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Actors and resources of an evolving local system. The processes that involve Catania, a dynamic reality in a low developed region

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ACTORS AND RESOURCES OF AN EVOLVING LOCAL SYSTEM. THE PROCESSES THAT INVOLVE CATANIA, A
DYNAMIC REALITY IN A LOW DEVELOPED REGION*.

Abstract: Since the second half of the '70s, a great crisis has hit the local system of Catania, - which is the most important town in the North-east of Sicily - both in its economical aspects and in its social and political ones. In the '90s, nevertheless, the city has been interested by deep transformations which have caused new actors and innovative resources to emerge.

During the years of crisis, the Catania local system was based on the building industry and on the public expenditure that have nourished clientelistic and also illegal activities. In fact the public expense played a very important role in the economic development of Sicilian society, where most of the industrial enterprises worked in protected sectors. A few exceptions regarded SMEs with innovative capabilities and larger firms depending from an exogenous management.

From this point of view, the authors of this paper will try to draw a clear picture of the changes happened in the last decade in the Catania socio-economic system, pinpointing its ability of nourishing new initiatives in high technology sectors and attracting others from the outside, thanks to the new political atmosphere present in the city and its ambitious aspiration to become an important node in the Mediterranean Basin. Some of the actors of these changes are a group of innovative entrepreneurs, the local University and a new class of politicians, more sensitive to the economic and social development of the community.

1. THE CRISIS OF SOUTHERN ITALIAN CITIES BETWEEN 1970 AND 1990

Over the last few decades in the more advanced Western countries a variety of urban and social processes have taken place, in an attempt to overcome the concept of “maximum urban density”. At the same time there has been a process of delocalisation and decentralisation of industries. In Italy these phenomena took place above all in the early 1970’s.

There are many side effects and consequences (Gasparini e Guidicini, 1990; Martellato e Sforzi, 1990):

- a) the development of road and rail networks and public transport systems;
- b) the pervasive nature of the development and techniques of communication, especially in the computer sciences field;
- c) the scale diffusion of new telematic technologies and the application of computer-science modules to industrial production, symbolic communication and allocation of spaces.

The rapid growth of these “social qualities” has consolidated new patterns for “localisation factors” which attribute priorities and key roles to the following variables:

- a) the availability of spaces and cost of ground-space;
- b) the accessibility and optimised exploitation of the territory;
- c) the ability to use infrastructures and services on a “quaternary” dimension;
- d) the social climate, characterised by a minimisation of conflicts and a maximisation of active/productive presences;
- e) a constant compression of the cost-of-labour graph.

The combination of this series of variables results in the tendency to re-locate industries and centres of production outwards, in two precise directions: towards suburban areas and towards extra-urban areas.

One of the principal reasons for the redistribution of industry and production factors over the territory is that the growth in the mass of industrial products is slower than the growth in productivity itself, because of the exponentially growing dependence of the dynamics of “product development” on the dynamics of “development of the tertiary functions” (Cafiero e Cecchini, 1990) . The urban network is modelled and re-characterised as a *network of services*, constituting the dynamic element of the “economic foundations” of the city. And in turn the network of services fulfils its duties by means of an authentic explosion of state-of-the-art functions and services. The geographic layout of the services of the urban network has as its strategic points:

- a) financial and commercial services;

- b) services of higher education and research;
- c) planning and specialised professional consultancy services;
- d) social services and opportunities for “cultural consumerism” in line with the new “lifestyles” which have become widespread.

In comparison with the individual and combined effects of these processes, during the decade 1971-1981 it was possible to note a slowing down of the urbanisation process in all Italy, in harmony with the tendencies towards *de-urbanisation* and *counter-urbanisation* which may be noted over the entire area of the more industrialised countries. It is right here that a discrepancy may be noted: the inversion of tendencies is not to be found in the southern regions, with the exception of Campania and the area surrounding Catania in Sicily.

In particular, in the Mezzogiorno a strong link is formed between income and directive functions, leading to the evident subordination of the *urban markets* to the inputs and outputs of the local and central political/institutional and economic/administrative systems. In this way the effects of repercussion and territorialisation of the *political market* become the gravitational ring on which the allocation of spaces and the re-organisation of the territory are based. A phenomenon of intermediation and interpenetration takes place between *government political classes* (not only present in the territory) and economic/entrepreneurial *groups of interest*.

The growth of the power, the roles and the functions of the “building cycle” and the “construction cycle” in Southern and insular Italy is a functional articulation of this system of parallel interpenetrations: it is sufficient to think of the cycle of “building without planning permission” with its alarming side-effects of degradation of the environment; or of the cycle of public works linked to policies for extraordinary interventions.

Moreover, these difficulties are accentuated by the presence of another extremely negative constant: the enormous gap in communications in the South between the urban areas and the regional and provincial territories surrounding them. Urban areas in the South, instead of acting as an element of integration in the territory, tend to disintegrate it, leading to the degradation of its urban and environmental resources, and bringing to the surface the vast *urban problem* of the southern regions.

In fact, while in the more developed regions of Europe, there is a growing awareness in the 1970's that the urban system is operating as a strategic infrastructure for development, the main cities of Southern Italy, such as Naples, Palermo, Bari, Cagliari and Catania, are going through an identity crisis, living between a civilised and economic society in rapid evolution which demands activities and urban services of a

very high quality, and the inability to offer an adequate supply of these and to carry out high-level functions. This is not a crisis of industrialisation but an urban crisis in its widest and deepest sense, in the sense that it is exactly the lack of qualities and of urban functions that are the main cause of the crisis in the productive system of the southern cities.

During the 1980's, the more evolved urban systems become aggregated in network areas, exploiting and organising their qualities and functions of communication and dislocation of high-class services and immaterial benefits. But the lack of these qualities in the cities of Southern Italy weighs down the urban structures and environment with:

- a) non-application of the anti-seismic regulations in urban areas;
non-observation of the regulations protecting the landscape and historic or cultural values;
- b) non-organisation of town-planning activities in expanding districts;
- c) non-construction of ring-roads around the cities;
- d) saturation and over-use of an obsolete sewage system;
- e) over-pricing of land-rent;
- f) pollution of the underground water courses;
- g) non-recovery and non-restoration of districts and old town centres of immeasurable artistic and cultural value (Naples and Palermo are extreme cases).

Under the effect of the above-listed processes, from the 1970's on the urban and rural landscapes of Southern Italy have been transformed around two strongly interdependent geo-anthropoc phenomena:

- a) deserted rural areas;
- b) poor quality concentration in the urban areas.

The result is an excessive population density in areas characterised by a high level of urban and social degradation; the creation of chaotic areas housing half the population of southern Italy in small overcrowded spaces. And this result, in its turn, becomes the pre-condition for growing, if not unlimited, processes of civil, territorial and environmental degradation.

An Istat analysis carried out in the early 1980's on eleven of the most important metropolitan areas in the country revealed that 32% of the homes in the four southern cities included in the survey (Naples, Bari, Catania and Palermo) were in an extremely poor state of preservation, compared to 14.3% in the central and northern cities.

And this is without taking into consideration the outskirts of the southern cities, in a state of total abandonment and degradation, not so different from the slums and ghettos of North America. San Paolo on the outskirts of Bari, the Zen area of Palermo, Librino in Catania and Secondigliano in Naples, among many other possible examples, represent a perfect expression of social alienation and urban exclusion,

where the inadequacy of the housing areas is added to the total lack of social services or links with the “heart” of the city. The ghetto districts and the community living areas of the southern cities have now become an explosive mixture of social contradictions, hardships and suffering, of anger and frustration, constituting an inexhaustible background of departures from the norm, separated by a thin boundary from authentic phenomena of organised crime.

In the early 1990’s, while the search for solutions to these phenomena of degradation in the southern cities was becoming intensified, in the more advanced and developed western areas a first partial process began of inverted tendency in the processes of counter-urbanisation and de-urbanisation which had been noted in the previous decades. The most significant fact is that processes of urban re-agglomeration occur, comprising within them a combination of all the activities of direction, creation, innovation, production and execution (Dematteis e Bonavero, 1997).

But it is above all the new economies and diseconomies of information and computer communication that have reorganised the architecture not only of the urban functions, but also of the conditions of anthropic intervention and of the forms of expression, influencing the way of life of all human existence. The combination of structural and infrastructural, material and immaterial facilities in more or less concentrated spaces revolutionises the present geographical layout of the city, creating or consolidating the global urban systems of a network structure, in which the optimised level of services and performances may be concentrated (Dematteis e Guarrasi, 1994).

2. THE URBAN SYSTEM IN CATANIA: FROM DECLINE TO REBIRTH

The changes which have taken place in the city of Catania reflect for the most part the evolutionary characteristics of the urban system of other southern cities; however, as we have already noted, these resemble more those of cities belonging to more developed regions when it is possible to note processes of decentralisation of the economic activities, of the residential areas and of the political/institutional structures.

With regard to the former, in the Catania of the late 1980’s it was very easy to note three different types of industry, situated mainly in the agglomerates run by the Consortium for the Catania Area of Industrial Development (Consorzio per l’Area di Sviluppo Industriale di Catania) – Pantano d’Archi in the Catania area, Piano Tavola in the region of Belpasso and Tre Fontane near Misterbianco (Giardina and Ruggiero, 1990; Scrofani, 2000):

- the major public industries (Selenia Spazio, SGS Thomson)
- the major private industries (Cyanamid, Cesame, Cementerie Siciliane and the local groups specialising in construction activities, Rendo, Costanzo, Graci, Finocchiaro and Virlinzi;
- small and medium-sized firms.

The major entrepreneurial groups, both local and exogenous, had developed strongly integrated industrial activities, precluding important agreements for sub supply or information exchange with the existing firms in Catania. In this way they helped to create, together with the local and regional political class, a substantially closed social and economic context, in which even access to jobs in local public administrations was the prerogative of relatives and trusted friends. This closed society controlled all but a few of the medium-sized firms, created for the most part with capital from outside and adopting

productive processes based on mature or advanced, but not innovative, technology. These were occasionally able to extend their markets to a national and even international level.

The decentralisation of some political and institutional functions was an attempt to create a metropolitan area extended to include the towns closest to the province's capital, towns which provided a home for all those who abandoned the chaotic city as a mass to seek refuge in spaces more congenial to their needs. However this was not accompanied by the simultaneous decentralisation of private activities and cash flows destined for public works, whose management remained firmly in the hands of the power-groups, established irremovably in the centres of decision-making, with their solid regional and national political connections.

The institutions and the local authorities, which elsewhere had contributed actively towards the formation of a lively and vital society, in Catania, as in the rest of the south, has benefited only specific personal interests, with clientelistic methods of managing public funds. A vicious circle has thus evolved which has not only upset the mechanisms of the economy but also, and more alarmingly, has destroyed the collective identity of the community, leaving it in the hands and at the mercy of a political and managing class of low cultural values.

The precarious balance existing among the various components of Catania's social and economic system, a mirror of the situation of the entire region, rapidly disintegrated in the early 1990's as a result of internal and external events revealing all the weaknesses of the productive system and the civilised society (Scrofani, 2000):

- a) the globalisation process of the markets made Sicily vulnerable to the incursions of multi-regional firms, more competitive and aggressive, which had no difficulty in demolishing the local competition; local firms managed to survive only thanks to providential market niches;
- b) the reduction of Italian public spending in favour of the Southern regions, due to the balance of trade deficit and the need to respect the parameters imposed by the E.U., practically wiped out the social security coverage under whose protection the large local groups had prospered, and slowed down the transfers in support of family incomes;
- c) the implosion of the Mafia phenomenon, which had reached its peak with the Palermo slaughters in 1992, opened up new opportunities for economic and social initiative;
- d) the crisis of the local, regional and national political class (which blew up with the "tangentopoli" affair at various levels of public administration) allowed new groups to emerge, representing collective interests and no longer linked to the old political parties (Triglia, 1995);
- e) the development of a middle class, employed for the most part in the public sector and in services, led to virtuous effects such as an increase in education and modern consumptions, mainly applied to the cultural sector;
- f) the formation of new types of professional figures within the middle class allowed the development of new criteria for the selection and promotion of personnel, based on merit and not on favours and political friendships.

The toppling of the previous balances brought to light a number of serious limitations in the economic and social system, such as: the excessive fragmentation and disarticulation of the productive units, the high rate of youth unemployment, the low value of local industrial productions, the considerable

weight in employment of the construction industry. But it also allowed for the adoption of new choices and the affirmation of new balances, as a result of the renewed relationship which grew up between the global and local dimensions of the economy. Globalisation of the economy, in fact, does not reduce the significance of local territorial systems, in particular those which possess a strong historic and cultural identity. These may become, rather, functional components of the global network, created by the local communities which activate “self-centred” processes of development (D’Antonio-Iter, 1985; Conti, 1995; Dematteis, 1997).

It is also necessary to consider that the *new economy*, as well as being based on the advantages of network interaction, which make it possible to overcome the rigid schemes and operative limitations typical of Fordism, opens up the way to totally new forms of business and production organisation, which may successfully compete with more traditional forms, and a new way of producing and organising knowledge, defined as *knowledge economy* (Rullani, 2000a). If the forms of management, connection and integration of the networks are carried out efficiently, the roles of firms tend to be differentiated. The result is a knowledge economy based on a new paradigm, that of the network specialisation/integration, thanks to which the knowledge possessed produces more and consequently supports higher and higher flows of investment in learning and experimenting, which with time will permit an acceleration of the innovative processes.

Naturally, this evolution towards virtual, but rich, forms of long-distance relations does not imply that the territory and the direct relations between subjects lose their importance and significance. On the contrary, it is essential to consider that direct relations, in spite of their higher costs, are still the most effective way of managing knowledge within the local context. This is why all those relations which are able to compensate for the higher costs of local interaction compared to network interaction with their level of complexity or the quality of the ideas produced and exchanged, (Rullani 2000b), will remain anchored to the local scale. The share of economic relations which will remain linked to the local territory will depend therefore on the ability of the territories and of the local networks to evolve their complexity while containing their costs (De Pietro, 2000; Di Maria, 2000).

If, with the mediation of the network, it is possible to increase the yields obtained in the use of knowledge, it becomes more economical to invest in the production of new knowledge. In this way a self-propellant circle is created, whereby the network becomes ability to learn. Networks which are too small or not efficient enough will become after a while networks with little intellectual capital, because they do not make it economical to invest in them.

Over the last few years a series of forces have been working in this direction in Catania, giving a glimpse of the opportunity to create a highly competitive environment, not only for the accumulation of knowledge concentrated there and for the research carried out, but also for the attraction of the single natural and cultural resources to be found. Although Catania is not fortunate enough to have a geographic location in the centre of Europe, indeed is on the very outskirts, nevertheless the city is doing its best to attract outside entrepreneurs by means of the development of its civilised society, an increase in public safety, the reinforcement of a collective identity which many people had felt they had lost.

The most important contribution towards this has come from an absolute novelty in the local institutional context. A significant change occurred, paradoxically in Sicily before anywhere else in Italy,

in the regulations regarding the election of the Mayor. While in the past the Mayor had been elected by the City Council members, now the citizens themselves choose their mayor directlyⁱ. As well as this important alteration there have been other changes in the regulations regarding relations between Mayor, administrative board and full City Council. This innovation has given new Mayors the opportunity to break away from party interests and to give a free rein to their ability to govern the entire territory, “personalising” the local political institution. This major innovation has certainly met with the approval of the citizens of Catania: after a long period of political instability during which different mayors, nominated without the slightest possibility of assuming any real social control, governed the city for relatively brief terms, they confirmed a single candidate, Enzo Bianco, for a double term. Following this period they changed both leader and political inclination, having the opportunity to make the choice directly and personally (Lanza and Timpanaro, 1997).

In this sense the new law regarding the direct election of the Mayor, in Catania as in many other towns in the Mezzogiorno (Naples, for example), has given the figure of the mayor a new, previously unknown, symbolic value (Di Cersosimo and Donzelli, 1996; Leonardi, 1995). This is why if some southern towns, Catania among them, are beginning to re-acquire a sense of identity and to become better known from outside, a large part of the merit is due to the mayor who becomes a tangible symbol representing them.

From the point of view of economic and social development of the territory an important part had been played above all by interventions to improve the living conditions of the old town-centre, others in favour of children and young people and others still to encourage productive investments in the city’s territory. An attempt has been made on one hand to reconcile cultural policies and those for young people, improving school facilities, creating as many as 36 open-air playground areas for children and promoting a variety of cultural initiatives within schools, also thanks to the co-operation of the municipalities. On the other hand, public cultural initiatives have interacted with urbanistic and social policies. Much attention has been paid to the artistic initiatives of young people, who have been given the opportunity to occupy the streets and perform live concerts in pavement cafés situated in strategic corners full of atmosphere in the old town. This has not only helped citizens to repossess streets which had become degraded and ill-frequented, but has also led to a whole series of entrepreneurial initiatives, quite likely to transform the declared intention of creating cultural meeting-points into the more lucrative offer of a restaurant or barⁱⁱ.

The cultural policies of the administration have therefore not only made it possible to improve and promote a new image of Catania, dynamic, operative, efficient and clean in every sense. They have also without a doubt contributed to a renewal of its attraction for tourists, emphasising the considerable cultural and recreational resources and making them known to a national and international public. A territorial marketing operation has been promoted by the institutions, which have been the first to give their own essential support to the formation of an urban identity and the establishment of a new relationship with the local community, concentrating its attention on points of common interest.

It is therefore possible to conclude that the rebirth of Catania is under way, and that the present processes helping to channel the city’s development into a modern urban system are based on a wide range of subjects and resources, among which the following are important:

- a) the local institutions. The growing attention towards forms of government of the local communities depends not only on the greater ease with which income is controlled, the efforts to be impartial and the virtuous behaviour of those who occupy key positions, but above all on other important components, less formal, connected with human resources, such as professionalism and cognitive experiences, which in the end represent the interests and aims of the whole community.
- b) The University of Catania. Tied down, until the mid-1980's, to a rigid model of valorisation of teaching/learning and basic research activities, in recent years the University has paid more attention to the needs of the productive world, above all after an initial period of uncertainty regarding its new role following the recently acquired autonomy of Italian universities. The University has recently developed common research projects and important co-operations with private firms, for the realisation of innovations in both products and processes, in mature sectors as well as in hi-technology ones, under the control of multinational firms but not excluded from the curve of local development. The University has made a valuable contribution to the creation of a new work force with excellent basic and specific qualifications – thanks not only to the technical and scientific faculties but also to the faculty of Economics – a resource which attracts significant multi-regional investments (Scrofani and Mazza, 2000).
- c) ST Electronics. A firm which, until the late 1980's, had remained outside the local context, merely exploiting the abundant supply of low-cost employees, each with a diploma if not a degree. During the 1990's, the ST company changed its business attitude, developing in particular its research activities with the co-operation of local engineers and with active collaborations with Catania University in studying the use of new materials. It increased its employment of human resources, leading to the creation of a supply of local labour-force of excellent professional standards and highly motivated. On the other hand, it also altered its relations with other firms, transforming its activity from a totally verticalised form of production to the decentralisation of small but significant phases in the production processes to other firms, local and non; moreover, the ST company has helped to attract new business investments in the field of electronics and telecommunications, in fact the industrial area which has developed has been labelled "*Etna Valley*" by the international press.
- d) The natural and artistic/cultural resources. The approach to the management of these has changed radically, from a purely conservative, if not passively "usurious", attitude, to one of compatible protection, with a moderate degree of valorisation from the tourist point of view. In particular the archaeological sites within the city are being promoted, the historic buildings are being restored, also with the help of EU programs such as Urban, and some areas along the coast are being converted for new uses, such as the Playa area which, in the context of the Territorial Pacts of the City of Catania, has been equipped to cater for a large flow of tourists from outside the region, instead of merely for local sea-bathers. To make this possible the hotel capacity of the entire city area has been increased (among the different investors who have been attracted to Catania are the Franza group, engaged in creating hotel structures and the Caltagirone group, which has bought a large hotel in the city centre).
- e) The central points of the transport network. Much attention has been paid to mobility within the city, re-organising the public transport service and building a stretch of underground railway, to be extended in the future. But in particular the aim is to improve and valorise the strategic

infrastructures of the transport system in southeastern Sicily, so as to insert this area in the context of the European and Mediterranean networks.

These subjects and these resources, organised into an integrated plan for local development, constitute the vital propellant of Catania's urban system, which is aspiring to become a pole of attraction for new investments by regional and extra-regional firms. In reality, however, it is necessary to acknowledge the prominent role of two resources. The first is the abundant supply of labour, at low cost and qualified with a degree or at least a diploma. There is no secret in the fact that young people starting work often receive wages or salaries well below their cultural or professional level, although we must also admit that work experience still constitutes the most important factor in training. The second important resource is the growing confidence in the cityⁱⁱⁱ, both inside and outside the city centre, achieved through the development of civilised society, the increase in public safety, the rediscovery of a collective identity which had previously been lost.

The initiatives set in motion by the City Council to incentivate entrepreneurial activities are coordinated by "InvestiaCatania", an agency which carries out all the bureaucratic activities necessary for new production investments and which co-operates with the society coordinating interventions and plans for the South-Catania Territorial Pact. This pact has an important function in promoting plans and initiatives for boosting tourism along the south coast of the city.

Important results, on both a political and an economic plane, have come from the acceleration and simplification of the bureaucratic procedures for starting up new entrepreneurial initiatives within the city's territory, now possible in a maximum of 90 days. For the first point, the creation of the InvestiaCatania office was a forerunner of and an inspiration for Bassanini's 1997 law, which allowed for the creation, over the entire national territory, of specific city agencies for the completion of all the bureaucratic procedures necessary for the start-up of new businesses. From an economic point of view, the results have been noteworthy: from April 1997, when the agency was opened, to now, several hundred procedures have been completed, above all in the trade and tourist sectors (table 1). Some of these are especially worthy of note: the new Omnitel facilities (an assistance centre for mobile telephones), Acqua Marcia (restructuring and restoration of the Excelsior Hotel, recently purchased from the Banco di Sicilia and situated in the very heart of the city centre) Coin (a department store specialising in clothing), Auchan (a hypermarket), Nokia (a research centre for the creation of networks to locate cars telematically), Wyeth Lederle (a biotechnological industry for the production of antibiotics for veterinary use), McDonald's (a new fast food centre opened on the site of the old Olimpia cinema) and above all the creation of the new ST Electronics facilities (electronic components); also under way and worthy of note are the initiatives of the Crazy Bull (a restaurant belonging to the Peroni group) and of Tullio Abate (a workshop for the production of motorboats). The most significant initiatives can be linked to an ambitious project launched by the leading class of Catania, to establish an electronics centre on the foothills of Mount Etna, thanks to the considerable collaboration in the field of research between the University of Catania, ST Electronics and the newcomer Nokia, to which are added the production activities of a number of small and medium firms, some local, others branches of outside companies.

The project for an integrated development of Catania's urban system therefore draws the majority of its impetus from the economies and diseconomies connected to electronics and telecommunications technologies, which tend to modify not only the city's economic organisation but also its urban functions.

3. RE-ORGANISATION OF FUNCTIONS IN THE CITY OF CATANIA

The new interpretation of the concentration in space of structures and infrastructures, both material and immaterial, presupposes, as we have already stated, the carrying out by local agents of a complex and well-articulated project, based on the revitalisation of the existing urban system and taking into account the needs of both the community and local economic operators, especially for the creation of multi-regional networks. These networks are full of opportunities for those who are able to exploit them with high quality performances, including the sale of a product/territory placed on the market by means of suitable territorial marketing strategies. Above all it is essential to be active and dynamic, to be well prepared and, above all, not to offer the promise of services or performances which will not be kept.

The plan for an integrated development of Catania's urban system presupposes a systematic review – which is still under way – of all the strategic urban functions, bearing in mind the following priorities:

- a) the search for a positive solution to the conflict between urban centralisation and decentralisation, by means of suitable political decisions;
- b) public incentivisation for the re-organisation of Catania's strategic functions so as to lead to the formation of a multi-borough urban area (corresponding to the metropolitan area for some functions, and to all south-eastern Sicily for those of a higher level);
- c) a plan for functional re-balancing on the basis of the new or restored centres, including the abolition and/or reformulation of plans or hypotheses which could threaten to aggravate the present lack of equilibrium.

The following systems of functions are taken into consideration for their strategic validity:

- the **residential function**: are plans to reinforce this, specifically in the historic city centre, by means of processes of urban regeneration, improving the standard of living and the accessibility of outlying areas (such as Librino). An acknowledgement of the important part played in this field by towns in the foothills and along the coast north of Catania, has led moreover to the decision to improve the city's public transport system beyond its present administrative limits, and solutions are being studied in order to optimise gas supply and refuse collection in the entire urban and suburban area.
- The **functions of production and exploitation of artistic and scientific culture**: these, including theatrical and musical arts, will be improved thanks to the development of local cultural associations whose impetus towards social solidarity is beginning to make itself felt. This in its turn contributes to the creation of an atmosphere of trust in the competent management of the local institutions. The large number of associations which have developed in Catania in the field of production of all types of culture (literature, theatre, painting, music and cinema) assumes a significance not only for its strictly cultural value but also for the large number of people it involves: it has considerable consequences for the social/political conditions leading to local development. Over the last six years, for example, the flourishing of economic initiatives (pubs, sidewalk cafés with piano-bars),

combining the offer of food and drink with good music in characteristic corners of the old town, is not only a result of the cultural ferment animating the city but also a cause for the breakdown of the old social balances which made civilised growth so difficult (Scrofani, 2000). On the other hand this proliferation of artistic and cultural performances requires large areas of space, a problem that can be solved at least partially with the recovery and restoration of some disused buildings, suitably restructured for use for cultural initiatives of various types. Examples are the Cortile Platamone, (previously used as a parking space for refuse-collection trucks) and the municipal slaughterhouse in Via Zurria, which has been disused for some time. Moreover, in recent years there has been an intense collaboration between the municipal and provincial authorities in an attempt to make better use of the considerable space available in the culture and exhibition centre “Le Ciminiere”, restructured some years ago by the Provincial Authorities, for a larger number of cultural activities. The cultural policies recently adopted in Catania are similar to those previously adopted by many other European cities, where culture is afforded a direct role in the re-launching and “regeneration” of the city centre (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993). They have led to a proliferation of public and private interventions with the aim of preserving and safeguarding cultural goods and revalorising the local artistic heritage, which has been brought more into the limelight. Also the private sector has begun to assume an active role in the field of promotion of cultural activities, opening up spaces for shows and directly organising exhibitions and other cultural events.

- The **functions of formation and research**: this, thanks to the active part played by the University, have made it possible to restructure and re-use a whole series of publicly-owned empty buildings in the old town, creating a totally original atmosphere in the central area of the city. The presence of the University buildings is a strong influence on the town planning, its structures being situated in monumental buildings such as that of the central Piazza Università, and that of Piazza Dante (in the former Benedictine Monastery) and in other very central streets where further historic buildings are being re-adapted. An important role has also been assumed by the buildings used for teaching, research and sports at the Cittadella Universitaria, in the northern part of the city, where intangible activities such as research and training created a plus-value for the localisation of new investors. The University of Catania, moreover, is acknowledged to be one of the most active components of Catania’s urban system, participating in the multi-regional network structures for research and training, developing new operative and promotional instruments, such as highly specialised post-graduate master degrees and decentralised university faculties located in a number of provinces in Eastern Sicily.
- The **exhibition and congress functions**, concentrated for the most part in the Le Ciminiere complex. Restored and adapted by the Provincial Administration, this area would be less costly to run if it were used for the wide variety of trade fairs, congresses and cultural events proposed by the various local associations, disregarding interests of a specifically political nature, which have led to a more limited use of these facilities, to the detriment of some cultural sectors and local operators (for example, craftsmen working in lava-rock, wrought iron, glass and wood-carving).
- The **administrative functions**: these were previously situated in a number of buildings in the old town, but began to be more swiftly moved outwards during the 1990’s. Ten municipalities were

created with independent authority, especially in the cultural field, with the possibility to manage a small budget independently for the organisation and presentation of cultural events. It is to be hoped that the authority at their disposal, limited today for the most part to a consultancy role, may be increased in the future. Some urban spaces have become available with the transfer of most of the provincial offices previously situated in the enormous office building formerly belonging to the Itin Company, at the gates of the city.

- **Financial, insurance and banking functions** at a management level: these are represented principally by the business pole of Corso Sicilia, but are now beginning to find a new and more efficient location in a number of historic buildings specifically restructured for that purpose. These are situated in different points of the city, and are all distinguished by the elegance of their structure and ornamentation, sometimes in liberty style, rediscovering the splendour of a bygone age.
- **Commercial distribution functions:** these, which need to be extended over a wide surface area, have been suitably relocated on the outskirts of the city (for example the Auchan shopping centre, situated in the same outlying area as the airport) and in some neighbouring towns, notably Misterbianco and S. Giovanni La Punta, where the necessary space was readily available. Small and medium sized shops, on the other hand, more in keeping with the daily needs of residents, have remained within the context of the city.
- **Telematic and Computer-science functions:** those belonging to administrative activities have achieved the considerable goal of simplifying bureaucratic matters, which may now be completed by the outlying offices of all the small municipalities in which the city is divided. Moreover, new technologies have made it possible to establish a single office to simplify changes of address where new contracts for water and electricity are involved. On the other hand, the office which was opened some years ago to deal with the Territorial Information System (SIT) of the city of Catania, has achieved limited results, in spite of its considerable potential. The office in fact is used at the moment only as a complement to the activities of civil protection carried out by a different office (in fact what has been created is a data bank, complete with maps, recording the position of rallying-points and escape-routes, for use by the population in the case of an earthquake, and of the medical and paramedical structures at the service of the population). The SIT office could assume an even more significant role, if its activity were extended as a support for city planning or the offer of municipalized services, such as those for the distribution of water or gas.
- **Hospital functions and the units for health and social services:** although in the past these have played an important part in congesting the town centre, as a result of the central position of some of the structures, in recent years they have been the object of a noteworthy attempt at renewal, with the creation of the decentralised structure of the Cannizzaro Hospital and the new Garibaldi complex.
- **Functions for the protection of the environment and the use of clean sources of energy:** these can find important points of reference in the City Energy Plan (PEC), drawn up with the collaboration of Conphebus, a society belonging to the national electricity board, situated in the industrial centre of Pantano d'Archi. Completed in 1999, the PEC is due to become an instrument for the planning of interventions with the aim of reaching higher levels of efficiency, competitiveness, flexibility and security, in the field of activities to support energy saving and renewable sources,

which represent the key points for sustainable economic development. At the moment some projects are already under way connected with the following: A) integrated management of the city's public street lighting system; B) integrated management of the electricity plants in all the city's state schools; C) integrated management of technological facilities at the service of sports grounds; D) "Solar City", a plan for a massive use of solar panels for clean energy in public buildings.

- The **transport function**: this is being reinforced with regard to mobility within the city, with the re-organisation of the public transport service and the creation of the underground railway line, now almost complete, but also thanks to the increased potential and appreciation of the strategic infrastructures for transport in South-Eastern Sicily, in the context of the European and Mediterranean networks. The project for an interport, to be realised where there is an intermodal terminal, will certainly improve intermodal transport of goods, to the great advantage of goods produced both in the Catania area and in those of Ragusa and Enna. On the other hand, the flow of passengers and goods arriving on and leaving the island will be improved and encouraged if the port facilities are enlarged, as well as those of Fontanarossa airport, where traffic transits to and from almost all the south-eastern part of the island.

The re-organisation of Catania's urban functions has been characterised as the natural reaction to the long negative phase of its economy and the uncertainties for the future. Each of the local actors involved (economic operators as well as public and private institutions) has reacted according to an individual potential, developing strategies of adaptation, reaction, mobilisation of resources (Pichierri, 1989; Perulli, 1992). In practice, the reaction to the crisis of the period from 1970 to 1990 has revealed the ability of local actors to mobilise hidden forces and attract new ones from outside, to make their city part of a network with many others, to destroy the old, obsolete and crystallised social structure which had anchored the city to a vicious circle for so long, and to introduce innovation and discontinuity (Perulli, 1992). And the result of this is the aim to revitalise the principal pole of Catania's urban agglomeration giving it high-level services, a specialised technopolis, business centres, research activities. And at the same time to decentralise a part of this development according to a precise program in new areas of expansion, served by an adequate connections network and already able to attract new firms (especially high-tech ones for qualified employees).

The lack of rigid social stratifications, the presence of a commercial tradition in the city, of a reserve of self-employment and specialised workers prepared to "invest themselves" in new forms of activity and entrepreneurship, has made it quite easy to launch the transition phase in post-industrial urban directions (Perulli, 1992). It is a fact that professionals of the advanced tertiary sector often have origins going back to the urban commercial class and neo-entrepreneurs in a solid tradition of self-employed workmanship.

The articulated whole of Catania's new urban functions has naturally found its points of reference in local operators, public and private, but also makes use of the urban instrument par excellence of the municipal administrations, the General Town-Planning Document (Piano Regolatore Generale). The strategic structure of the P.R.G. drawn up by Catania's city administration contains a series of fixed

points – listed below – necessary for an essential urban rebalancing and for the implementation of qualitative values of social and economic exchange in the city:

- relocation of the central railway station on the southern outskirts of the city;
- improvement of the Librino area;
- improvement of other degraded areas;
- adaptation of roads and streets to meet the requirements of protection and safety of the population in the case of catastrophic seismic events;
- completion of the new Eastern Ring-Road;
- re-qualification for recreational purposes of the sea front to the East of the ring-road;
- utilisation of the Playa area for hotels and recreational activities, in accordance with the city's territorial pact;
- enlargement and improved efficiency of Fontanarossa Airport;

relocation in buildings outside the city centre of some strategic functions: administrative (the grouping together and transfer of most of the provincial administrative offices to the buildings of the former Itin firm of the Rendo group in a neighbouring town); public health (the building of a new hospital structure in the western part of the city, to which to transfer the activities and staff of the present Garibaldi Hospital); commercial (favouring the concentration of structures for wholesale commercial distribution in the neighbouring town of Misterbianco);

- revaluation of the archaeological resources, through the creation of an archaeological site in the city centre, including the Greek theatre, the Odeon and the excavated ruins of the ancient city.

This formidable instrument for town planning, in any case, constitutes the fragile but essential boundary between an articulated and functional territorial planning system and the irrational use of public areas, conditioned by the individual and clientelistic interests of the local administrations. This is where, and why, the city's future development lies in the balance.

Tab.1: Number of entrepreneurs, workers and investments for sectors in Catania by means of the Office “InvestiaCatania” from 1997 to 2000.

1997

SECTORS	N° ENTREPRENEURS	WORKERS	INVESTMENTS (£)
Agriculture	2	12	1.450.000.000
Artisan activity	17	52	4.352.000.000
Trade	54	220	10.275.000.000
Industry	15	215	97.535.000.000
Services	42	58	6.570.000.000
TOTAL	130	557	120.182.000.000

1998

SECTORS	N° ENTREPRENEURS	WORKERS	INVESTMENTS (£)
Agriculture	1	3	500.000.000
Artisan activity	14	37	900.000.000
Trade	48	337	72.750.000.000
Industry	16	224	35.180.000.000
Services	36	216	21.019.000.000
Tourism	6	(*)	1.810.000.000
TOTAL	121	817	132.159.000.000

(*) = not available

1999

SECTORS	N° ENTREPRENEURS	WORKERS	INVESTMENTS (£)
Agriculture	0	0	0
Artisan activity	9	30	1.042.000.000
Trade	14	317	16.345.000.000
Industry	14	145	20.405.000.000
Services	17	155	23.897.000.000
Tourism	25	100	19.858.000.000
TOTAL	79	747	81.547.000.000

2000

SECTORS	N° ENTREPRENEURS	WORKERS	INVESTMENTS (£)
Agriculture	0	0	0
Artisan activity	2	7	200.000.000
Trade	2	8	1.750.000.000
Industry	7	319	30.351.000.000
Services	10	167	31.547.000.000
Tourism	32	302,5	55.622.000.000
TOTAL	53	803,5	119.370.000.000

*Although this work is fruit of the combined research of the two writers, the first and second part were written by Luigi Scrofani, the third part by Vittorio Ruggiero.

ⁱ The direct election of the mayor was established by the Sicilian Regional Law n° 7, 26/8/1992, while it was introduced in Italy by the national law n° 81, 25/3/1993.

ⁱⁱ A testimony of the improvement in living conditions in some streets of the old town is the return of many citizens to Catania who had previously “emigrated” to towns in outlying areas close to the mountain, where they buy detached houses or apartments in older buildings to be restored.

ⁱⁱⁱ The growing trust afforded to Catania by firms from outside was recently underlined by the manager of ST Microelectronics, Pasquale Pistorio, in an interview granted to Catania’s most important daily newspaper (La Sicilia, 30th May 1999).

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