the 1980s can be interpreted as a means of incentivising trade, in particular between the Veneto and Bavaria.

In the mid-1990s, this railway line became a European project and the construction procedure began. In 1996, the European company Brenner Basis Tunnel, whose shareholders include Rete Ferroviaria Italiana, the Republic of Austria and Land Tirol, was set up with the aim of promoting study and design of the Brenner Basis Tunnel.

The idea of a fast railway line is therefore the outcome of a reflection also made at local level and about which a dialogue has been underway for some time among the administrations involved. One example of this is the Comunità d'Azione Ferrovia del Brennero, founded in 1991, in which the Provinces and Länder crossed by the railway and the Chambers of Commerce of Verona, Trento, Bolzano, Tirol and Bayern collaborate. This collaboration has a dual purpose - firstly to make common decisions on both improvement of the existing railway and construction of the Corridor and

secondly, to keep the populations living along the railway informed about progress in its construction.

Within this consortium, Trento Autonomous Province has supported the project for a high capacity railway, in the conviction that it represents a way of resolving one of the problems most keenly felt in the Alpine area, also mentioned in the Alpine Convention, namely the intense transit of goods by road, a source of environmental problems denounced on a number of occasions. With the support of Bolzano Autonomous Province and Land Tirol, it has also insisted on reviewing the design proposals for constructing the high capacity railway.

The design initially drawn up in a technical capacity by Rete Ferroviaria Italiana and following a surface route along the valleys of the Isarco and Adige rivers was rejected in favour of an alternative involving laying the new tracks in tunnels as far as possible.

This alternative has been confirmed at institutional level. The part of the route crossing the Alto Adige-Süd Tirol Region therefore seems not just for the most part already defined, in agreement with Rete Ferroviaria Italiana, but has also been taken on board in the urban planning schemes of the local authorities concerned, with the necessary formal modifications. As regards the part of the railway line crossing the Trentino, during the environmental impact assessment procedures, which are one of the prerogatives of the Autonomous Province, the Provincial Environmental Committee has given a binding favourable opinion on the tunnel route.

On the basis of its experience on flow management, Trento Autonomous Province, together with Bolzano Autonomous Province and Land Tirol, has also requested that the entire mobility along the corridor be re-organised by a specific authority in order to create synergies between the various road, rail, energy and communications networks in a perspective of transport sustainability and economic viability (Diamantini, 2007).

In other words, on the strength of its independent position, Trento Province has come to the fore as a protagonist in the complex mechanisms of territorial governance, rejecting close-minded or even defensive positions and successfully dialoguing as an equal with metropolitan areas.

Relationships between the city and its hinterland: the case of Rotaliana Königsberg

The start of the growth process which began in the 1960s and led the Trentino to leave behind it a condition of widespread poverty coincided with a process of administrative decentralisation during which the Autonomous Province delegated some of its powers to local districts, coinciding more or less with the major valleys, sufficiently large to require an alternative to the municipal vision.

The local communities in their new administrative units (“comprensori” or districts) were therefore given the right to decide independently on rele-

vant themes, such as land use change, encouraging them to play an active role, considered as a constituent element in support of regional autonomy. In a certain sense, participation of the inhabitants in development decisions reinforced their relationship with their territory and guaranteed the well being of everyone in harmony with the character of the places.

It can be stated that the districts have played an important role in the development diversification I mentioned above, as well as in the resulting differentiation of land use organisation. In all this, the area reaching from Trento to the border with South Tyrol has a different story.

When the districts were established, this became part of a larger area - the Adige Valley District - incorporating the seat of provincial government, the city of Trento. This despite the fact that its characteristics were anything but urban as it was a predominantly agricultural area.

The reasons for grouping them together are contained in the first regional planning scheme approved by the Autonomous Province in 1967, also the first regional planning scheme with institutional value approved in Italy. In that scheme, one of the functions attributed to the Adige Valley District was industrial, with the expectation of several thousands of new jobs in that sector.

But given that the factories could not be set up in Trento, three large industrial areas were created to the north of the city to also accommodate "those factories located in the urban nucleus of Trento which represent a disturbance for both their fumes and their visual impact" (Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 1968).

In other words, a large part of the Adige Valley was placed in a subordinate position with respect to the city, destined in subsequent years to become not only an industrial development site, but also the final destination of the suburbanisation process of numerous often low-income families formerly resident in Trento. It was, of course, a consensual subordination, in the sense that it happened with the approval and collaboration of the local municipalities concerned, particularly during the phase occurring during the 1960s and 1970s, when industrial growth represented the practically obligatory means of achieving the desired aim of overcoming poverty.

The decentralisation process has gone through various phases, culminating now with the establishment of the "Valley Communities", called on to develop a strategy able to make the achievement of higher levels of well-being interact with valorisation of the particular character of the places, starting from the environmental and landscape characteristics. By means of participatory procedures, the local inhabitants have been involved in developing this strategy. The establishment of the Valley Communities has resolved the subordination to the city in the area of the Adige Valley north of Trento, namely the Rotaliana-Königsberg.

The Rotaliana Königsberg Community covers an area going from Lavis, an industrial municipality at the northern edge of the city, to Roverè della Luna, an agricultural area bordering on Alto Adige-Süd Tirol (Fig. 1). This

opens up a new play of relationships in which a city and its hinterland find themselves dialoguing for the first time in recent history, the former having lost its territorial supremacy, although due to its physical contiguity continuing to exert a heavy pressure in terms of demand for land and the use of space, and the latter having to define, by means of a growth strategy, its own otherness with respect to the city, without which it risks becoming engulfed.

And it is in this play of relationships, proposing again the theme of territorial governance on a different scale, that the theme of a new urbanity comes in, in other words, the theme of a city which, as previously emphasised, differs from that produced by contemporary urbanisation processes. And this is possible precisely thanks to the contributions of these new parties and the new assumptions they introduce.

Landscape as key factor of new urbanity

Once it has been established that in alpine regions the cornerstone of the new urbanity involves advanced urban functions whose intrinsic lightness does not weigh on the places and therefore adapts well to their sensitivity, there is still the problem of the perception of its characteristics, which cannot be simply those of plain cities, at the risk of a loss of identity. The theme of the landscape thus ends up as central to construction of this new urbanity.

The landscape cannot, however, be the result of a mere drawing or, worse, a window-dressing exercise vaguely addressed to places, but only the consequence of their aware construction. In turn, this construction cannot be a simple invention, but must be structurally linked to the local milieu, its characteristics and the lifestyles of its inhabitants.

The city of Trento is the result of a process begun in the mid-1800s with major works involving the course of the Adige river, coinciding with construction of the Brennero railway and continuing until the 1930s with the straightening and reinforcing of the banks of rivers and torrents, reclamation of large areas of the valley floor, organisation of the infrastructural network and construction of hydroelectric power plants. It was on this tissue that the subsequent urbanisation developed, with the reinforcement of minor centres following both the establishment of factories and the progressive spread of the built fabric onto areas previously subject to flooding.

After the Second World War, development of the industrial system and infrastructural network (the Brennero motorway in particular) represented the basis for a further phase of expansion which made the traditional urban structure based on a distinct separation between the urban agglomeration and the surrounding countryside definitively obsolete. The recent phase has seen the consolidation of processes now normal in Western countries - reconversion of industrial areas, suburbanisation and diffuse settlement patterns, relocation of commercial and tertiary activities in external areas and reinforcement of the infrastructural network in relation to the accessi-

bility of Trento.

These processes, which should have led first to the “linear city”, then the “extended city” as set forth in the planning schemes of the 1960s and 1970s, were particularly intense in the area between Trento and the border with Alto Adige-Süd Tirol, the Rotaliana-Königsberg. Here the transformations had a profound effect on land use structure. Firstly, by scattering across the open land industrial, storage, loading and unloading areas, hard-standing for vehicles and areas for environmental treatment plants; then by allowing the proliferation of residential buildings with settlement patterns and building typologies unrelated to the places and finally, by considerably extending the infrastructural network and interfering with the hydrographic network (Fig. 2).

These transformations resulted in hybrid suburbs, in which urban functions for which there is no longer room in the city are mixed with agricultural areas, interrupting (with ill-considered local choices) the continuity of the landscape over the entire area between Trento and Bolzano. A continuity once rooted in the history and function of the places (Diamantini, 2012).

Today, the landscape in that part of the Adige Valley running from the city of Trento to the Chiusa di Salorno, extreme northern edge of the Trentino, therefore resembles the random assembly of numerous irregular pieces consisting of urbanised areas and open spaces (Fig. 3). The main traffic arteries, quarries and numerous structures, which have sprung up casually as a function of the distance from the urban centres stand out against this background.

In turn, the built-up areas are in every way heterogeneous, above all as a result of the rigid separation of functions laid down in the urban planning scheme, accentuated by incorrect locations, as well as by the poor quality of the industrial buildings, and the variety of styles placed side by side at random to produce an impression of great disorder. The open spaces which still occupy a considerable part of both sides of the valley as well as a large portion of the valley floor appear preserved on one hand by the natural characteristics, principally the steeply sloping valley sides, and on the other by the value of the agricultural holdings (whose limited extension allows them to be cultivated part-time) which represents a barrier to expansion of the built-up areas.

In the first case, there are woods that cover the sides of the valley, in the second, orchards and vineyards, cultivated alternately according to the evolution of the market demand. In hilly sections, particularly on the orographic left of the Adige River, but also on the right, immediately outside the city there is a well-structured agricultural landscape in which the alternation of woods and vineyards is still able to create attractive patterns (Fig. 4).

On the whole, however, in the mix of high-quality and mediocre landscapes, it is the latter which takes precedence, transmitting the image of building development as rapid as it is random, in which the open spaces have been preserved purely by chance.



11.2. Lavis. Former customs
photo by Anna Da Sacco



11.3. Lavis from Doss del Paion
photo by Paolo Sandri





11.4. San Michele all'Adige
photo by Paolo Sandri

Achieving a new urbanity means above all overturning the paradigm according to which the environs cannot ever be anything more than something available to accommodate the expansion of the city. This is today possible, as shown by the reflection initiated with preparation of the most recent provincial planning scheme, which identifies the results on the landscape as the point of reference for decisions regarding future spatial organisation (Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2007). In fact, the city (namely Trento) on one hand and the Valley Communities on the other are called on to define, together with the local inhabitants, methods for safeguarding and transforming the territory, in conformity with a plan able to create synergies between the development choices and the quality of the places.

The Rotaliana-Königsberg Community has already proposed its own vision of the future, completely distinct from that of urban periphery, emphasising an otherness with regard to the city, fortified by the fact that, alongside traditional urban activities such as industrial production and commercial distribution, in recent years top-quality agricultural production (vine growing and wine-making in particular) has become ever more important. This production is the result of an evolution in cultivation, from mixed crops following valley-floor reclamation in the mid-1800s to fruit growing in the second half of the last century and more recently vine growing based on top-quality grapes and internationally famous brands (Comunità Rotaliana-Königsberg, 2013).

The image proposed remains firmly anchored in diversification of the local economy, but without this leading to protracted conflicts over land use and a progressive degeneration of the places. An image further enhanced by a series of connotations, with reference to encouraging innovation, supporting the most advanced production processes and promotion of a development which does not lead to further land consumption; or again, to the quality of the local area, in the sense both of the services available and the beauty of the places, to be achieved through projects involving re-utilisation of degraded or abandoned spaces or the re-composition of the landscape itself. In implementing this vision, a dominant role is attributed to the agricultural landscape, assumed as an independent variable in the transformation processes (Fig. 5).

This does not, of course, mean – according to Perlik (2007) – blocking all solicitations coming from the city a priori, but rather providing them with responses coherent with the vision of the future, which the Community has constructed for itself. In turn, the city is called on to make a similar re-examination, considering the valorisation of those parts of the landscape, which most characterise it as different from cities on the plain.

Conclusions

The actions undertaken by Trento Autonomous Province in recent decades have emphasised its leading economic role and ability to negotiate, with reference to the national and international relationships, with metropoli-

tan realities. In this sense, the Autonomous Province has created the conditions for constructing a “gentle metropolitanisation model” (Aaster, 2009b), centred on local institutional and community resources, integrated horizontally and able to construct a different relationship between city and countryside.

This appears essential, as underlined by many of the authors quoted here, not least in order to maintain the specific identity-affirming characteristics, which would otherwise disappear, dissolved under the pressure of those standardizing processes, which are everywhere proving overwhelming.

Implementation of this model seems so far to be incomplete. While important results have been obtained regarding the anchorage of metropolitan networks, much still remains to be done, from the spatial point of view, in terms of the spatial integration of the city and its hinterland.

The duplicity of the theme of the new urbanity - on one hand implying decision-making autonomy and innovative abilities and on the other, constant attention to maintaining (although within the necessary change) the identity of the places - today emphasises the gap which has opened up in recent decades between the change in which the city has played a leading role on one hand and the character of the places, culminating moreover in a settlement pattern not far removed from that of cities on the plain. In particular, as well as paying little attention to the quality of the transformations, the city has simply offloaded the most problematic processes, from the relocation of industry to that of families, onto its environs.

A reversal of this trend now seems to be underway, caused by the unexpected protagonist's role played by part of the hinterland with establishment of the Valley Communities, given significant responsibilities starting with control of their territory.

For the purposes of the new urbanity and thus of an effective and efficient process of integration between city and hinterland (in other words the area which has best preserved its alpine characteristics), it is now appropriate not just for the hinterland (mountain) to become a city, while preserving its identity, but also for the city to become hinterland (mountain) or, to eliminate the paradox, become a non-alien part of a local context of great environmental and landscape value.

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11.5. View toward Bolzano from Mezzocorona
photo by Hugo Muñoz

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