

Rome Capital Region: reasons and scope of a different prospective

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Abstract: New geographies of urban development have been emerging, as a result of the interplay between global driving forces and local socio-economic and institutional conditions. In Central Italy, the influence of the city of Rome has gone beyond the administrative limits and of the Daily urban system traced on the basis of commuting flows. The urban geography of Rome has, no longer, a radial structure, new spatial and functional interdependencies are emerging in a vast and low-density city-region, expanded even beyond regional borders. This paper presents first results of a research carried out by the University of Roma Tre commissioned by the Lazio Region, whose aim is to investigate recent urbanization processes in the city-region of Rome under the above-mentioned perspective, adopting a multiscale approach, critically referred to international studies on the regional dimension of urban development, with an intentional mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Since “conspicuous changes” are now emerging from a series of tactical and opportunistic assemblage, our aim is to underline the need of a renovated multi-level governance, to address the transition from assembling to agencing in terms of a more equal distribution of social and economic opportunities within the regional space.

Keywords: City-region; Multilevel governance; Assemblage; Agencing.

In the last twenty years, a plural reflection on transformations that have gone through the category of the urban opened up a new perspective over the regional and post-metropolitan scale of urbanisation. The reorganization at regional scale can no longer be looked at through static interpretive lenses, being configured as a process a dynamic of decomposition/recomposition of relationships between economy, society and territory, driven by the combination of inter/supranational forces and local factors. As highlighted by Brenner and Schmid (2014), polarization and extensive urbanization coexist in a continuous process of urban re-writing, through processes of differentiation and standardization of the territory, implosion and explosion affirming new forms of urban life and types of spatiality (Balducci *et al.*, 2017, p. 18).

Similar dynamics occurred in the regional area of Rome, later than in the northern part of the country where a regional polycentric structure already emerged in the Sixties (Moroni 1969, p.11-15) and was deeply analysed in relevant well-known studies (Lanzani and Pasqui 2011, p. 39-40). On the contrary, the new territorial dimension of urbanization in the Roman area - arose from the joint impulse of a real-estate cycle started in the 1990s and of the economic reorganization influenced by national and international drivers - is so far partially unexplored. As a result of a centrifugal process of inhabitants

and activities, the urban system is nowadays extended at a large scale (on first approximation, within an area of 100 x 80 km) and reorganized through corridor dynamics along the transport backbone. Moreover, the influence of Rome has expanded on an even wider area that goes beyond physical boundaries of the conurbation and the perimeter determined by daily movements between home and workplace. Flows of people, goods and knowledge are spread in a basin extending up to Umbria and Abruzzo, where six million people live, work and spend their free time.

Need for a different descriptive-interpretative model. Rome is a city in transition, going through a particularly complex phase of change. The weakening of its function of political capital, which so far determined the economic and social base of the city, necessary leads to reflect on possible actions of contrast to the decline (Tocci, 2015; Caudo, 2017) and measures to accompany the transition towards a new phase (Coppola and Punziano, 2018). However,

«Rome as Capital City has not managed, until today, how to go beyond the idea of a big city which attracts a large number of civil servants and inhabitants who need houses» (Caudo, 2018)

It's therefore necessary to abandon this dominant perspective that has leaved in the shade what happened outside the city. The regional dimension of urban development has become the proper area for the interpretation and the governance of change. This is the reason of an ongoing research commissioned by the Lazio Region and carried out by the University of Roma Tre, whose first results are presented in the following paragraphs.

Metropolitan Core and Capital Region: a needed distinction

From the metropolitan Core... A decades-long tradition characterizes studies on the delimitation of urban systems based on physical and functional integration between contiguous territories. The plurality of criteria that can be used to define metropolitan areas, due to the different possibilities of conceptualizing "territorial interdependence" (Calafati, 2014, p. 5), leads to different outcomes. In the Roman case, however, there is a convergence around the delimitation of a *metropolitan core* whose shape and dimensions are to a large extent superimposable with those of the Province¹.

	Area kmq	Municipalities n.	Population 2011 *1000
Provincia di Roma (+)	5.363	121	3.997
FUA Eurostat (*)	6.165	159	4.066
Metropolitan Core (#)	6.607	171	4.146

(+) Legal population, Census Data. (*) Eurostat data, reported in Istat 2017, p. 316 (#) Our elaboration, on Census data

Table 1. ISTAT data 2011 processed by the authors

... to the Capital Region. Starting from a study by Paolo Veneri and Rafael Boix (2009) - based on criteria for the delimitation of metropolitan areas which, although being referred to systematic commuting, are more sensitive to the interdependencies on the macro scale - we have extended the field of observation to include the functional areas of Viterbo, Terni, L'Aquila and the local labour systems of Rieti and Avezzano². The use of mixed criteria was necessary to circumscribe an

¹ According to the 65-2014 law, the metropolitan city administrative boundaries coincide with the former province limits.

² Rieti and Avezzano are small cities not considered in FUA (Functional Urban Area) delimitation. However, being located in mountain areas, they play a significant role – under a socio-economic point of view – for a large

appropriate area for investigating the quality of the economic and social relations with Rome, even if the delimitation of a precise boundary escapes univocal determinations (Balducci *et al.*, 2017 p 18).³ In our work, we define as “Capital Region” this new framework within which fruitful relationships with Rome can be unfold and governed.

	Municipalities n	Area kmq	Population 2011 *1000	Density ab/kmq
Rome (inside the motorway ring)	1	345	2.100	6.000
Rome Municipality	1	1.287	2.617	2.030
Province/Metropolitan city (NUTS3)	121	5.363	4,353	810
METROPOLITAN CORE	171	6.607	4.146	630
Lazio Region (NUTS2)	378	17.232	5.892	340
ROME CAPITAL REGION	471	22.132	5.935	270

Table 2. ISTAT data 2011 processed by the authors

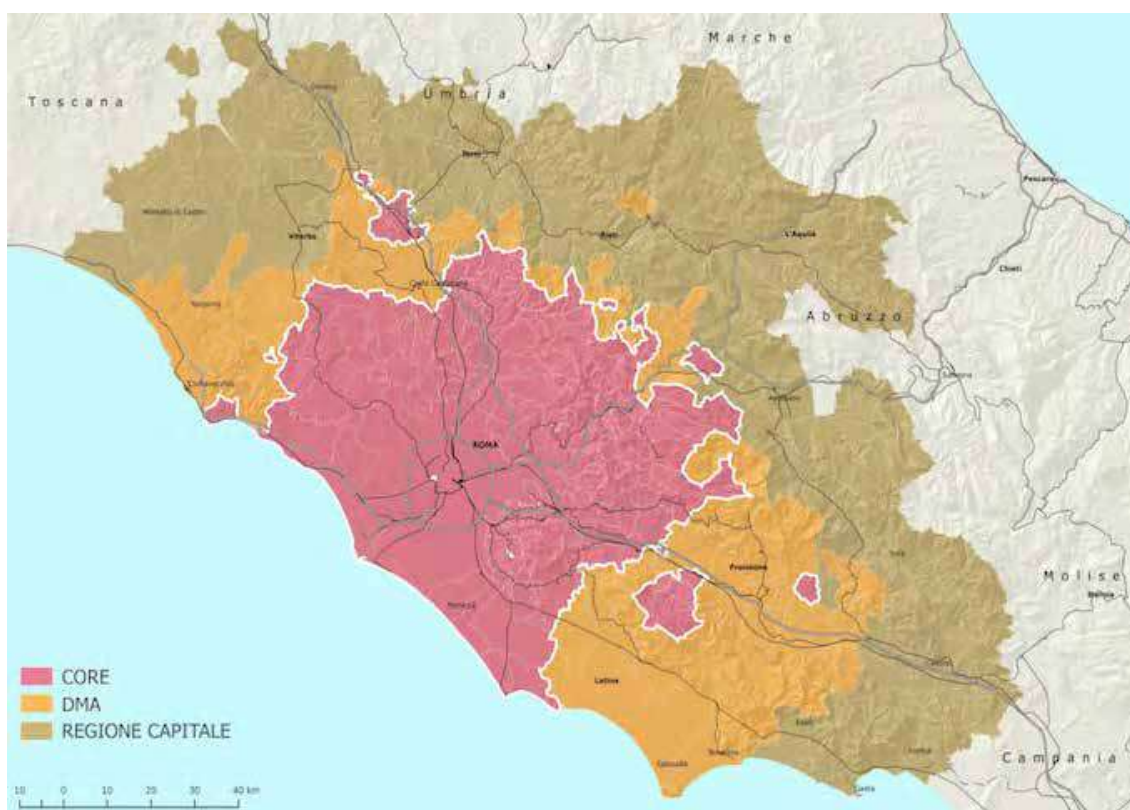


Figure 1. Metropolitan Core, Dynamic metropolitan area of Rome, Capital Region. ISTAT data processed by the authors

number of municipalities (both fall within the larger 10 out of 661 local labour system in Italy, according to ISTAT).

³ ISTAT proposed the identification of 35 “Functional region” to investigate “the consistency of relations and exchanges between Italian cities” (ISTAT, 2017, p. 99). The functional region of Rome is largely superimposable with the Capital Region, with the exception of Terni, aggregated to Perugia. This divergence is representative of blurring borders. *Dynamic Metropolitan Area* method, proposed by Clusa and Roca and adapted and tested by Paolo Veneri and Rafael Boix (Veneri and Boix 2009) in a comparative study between Italy and Spain, presented at IERM in 2009. The DMA can be seen as an *in-between* space.

Rome Capital Region: the overall strength

About half of the population of the Central Italy⁴ live in the Capital Region. Since 1951 until today, the number of inhabitants increased by more than 2.5 million, equal to 75% of the overall increase recorded in the six Regions of the Central Italy. Consequently, the weight of the Capital Region increased from 36.5% to 46%. Within the Capital Region, the weight of the population of the municipality of Rome from 1981 to 2017 remains almost unchanged (2.8 million), while the greatest growth is recorded in the *metropolitan core* (from 3.7 to 4.5 million), witnessing a strong process of counter-urbanization.

From an economic perspective, in the Capital Region:

- more than half of companies of the Central Italy (500,000) have settled;
- the added value of the production (DARA, 2104, p.88) is higher than the Italian average, being the Province of Rome is the third metropolitan city by added value per capita (31.415 Euro, in 2014) and the second by total added value (134 billion Euro, in 2014);
- key productive sectors (biomedical, aerospace, telecommunications), having a high level of innovation/internationalization (Unioncamere Lazio, 2014, p. 19-20), deny the image of a capital city flattened on public sector and mass tourism;
- international logistics and trading players located relevant centres because of the advantages linked to the barycentric location along the North-South ridge and in the junction between the Tirrenian and Adriatic sides.

Distinctive outlines: three profiles of urban development

Rome Capital Region is not comparable with other Italian metropolitan areas. The interplay between the geographical and settlement features configures a rich and diversified space, totally peculiar, articulated in about twenty-five geographical sub-regions (Almagià 1966) and as many settlement systems (Menichini 1996) combined together. In the perspective of urban development, some profiles are particularly relevant: the emergence of an imperfect polycentrism, the consolidation of urban clusters influenced by dynamics of corridor and junction, the structuring of non-linear geographies reflecting complex spatial-temporal relationships.

Imperfect polycentrism. Although the low degree of urbanization (8.4%) and density of population (less than 300 ab/kmq), Rome Capital Region is characterized by the presence of a significant number of medium-sized cities (46 municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants), consolidated in recent decades and distributed in equivalent number between the metropolitan core and the Capital Region. This polycentric structure can be qualified as “imperfect”, because of the dominant role of the central pole within the functional region (Fardelli *et al.*, 2017, p. 107) and due to gaps in provisioning high and differentiated supra-municipal services detected in half of the cases.

Municipality inhabitants	1951	1981	2017
> 100.000	1	2	3
50-100.000	2	4	10
20-50.000	13	27	33
Totale	16	33	46

Table 3 Capital Region. Number of municipalities per class of Inhabitants.
Istat data processed by the authors

⁴ Central Italy is one of the 5 NUTS1 statistical group of regions, and it encompasses Toscana, Marche, Umbria, Lazio. By dividing Italy in three parts, geographically speaking, Abruzzo and Molise can be considered part of Central Italy.

Corridor dynamics. Next to this urban structure, sparse and imperfect, new settlements - specialized for the large distribution, the *loisir* and the logistics - interest both main industrial poles, planned in the Seventies within the framework of industrial development policies for the Southern Italy, and minor industrial zones planned at municipal level and afterward adapted to encompass new functions. A well recognizable logic of corridor, intended as an urban development dispositif (Garavaglia 2017, p. 59-62), pushed the reinforcement of the regional urban system along the internal axis Orte-Fiano-Valmontone. The national motorway network is here also the backbone of regional transport and, at one time, allows to serve the local catchment area and to reach the central-southern area (especially the Neapolitan area, almost equivalent in terms of population compared to the Roman one). The interplay between the new geography of specialized settlements, concentrated in valley floors and coastal plains, and the old structure of historical settlements along the consular and ridge roads, shape new territorial figures (see Figure 2), whose traces are visible from commuting lines (Vazzoler, 2016), although not representative of important non-systematic flows of goods and people.

Non-linear geographies. Over a time period of forty years, Rome experienced a decrease of 800,000 inhabitants in the central areas, compensated by population growth in peripheral districts. The *Raccordo Anulare*⁵, conceived as the external ring around the city, today constitutes an intermediate axis of the *metropolitan core*, considering that 2.000.000 people are living inside it, and almost 2.500.000 outside. Without questioning the weight and role of the central city, the regional territory can no longer be interpreted using linear descriptive models based on the dichotomy centre/peripheries. Spatial patterns of inequalities and vulnerabilities do not follow univocal trajectories, both within the *metropolitan core*, as well as in the *Capital Region*. Moreover, interpretations based on the contrast between central cities and rural areas, or on the hegemony of urban elites (D'Albergo and Moini, 2011, p. 5-27), have to be flanked by opposite reflections over the weak influence of Rome, inadequate to counterbalance local socio-economic fragilities.

The Capital Region as network of productive systems

According to a Censis-Unioncamere report (2010), companies and employees in the manufacturing, logistics, wholesale trade and high-tech sectors are concentrated in 13 clusters, whose formation and development is determined by a sum of interacting factors:

- consolidation of territorial supply chains (agri-food, boating);
- localization of large companies (mechanics, aerospace, pharmaceuticals);
- direct relations with the metropolitan area and with the supra-regional territory as a potential catchment area (wholesale, logistics);
- institutional initiatives (ICT, High-tech).

Recent researches (DARA, 2017) confirm that the *metropolitan core* constitutes the heart of a more extensive and solid productive system, involving industrial sectors in external counties (Latina, Frosinone, Rieti and, beyond the Lazio's borders, L'Aquila). For pharmaceuticals or advanced mechanics (aerospace), the trans-regional and metropolitan dimension produces relevant advantageous synergies for innovation and internationalization. Hence, the presence of a relevant number of small and medium-sized cities and dynamics of network connecting local production systems to advanced research and service centres concentrated in the central city, configure the Capital Region, at least potentially, as a *supercluster* (Scott, 2001). Therefore, the perspective of the Capital Region can be intended as a means to pave the way for new forms of collaboration between Rome and its regional territory, overcoming the limits of local development and the distortions of metropolitan polarization.

⁵ Grande Raccordo Anulare (GRA) is the common name of the motorway ring of Rome, built in the Sixties.



Figure 2. 2011 Commuting flows not towards Rome, and production clusters
 Source: University of Rome Tre, based on Istat and census-Unioncamere data
 Extract from Rome Capital Region– Research Report.

Towards an intentional assembling

Spatial territorialisation and the dialectic between opportunistic practices and inertial forces. The previous overview to the Capital Region is aimed to spatialize overall trajectories of change. Looking at a lower scale, substantial transformations directly related to the socio-economic reorganization mainly appear as physical reconfigurations and functional adaptations of the material legacy of previous cycles of urbanisation: national motorways (urban and regional commuting), specialised industrial settlements (tertiarization and recreational use), urban fabrics (repopulation of historic centres, abandoned farms and touristic apartments on the coast), agro-forestry land (productive intensification/extensification, diversification/fragmentation), natural areas and heritage (tourism-oriented functionalisation). These transformations, considered individually, appear as site-specific outputs produced by tactical initiatives, promoted by families or companies, looking for the maximum benefit achievable in the short period and on the given conditions. Public infrastructures and land-use regulation, both established decades ago⁶, perform more as constraints than as drivers of development. The dialectic between opportunistic practices and inertial forces produces implicit adaptive strategies (not discussed, nor evaluated in the public arena). As briefly above illustrated, due to their path-dependence, they don't seem able to counteract territorial fragilities and inequalities, nor to fully dialogue among each other, nor to contribute in a synergistic way to accompany the economic transition.

From assemblage to "agencing". From a more theoretical point of view, these dynamics can be interpreted under the Deleuzian lens of assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). Moving through assemblages seems to be the dominant condition of the action: inertia and conditionings alongside

⁶ About 60% of municipal land-use plans were approved more than 30 years ago (Regione Lazio, internal survey).

uncertainty and movement in relation to external forces determine a specific space-time condition, pushing towards “short-sighted practicalism and expediency” (Hillier 2011, p. 504). As highlighted by Hillier, the movement from assemblage to *agencing* (intended as a process by which various entities are inter-connected and put in motion) is strictly related to the awareness about “opening-up or closing-off” potentialities.

Despite the importance of the transition from assembling to *agencing*, the domain of short time is persisting. Therefore, a question remains as to the specific capacity of spatial planning to address long term issues and strategic choices. The long duration has not disappeared, but the search for founding elements of permanence and persistence doesn't appear sufficient to give a real, pro-active role to spatial planning. This is why the greatest challenge lies in the capacity to act in the intermediate space between short and long duration, tactics and strategy, need and desire: a space full of contradiction and therefore of possibilities (Gabellini, 2018).

Within this framework, Roma Regione Capitale can be seen as an initial hypothesis to move on in the “zone of indiscernability” between “a form-that-is-no-longer and another form that does-not-yet-exist” (Hillier 2014, p. 514). At this stage, the main research focus is the setting of metaphorical images, giving an overviewed and differential vision, aiming to formulate proactive hypotheses about the future as a basis for the activation of new trans-scalar policies, capable to reconnect local diversity to the ambivalent characters of metropolitan polarisation. In the following steps, the main aspect to investigate is linked to the relationship of macro-level structures and micro-level movements and to the concept of scale, both as a capacity to read the transformation moving between the complexity and fragment, and as a meaning line capable of proceeding for socio-spatial-temporal concatenated jumps rather than being conceived as expansion.

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