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## Trieste: a centre on the border

Paola Di Biagi

Thinking of Trieste as a laboratory for policies, plans and projects directs our attention to the recent history of a city which, like many other cities in Italy and Europe, has registered, albeit with some contradictions, an increase in the speed of territorial, economic and social transformations. From the 1990s a number of planning tools, of various types and scales, implementation plans, major urban transformation projects, complex policies and programmes have been devised one after the other. These tools have come to terms not only with the need to manage changes in progress, on a local and regional scale, but also with the necessity of foreseeing possible further scenarios of change and coping with transformations on a supranational level. Such a condition, shared by other complex and changing realities, is rendered even more complex by the peculiarity of a geographical position, which gives Trieste the status of a border city, on the edge of politically diversified and at times unstable territories. As a meeting point for the peoples of the Mediterranean, the city becomes a place of exchange, not only of goods but also of knowledge and cultures. The geopolitical changes in contemporary Europe tend to highlight once again the ambiguous vocation of Trieste for being a multinational and multiethnic city: melting pot and cross roads of different cultures. Since the end of the 20th century, the role and significance of the Triestine territory underwent major changes. Even more significant transformations

are expected today as a result of Slovenia's accession to the European Union in May 2004. Such changes will affect not only the city and the region but to some extent the whole Northeast, giving the city the opportunity, if aptly used, to regain a new centrality within an economic and territorial system bereft of barriers. As a result, a cross-border approach to Trieste's urban issues is gaining momentum, in urban and territorial planning. The 'European macroregion' project, which would include the regions of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Carinthia, the would-be regional authorities in the Slovene coastal areas and Karst, Istria and the coastal county of Rijeka, pursued by the new President of the Region as tool and space of cross-border cooperation, will place Trieste, along with Gorizia, within a new network of relations and exchanges between territories and cities aimed at defining a shared vision as far as territorial and landscape planning, economic development and infrastructural layout are concerned. Transnational cooperation projects and programmes, like Interreg initiatives or hypotheses such as the passage on the Triestine territory of the European Multimodal Corridor V, the infrastructural connection projects of the upper Adriatic coast, the hypothesis of an International Park on the Karst, but also the candidacy of the city as the site for the international Expo in 2008, define new opportunities for prefiguring scenarios of complex and integrated transformations, resulting from concerted actions between national and international government bodies. The future prospects of the city and its territory seem to

define new patterns of economic and spatial relations, enacting some sort of return to the past, to the role of Trieste as an exchange point between MittelEurope, the Balkans and the Mediterranean, updating and changing the vocation which the city had up to the beginning of the 20th century. There emerges a conceptual change, rich in implications as far the issues and sites of the territorial project are concerned, where the city gradually loses the feature of *finis terrae* and takes on the characteristics of transnational connecting space, of *centre on the border*.

With this initiative, we intend to take stock of the most recent transformations that occurred in the city planning, and to examine them in relation to policies and tools devised on a wider scale, both from a geographical and temporal point of view.

From the 1990s, there clearly emerges the firm intention to upgrade the consolidated city and to recover its urban heritage. Along with the issues of the physical and functional redevelopment of the Old Port, and more generally of the reconstruction of the city waterfront with the subsequent reclaiming of open spaces and artefacts, there has also been the recovery of the image of a decayed historic centre, from a spatial, economic and social point of view, resorting to a variety of tools like the Prusst programme (Urban regeneration and sustainable territory development) "The reconquest of the waterfront", the Urban Tergeste programme, the detailed Plan of the historic city, the Colour Plan, the Plan of the 'dehors'. The call for upgrading the spaces of the public city and the considerable amount of

buildings and residential blocks built during the 20th century, went hand in hand with an increasing concern for the inhabitants' needs, not only in terms of services and facilities but also with regard to places and occasions for socialization, as shown by the development of integrated programmes for urban upgrading and social promotion like the "Habitat, health and community development" programme. Along with the definition of new perspectives for the city centre renewal, a great deal of attention has also been paid to the housing and environmental resources of a hinterland, the Karst territory and its scattered villages, which had been separated from the 'maritime' city for a long time and has now been reinterpreted as an integral part of the new urban form, in a city lived and inhabited on a territorial scale. In short, a complex cluster of policies, projects, and scenarios, involving a plurality of actors, and touching on different issues and scales, has been set in motion, all contributing to creating the new image of a city, that is internally reorganized and open to national and international contexts. The challenge put out by such an approach concerns the capacity to manage in an integrated way transformation processes which are becoming more and more complex, due to the plurality of actors involved and to the need to bring coherence to an ever more fragmented and kaleidoscopic pattern of actions.

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