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Scritti di **Maryam Abdollahpour, Alessandro Balducci, Angela Barbanente, Sara Basso, Antonella Bruzzese, Alberto Budoni, Lorenzo De Vidovich, Mariacristina Giambruno, Antonio Longo, Maurizio Meriggi, Corinna Morandi, Mario Paris, Marco Peverini, Emanuele Piccardo** | fotografie di **Marco Introini** | Libri di **Anna Attademo e Enrico Formato / Michele Bonino, Francesca Governa, Maria Paola Repellino e Angelo Sampieri / Paolo Ceccarelli / Jeff Cody e Francesco Siravo / Francesca Cognetti e Liliana Padovani / Giancarlo De Carlo / Patrizia Gabellini / David Gómez-Álvarez, Eduardo López-Moreno, Robin Rajack and Gabriel Lanfranchi / Jill Simone Gross, Enrico Gualini e Lin Ye / Daniela Poli / Bianca Maria Rinaldi e Puay Yok Tan / Özdemir Sarı Ö. Burcu, Özdemir Suna Senem e Uzun Nil / Samuel Stein**

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(ibidem) è curato da:
Luca Gaeta (Coordinamento)
Alice Buoli (Relazioni editoriali)
Silvia Gugu (Comunicazione)
Francesco Curci, Marco Milini (Redazione)
Giulia Fini e Cecilia Saibene (*Planum. The Journal of Urbanism*),
con la collaborazione di Carlotta Fioretti

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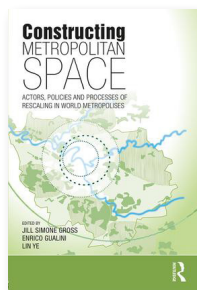
- 50 *Los Angeles River*
Fotografie di Marco Introini
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Queste giornate rallentate dalla prudenza e dalle precauzioni che ciascuno adopera per proteggere se stesso e gli altri dal rischio di un'infezione virale sconosciuta inducono a riflettere sulla fragilità di un mondo globale che non può arrestare la sua corsa. L'interdipendenza dei processi economici è tale che l'interruzione della fornitura di un piccolo componente meccanico paralizza la produzione degli stabilimenti di grandi imprese multinazionali. Il settore turistico di interi paesi entra in crisi con la sospensione di alcune rotte aeree e con le immagini indelebili di supermercati dagli scaffali vuoti mostrate dai telegiornali *all news* sugli schermi di tutto il mondo. Il settore finanziario sconta le conseguenze della reale incertezza del momento con ondate di vendite che fanno crollare le borse e impennare il valore di beni rifugio come i metalli preziosi. Sono soltanto alcuni esempi tra i tanti possibili. Forse ancora nessuno tra i teorici del globalismo ha pensato alla necessità di un freno di emergenza da usare nelle situazioni estreme, quando la corsa del mondo va interrotta almeno per il tempo necessario a evitare una vera pandemia. La pretesa autoregolazione di un sistema altamente interdipendente – da cui dipendono la salute, l'alimentazione e il reddito di miliardi di persone – è in realtà un azzardo sconsiderato. Il risultato è sotto i nostri occhi nelle strade delle città, sui *social media*, nel chiuso delle abitazioni, laddove va in scena uno spettacolo dell'arte di arrangiarsi con le mascherine improvvisate, ascoltando i pareri di questo o quel virologo, riempiendo la dispensa di generi alimentari a lunga conservazione. La quotidianità stralunata di queste settimane potrebbe essere un monito da cui trarre lezioni per affrontare la prossima emergenza globale.

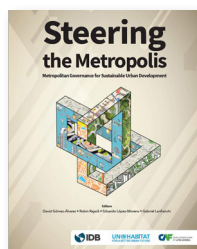
L.G.

Lorenzo De Vidovich

The Construction and the Promotion of Metropolitan Space: Two Sides of the Same Coin



Jill Simone Gross,
Enrico Gualini and Lin Ye (eds.)
**Constructing Metropolitan Space:
Actors, Policies and Processes of
Rescaling in World Metropolises**
Routledge, London-New York 2018
pp. 234, £ 42,99



David Gómez-Álvarez,
Eduardo López-Moreno, Robin Rajack
and Gabriel Lanfranchi (eds.)
**Steering the Metropolis:
Metropolitan Governance for
Sustainable Urban Development**
Inter-American Development Bank 2017
pp. 448, free online access

This review grounds its reflection in the study of metropolitan areas in the 21st century by discussing and bridging the analytical differences between two recent contributions: a book edited by Jill Simone Gross, Enrico Gualini and Lin Ye on the one hand, and a report produced by a collective endeavour among Inter-American Development Bank, UN-Habitat and Development Bank of Latin America coordinated by David Gomez-Álvarez who also co-edited the report together with Robin Rajack, Eduardo López-Moreno and Gabriel Lanfranchi. The two manuscripts address the key role played by metropolitan areas (or regions), whether they are core points of the global cities' network, central urban areas of their country, or pivotal national places for both international and local development. The editors undertake two different approaches in viewing the metropolitan spaces and scales worldwide. On the one hand, Gross, Gualini and Ye tackle the fuzzy nature of metropolitan spaces as political actors and policy objects, even in view of the social construction of the scale lying behind the metropolitan rationale. *Steering the metropolis* discusses instead the importance of pursuing the already legitimized centrality of metropolitan areas for the contemporary development of urban areas, as well as to draw further governance challenges. Common to both volumes is the effort to shed light on the centrality gained by metropolitan areas since the second half of the previous century and in particular in the first decade of 2000s, as a result of the state rescaling began in Western countries (Brenner, 2003). Such increasing attention to the metropolitan question has been anything but constant over the past decades. As discussed by Del Fabbro (2018) in a critical review of the sociological studies of metropolitan areas in Italy within the theoretical legacy of Guido Martinotti, between late 1980s and early 1990s the metropolitan dimension acquired a particular significance for novel research trajectories to face the territorial development of the whole country. Yet,



more than twenty years later, the author notices how little advancements have been made in defining a cross-disciplinary common ground of the metropolitan question and its decision-making scale. The contemporary attention to metropolitan areas – in Italy and beyond – arises precisely as a result of this weak common understanding, and it finds a fertile ground in the plethora of concepts (such as ‘city region’, see Scott 2001) and theories (such as ‘planetary urbanization’, see Brenner 2014) that endeavour a critical comprehension of the complexity of the urban in a time of globalization. Metropolitan spaces are key areas of such rescaling processes while they still represent the ‘arrival places’ for a number of people, firms and organizations seeking opportunities and interactions. Drawing on Del Fabbro (2018), the metropolitan question is now placed at the centre of many research stages, after experiencing different ‘waves’ over the past four decades, corresponding to phases where a specific attention was dedicated to metropolitan development, although politico-institutional arrangements fragmentally followed such research attention. *Constructing Metropolitan Space* and *Steering the Metropolis* deeply plough a new wave of metropolitan studies based on the centrality of metropolitan areas as a result of the rescaling processes on the one hand, and of the continuous metropolitan expansion on the other. This review aims at stressing how the book by Gross, Gualini and Ye guides a comprehensive understanding of the contested metropolitan spaces, whereas the report seems rather oriented to a legitimization of metropolises as pivotal places of the 21st century urban development in an assemblage of main UN-Habitat and OECD evidences. In this respect, the two reviewed volumes tackle the metropolitan question in two different ways, by representing two sides of the same coin. In the following sections, I firstly resume the key contents of each manuscript. Subsequently, I identify the main differences running between the two contributions through a critical reading of three cases addressed in both volumes. Then, I draw general findings about the contribution of both volumes to the literature of metropolitan studies, by emphasizing the discursive construction of metropolitan spaces and their contested scale.

Conceptualizing metropolitan spaces

Constructing Metropolitan Space represents an advancement of the research efforts undertaken by the International Metropolitan Research Consortium, a four-year collaborative research project structured around the exploration of governance and scale through several case studies carried out in Berlin, Delhi, Istanbul, New York, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Rome and Shenzhen. The cases are discussed by addressing very heterogeneous and challenging issues revolving around the construction of metropolitan spaces and the role of public and private actors in building such analytical and political framework. The book moves from the growing body of research that investigates the way metropolitan spaces are politically constructed, and how they are perceived, enacted and discursively connoted as policy spaces. Within the debate about metropolitan rescaling, embedded in the ‘new urban politics’ paradigm (Cox, 2011; MacLeod & Jones, 2011) that sees metropolises as places enabling advanced capitalist economies as well as economic competitiveness, the authors advocate the redefinition of contemporary processes of territorial politics and spatial development policies involved in the affirmation of a metropolitan scale. On this strand, metropolitan spaces are viewed as «a field of tensions between different spatial policy practices, representations and discourses» (CMS, p. 12) by embracing a social-constructivist and strategic-relational perspective that enables to account for the multifaceted construction of metropolitan space. Such space is pivotal for the development of public-private relationships, the redefinition of power geometries within state rescaling, as well as of the role of the state and the governance instruments it puts in motion in the metropolitan policies. In so doing, the authors explore the metropolitan question through a «theoretically informed analytical framework [...] pursuing a common focus in putting emphasis between strategies and the forms of agency of state and non-state actors in constructing metropolitan space» (CMS, p. 16). Such research posture invokes the notion of ‘space of engagement’ posited by Kevin Cox (1998, p. 2), with regard to those «spaces in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds», and where space is therefore seen as a strategic arena for

development policies that act as a leverage to control how spaces are used, by whom and to what end (d'Albergo & Lefèvre, 2018). Metropolitan space is seen as an inter-institutional construction that directly addresses metropolitan-scale construction through efforts to control and govern the space itself thanks to manifold initiatives: transit-oriented developments, the definition of new institutional actors, public-private partnerships built to develop a specific project (particularly in the mobility sector). However, all the cases addressed by the book reveal how such efforts achieve partial results, due to the social-spatial struggle involved in the reconfiguration of spatial scale (Swyngedouw, 2004) that puts metropolitan regions as strategic institutional arenas for development policies. Such tensions emerge from the complicated connections between power, practice and scale among a large universe of actors (Delaney & Leitner, 1997) involved in projects tailored on a metropolitan scale that is often unclear to all the players of a governance arena. The case study addressing the uncertain metropolization of Rome, by d'Albergo, Moini and Pizzo (ch. 8), points out how a specific metropolitan framework may be drawn around an ideal-type, in view of the twofold movement of an 'external' metropolization, reflecting the effects of globalization and market forces, and an 'internal' metropolization produced by the intentional actions of political and economic actors (Pyka, 2013). The economic, spatial and political dimensions determine such ideal-type of metropolis, according to economic relations between an urban core and its outskirts, the geography of metropolitan spaces in a polycentric scenario, and the scalar processes embedded in state rescaling.

Fostering metropolitan development

Steering the Metropolis is the most updated institutional report about metropolitan development. It shows the great deal of attention dedicated by UN-Habitat and OECD to metropolises as engines of policies, politics and collective urban development programmes. The report gathers a large number of cases, introduced by transversal topics regarding metropolitan governance. Despite the fact that no in-depth case studies are provided, their focus aims at unfolding the governance framework,

processes and outcomes towards a general diagnostic of local contexts, map of stakeholders, and key challenges. However, the whole report looks as a general endorsement of metropolises as the places of the future from any angle they are observed. In this respect, it seems entrenched in the international institutional framework of neoliberal urbanism that fosters a common sense of metropolitan areas as the best places for policy innovations (see Theodore & Peck, 2012). Although such criticality may be read through the contents of section 1 (theoretical perspectives on metropolitan governance) and section 2 (sectoral approaches to metropolitan governance), the whole report is a powerful tool in the hands of policy makers, administrators and scholars to grasp the magnitude of the contemporary metropolitan expansion in connection with the numerous societal, governmental, environmental and political complexities that metropolises are globally unfolding. From this rich body of theoretical perspectives two main contributions are particularly relevant. The analysis of political economy in metropolitan areas between the Global North and South (ch. 1.5 by Ortiz and Kamiya) stresses the differences in metropolitan governance between developed and developing countries. The focus on the urban planning challenges in mega-city regions (ch. 1.8 by Xu and Yeh) argues that more theoretical and practical work is needed to explain the performance of regions and metropolises and the form they articulate with other levels of government for better results. In particular, section 2 addresses the political economy aspects faced by metropolitan governance through a highly detailed overview of the main core points: new urban economies, land use, metropolitan finance and fiscal context, monitoring of metropolitan governance advancements, sustainability and climate resilience. Nineteen case studies constitute «a diverse sample of the different institutional, organizational, and procedural settings shaping metropolitan governance around the world» (SM, p. 45). The cases are from North America and Mexico, Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia. They all together reveal that there is no single metropolitan governance model, nor one best institutional arrangement. Yet, the editors move their analysis from the OECD evidences arguing that metropolises tend to be more



efficient and productive than cities, largely due to the economies of scale they generate (OECD, 2015). Although such perspective is largely debated and embraced throughout the report, the authors advocate the difficulties of a metropolitan governance consolidation. As argued by Ahrend *et. al.* in chapter 1.1, «the creation of a metropolitan authority does not, in itself, guarantee better policy coordination. And once such a metropolitan authority is established, given that socioeconomic dynamics evolve continuously, even once well-functioning governance structures may eventually need to be adapted over time» (SM, p. 56). Furthermore – the authors maintain – examples of successful metropolitan projects can typically be found in large-scale infrastructure investment initiatives that exceed the financial and managerial capacity of individual municipalities (such as high-speed rail projects) or major flagship events (such as the Olympic Games). Rather than discussing the collective social and political construction of a metropolitan space of action and scale of government, the report provides a comprehensive overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary metropolitan governance based on OECD and UN-Habitat research evidences. This collaborative effort also helps in setting-up the main research statements emerged over the last decades from both academic and governmental debates. In this respect, the report highlights the key importance of a metropolitan scale of governance, given that cities and metropolitan areas are responsible for approximately three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions from final energy use (SM, p. 28). In this view, the idea of ‘steering’ the metropolis is a highly challenging perspective that, albeit largely explored, faces the paradox of creating more liveable and sustainable metropolitan areas by constantly transforming those areas that constantly generate environmental problems today. Such a statement shall not be read as a critic against the rationale of the report. Rather, it is a note to stress the need to pursue a global framework of metropolitan spaces in policy actions and politics.

Contestation and promotion

Some conceptual differences run between the two volumes, as they differently cope with the

metropolitan question. Whilst CMS addresses the conceptual construction of metropolitan spaces through diachronic overviews or referring to specific projects, SM provides a general outline of the selected metropolitan regions, though it also mentions some targeted examples from each case. The cases of New York, Delhi, and Paris, addressed by both volumes, enable to grasp such differences. SM sees New York metropolitan region as a case of historical decline in metropolitan governance, showing the discontinuity of public policies that once favored sustainable mobility and quality public spaces. CMS, through the overview of six transit-oriented developments within the NY metropolitan region, highlights a dynamic and changing process of ‘scale craft’ building between spaces of dependences and engagements. With reference to Paris, whereas SM observes Grand Paris as a successful experience resulting from ‘conflicting cooperation’, CMS advocates the difficulty and contested efforts to reconstruct a metropolitan space for Paris and Île-de-France from 2000 to the present, fragmented by failures and cooperation strongly related to political turns. Observing Delhi, CMS argues that metropolitan Delhi is progressively becoming more salient as a spatial scale in view of the cumulative effect of policies and strategic actions, investigated through overviews of the mass transit metro system and the industrial estate projects. Yet, SM notices how Delhi, despite its special status of National Capital Territory, is characterized by fragmentation of responsibility, incomplete devolution of funds and functions and parallel existence of parastatals associations in metropolitan governance, like any other metropolis. Although SM discusses pitfalls and grey areas of metropolitan governance across numerous cases, the volume chases a research trajectory that strengthens the search for policy instruments and arrangements for metropolitan governance. Differently, CMS is focused on the contested nature of metropolitan spaces as arenas where socio-spatial power relations are negotiated and regulated (Swyngedouw, 1997). The contestation and construction of metropolitan space mirrors the rationale characterizing *Steering the metropolis*, generating a diversified dialectic about the metropolitan issue, with the result – achieved by both books – of contributing to the complex

understanding of metropolitan spaces as real existing spaces of politics and policies.

Discursive construction of metropolitan space

As scale is understood as a social construct in which power and material interests are at stake and mediated, the focus on the discursive dimension of spatial politics looks «at the interpretations and meanings of ‘what is metropolitan’ in processes of discursive (symbolic and rhetorical) construction of space through public policies» (d’Albergo & Lefèvre 2018, p. 154). The attention to the discursive dimension makes metropolitan spaces as contested spaces where political practices and talks constitute multiple ontologies of metropolitan spaces, and where their interplay is the expression of power relations and patterns of influences that may define specific rescaling and scale effects (Fricke & Gualini, 2018). Although the discursive construction of metropolitan space comes as an intangible aspect, it actually lies behind the shapes of the manifold metropolitan governances across the continents, and it influences the OECD and UN-Habitat focuses that are conveyed into *Steering the Metropolis*. The metropolitan space is a contested space resulting from rescaling processes where metropolitan regions gain a multifaceted centrality determined by the governance arrangements and power relations put in place for projects and policy developments affecting the metropolitan region. The discursive construction of metropolitan space calls for a framework that involves complex urban systems, usually characterized by an urban core – with different dimensions – and its surroundings, ordinarily identified with a constellation of municipalities. In this scenario, metropolitan spaces entail the need of a common understanding amongst the manifold governance actors of the scale and the places determining a metropolitan governance. In a way, metropolitan space raises an immaterial ‘sense of belonging’ to a specific region shared amongst public and private actors according to a specific policy, project or development trajectory. Actors’ perceptions and representations about the metropolis turn out to be multifaceted important dimensions of the consolidation and contestation of a metropolitan scale as they address the spatial dimension of metropolitan regions at a time where

their role is crucial role in the rescaling of public power (Armondi, 2017).

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