Introduction

Clara Copeta*

'Town', 'city', 'metropolis', 'post-metropolis', 'megalopolis', 'historic city', 'global city', 'informational' or 'industrial' city, 'port city', 'Mediterranean city', 'city of the Global North', 'smart city', '*senseable* city' – all such definitions are related to a city's number of inhabitants, its localization or specific economic activities.

Is it only a matter of denotation? Are these qualifiers really meaningful? Do they actually adhere to their object? Do they embrace it comprehensively? As a rule, definitions respond to pre-defined constraints, which makes them appear somewhat arbitrary. And – do they conform to urban reality, after all?

Moreover – does such a jargon pertain to academics only, or can it be shared with the inhabitants as well? The city itself does not adhere to one definition only, for the good reason that it is no longer a single exclusive structure. In fact, it is no longer a self-evident, spatially defined object; it does not grow linearly. It appears as a fluid object, without positive boundaries – the duality of country and city is less definite than in the past. One may suggest that the city is now omnipresent, to the extent that some of its features are everywhere – such as communication networks, long-distance informational aggregates (etc.) Then, it is no longer possible to define it as a space incorporating a high density of manufacture and people attending to specific economic activities.

Today it is possibly worth analysing the city in relation to its underlying urban substance, since together they form a whole: "cities are places of work, consumption, circulation, play, creativity, excitement, boredom [...]. They gather, mix, separate,

---

* Department of Letters, Language, Arts. Italian Studies and Comparative Cultures, University "Aldo Moro", Bari (Italy)

conceal, display. They support unimaginably diverse social practices" (*Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, Polity, 2002, p. 3).

Such a variety of movements and activities is indeed what we call urban reality, a plain definition of which may include all such elements – human, physical, technological, representational, of images, lifestyles, space-time routines, specific rhythms [...].

In other words, all cities have distinctive urban features, which require non-conventional methods, to be properly analysed and understood. Such urban reality includes also poverty, violence, racialism, neglect, illegality, – i.e. aspects that should be adequately managed by fitted urban policies (political inventions?); But it's necessary to understand urban reality , that carries out by the study of urban practices that also feature multiple neglected temporalities and a number of neglected places which in turn may be re-invented and some other multi-temporalities and places that need to better as bearing the identity markers for distinctive social groups. For this reason, they take on symbolic connotations, which is a crucial process, in that a community's culture is typified in its patrimony of symbols, which have been constructed over time. At last practises are indeed routines but meaningful and for this they need to have particular and fitted policies.

This text about visions of city is realized by essays written by scholars from different fields of study.

The first section is dedicated to the considerations of some geographers; Bruno Vecchio studies the network of the medieval cities (around 130) during the Communal Age and underlines the differences between the Northern and the Southern Italy cities.

Marina Marengo analyzes the city of Saint Malo, as it is described in the saga 'Ces Messieurs de Saint-Malo' by Bernard Simiot. This text – also defined a "roman terroir" – provides a good interpretation for the definition of the geographical imaginary in literature.

Xosé M. Santos analyzes the limited image of a historical city the tourists have and compares it to the most complete visions boasted by the locals.

Anna Trono analyzes the city of Lecce and its urban development strategies, with a view to achieving a more sustainable city.

In his essay, Lorenzo Lozzi Gallo, scholar in Germanic philology, deals with the vision of the city of Zara, both in medieval literature and in the tales of the German pilgrims who visit it.

Susan Ball elaborates a text about the Ekistics model of human settlements in term of its interdisciplinary approach to thinking on the city and its advocating research as the link between the academic and practitioner divided. Moreover, the author underlines that, in the field of urban studies, much was drawn on a number of the underlying principles of the Ekistics model.

The historian Annastella Carrino presents an interesting text about urban settlements in South Italy which are characterized by "agrotowns" (quasi-city). These are "social and territorial space in which some nodes of institutional history in the Europe of the ancient regime can be re-read" thanks to the "Libri Rossi" (local writings).

The Indian scholars Puja Bishnoi, Subodh K. Bishnoi, Mahesh K. Khandelwal present a careful consideration about the rural areas of the Bhiwani District in India, pointing out the characteristics of a drought-stricken environment, and blame the dryness as the cause of some environmental problems. For this reason, some questionnaires were administered in order to investigate the perception of the locals about this problem, and remedies were proposed.

Relevant in this volume is the presence of the territorial planners Antonio Leone and Domenico Camarda. The first presents a text about the "Smart City", defined in 2007. In the same year, some acts were conceived to evaluate the smartness of a territory. Moreover, the author underlines that the concept of "Smart City" is also a marketing concept, so that it should be possible to propose a broader definition including both the environmental sustainability and other urban dysfunctions.

Domenico Camarda focuses his attention on the concept of "spacescape". The ontological representation of the space is essential for artificial intelligence, but also for the knowledge of

the human behaviour in the space. In this case, spatial imagination can be a powerful support in strategic spatial planning.

The economists Caterina De Lucia and Diana Caporale discuss the existence of socio-economic dilemmas in view of renewable energy projects for the growth of greener cities and territories, analyzing the implications which at policy level could close the gap between effective and perceived use of renewable energy sources.

In the end there two young scholars: Manolis Orfanoudakis, together with Dino Borri, describes Corfu where the Venetian Domination influenced the actual form of the urban structure and architecture.

Elvira S. De Giacomo analyses the tourist development of Matera: the phase of renewal has partially altered the old quarters of the town; a phase of preservation is needed to foster the identity of the Sassi and ensure a sustainable and cultural tourism.