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The future of finis terrae: infrastructural scenarios

Vittorio Torbianelli

Urban economics researchers assert that the precondition for the development of western cities in the post-industrial era will be the capacity to generate and attract creative human capital. Cities in order to attract the "new creatives" (and thus companies working in the field of new technologies) will have to meet the pressing life quality requirements put forward by this esteemed human capital, sensitive to perceptive stimuli and to "experience consumption". Having leader universities in advanced sectors will be ever more important, as well as offering a wide range of opportunities (entertainment, shopping, sociality, culture) readily accessible and a high quality of urban and territorial spaces and network services. On May 1st 2004 Slovenia will access the European Union and Trieste, now undergoing a demographic and economic weakening typical of many other post-industrial cities, will regain a more central geographic position within an economic hinterland without barriers. The hope in the opportunities offered by the accession of new states to the EU is great: the prevailing opinion is that Trieste could redevelop economically, as it has already happened in the past, thanks to the relations with its central-eastern European hinterland coming close again. Hence policy-makers draw priority attention to the great infrastructural projects concerning the Paneuropean Corridor V, which links Venice to Kiev. But Trieste, aiming at such projects, is under the illusion that the

development factors are those of the past (infrastructural connections but not the creative human capital), running the risk to miss the chance of regaining a real central position over the next ten years. And yet this city with its research centres can aspire to become a post-industrial development centre, on condition that it goes through a strong social innovation. In such perspective, the relation with distance will not have to be considered on the physical level of the hinterland, but on a global scale, on the immaterial level.

What type of infrastructural choices should be made, then? It is important not to forget about the small scale, i.e. the urban and metropolitan scale, included in a 45-minute trip.

Among the great infrastructures those serving daily mobility play a central role. They make facilities on the territory more accessible by following a logic which fosters environmental quality growth. This does not mean that the city should cut itself off from the outside world; indeed the best results of the redevelopment process will be achieved only if Trieste is able to expand its surroundings and to integrate (and coordinate) completely with the nearest centres, creating a greater critical population mass and greater opportunities. These centres are Monfalcone (with its environs) and Koper across the Slovenian border. If Trieste, Monfalcone and Koper combine into a system, they could form a true integrated international metropolitan area. Such system could be ideally extended to Rijeka, located 60 Km from Trieste, but the two cities have not yet been connected by the motorway network. If on one hand a sound support to these

international projects is provided by the "Euroregions" policy carried out by the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region, on the other the great projects aimed at speeding up internal connections within the metropolitan area are a starting point for the creation of a new integrated system. To such purpose, Trieste and Monfalcone could be better linked with an underground motorway junction which from the Karst motorway goes directly into town. On the south-eastern side, the completion of the Trieste-Koper motorway connection is of great importance. The actual advantage of strengthening the new railway stretch between Trieste and Monfalcone (along the Venice line), linking the local airport, deserves further investigation. On the other hand, the relatively modest density of fluxes and high implementation costs (infrastructures should pass underneath the Karst) reduce the priority of transborder railway projects like that of the high speed train between Trieste and Ljubljana. But the single projects are not enough, they have to be placed inside a new overall design: a new plan for accessibility (and mobility) involving the whole area. It should concentrate in particular on the interface between the great connections on metropolitan scale and the most densely built and congested areas of the centres. The development of great infrastructure in the historic core of Trieste (tunnels and underground car parks) which do not blend harmoniously with the whole urban system perhaps is not the best solution today. The interface between the metropolitan network and the urban network should rather stem from the creation of some transport

nodes (car parks, park&ride facilities, etc.) placed on the outskirts of the densely-built district, at the end of metropolitan connections (railway and motorway) and should follow an innovative system logics, based on the integration between transport modes, rates and timetable and on the re-hierarchisation of the road network. Such a plan could trigger off new multi-functional urban planning projects along the main access routes and their 'urban heads', i.e. areas which have a great potential in both terms of accessibility and re-generation, such as the south-eastern "industrial area" and the Old Port area candidate to host the Expo in 2008.

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