

Account on “Rome. Still the Capital of Italy?”

VIERI QUILICI

Abstract: Rome has been a nation capital only a bit over 150 years, but the rhythm of its history has been marked by its various projects as a modern capital. From the *Piani dei Piemontesi* and the *Centralità* of Via Venti Settembre promoted by Quinto Sella, to Francesco Crispi's Monumental City and to Giovanni Giolitti's bourgeois city, from the imperial rhetoric persecuted by Benito Mussolini to the democratic recovery of the post WW II, up to the creation of the regions in the 1970s. And now? It has been over thirty years ago now, more or less, since the crisis of Tangentopoli (political corruption exposed in the 90s), no one even tries. Just as Walter Tocci¹ in his historical reconstructions has precisely recorded, the Paths, in which the prospects of a development worthy of a capital seemed could have evolved, have been interrupted. How to reclaim the lines traced by these potential paths, or rather, how to identify new ones, more relevant to the present needs and difficulties. These are the question to which the speakers have tried to answer. And, though starting from a common initial despair to which, we have said, they have tried to give different indications in reference to their study and individual deep thinking on the matter.

Keywords: Rome nation's capital, European capitals, scattered metropolis

At the round table “Rome. Still The Capital of Italy?” held on June 28th, 2018 at the seat of the Department of Architecture at Sapienza University of Rome, Piazza Borghese² where the topic of Rome still a capital was discussed. The various speakers who have answered the call³ found themselves converging on their diagnosis regarding Rome's serious identity crisis in its role as the nation's capital, scarcely surmountable in the short run.

1. Cfr. Walter Tocci, *Roma. Non si piange su una città coloniale*, goWare, 2015.

2. The initiative was promoted by professors Lucio Barbera from Sapienza University of Rome and Vieri Quilici from Roma Tre University.

3. Francesco Erban, journalist for “la Repubblica”, writer; Giuseppe De Rita, sociologist and founder of CENSIS; Vittorio Emiliani, writer and journalist; Massimo Teodori, writer and politician; Giovanni Cauda, Professor of Urban Planning, recently elected President of the III Municipality; Walter Tocci, politician and scholar of Roman urban events.

The question is not new, nor has there been a lack of attempts to compensate for the most obvious shortcomings. The phase in the 90s was characterized by the aspiration to compete with the great capitals of Europe in terms of image and efficiency,⁴ moving on from there to the approval of a new Regulatory Plan with distended boundaries, with its countless scattered centers, but lacking any spatial prospects of development. Having finally arrived to the present phase, what prevails is the acknowledgement of the condition of impotence before the abnormal scattered and low density urbanization, rendering arduous any attempt at bringing the structure of the city to its overall congruence. The *periferie* (outskirts) which have expanded and coagulated around the ANAS Grande Raccordo (Great Ring Junction) are also known as *Metropoli diffusa* (diffused Metropolis) and have determined an overall urban form corresponding to the exact configuration of the Exploded City of the recent decades, composed of centers of previous development, three-fourth thousand residents, and clots of a more or less consistent texture, whose sole identity has been reduced to the historical denomination of the site where they have sprung up, the so called “toponyms”. These, in fact, are the actual data of the current situation and the more recent attempts at remedies with respect to which the speakers were asked to comment.

It would seem there is no concrete hope that to the lack of prospects that an efficient solution may be found by continuing to fly low. The question holds especially regarding the city as such, but is what is even more serious is the total absence of any debate about Rome precisely as Nation's capital. An inexcusable silence, especially considering that the history of Rome Capital until now, after all, has lasted briefly and in this regard has presented not a few reversals of tendencies. Rome has been a national capital only a bit over 150 years, but the rhythm of its history has been marked by its various projects as a modern capital. From the *Piani dei Piemontesi* and the *Centralità* of Via Ventì Settembre promoted by Quinto Sella, to Francesco Crispi's Monumental City and to Giovanni Giolitti's bourgeois city, from the

4. At that time it was widely believed that the recovery of a city could or should occur through a policy of great works, using as a model Barcelona, London of the Millenium and Berlin, once more Germany's capital after the unification of Germany. For Rome in any case it was translated as a series of individual interventions which revealed themselves to be missed opportunities of development in various sectors: 'la Nuvola' by Fuksas at EUR, in the sector of international congresses, the new MAXXI, inadequate to measure up to the panorama of worldwide artistic production; the great Swimming and Water Sports Stadium designated to host events on the occasion of the Jubilee, project by Calatrava and still unfinished, etc.

imperial rhetoric persecuted by Benito Mussolini to the democratic recovery of the post WW II, up to the creation of the regions in the 1970s. And now? It has been over thirty years ago now, more or less, since the crisis of Tangentopoli (political corruption exposed in the 90s), no one even tries. Just as Walter Tocci⁵ in his historical reconstructions has precisely recorded, the Paths, in which the prospects of a development worthy of a capital seemed could have evolved, have been interrupted. How to reclaim the lines traced by these potential paths, or rather, how to identify new ones, more relevant to the present needs and difficulties. These are the questions to which the speakers have tried to answer. And, though starting from a common initial despair to which, we have said, they have tried to give different indications in reference to their study and individual deep thinking on the matter.

At the opening of the proceedings, the rector of Sapienza, represented by the vice-rector, prof. Renato Masiani, and the head of the Department of Architecture and Design, prof. Orazio Carpenzano, gave their support to the initiative.

Professor Lucio Barbera opened the debate with a comprehensive historical reconstruction of the process of the development of Rome Capital by reconnecting it to the main questions that have remained unanswered since the Risorgimento period of the Savoia, until the last and crucial decision by Cavour to meet the need to unite the two separate Italies, North and South, with Rome at the center in its indispensable connective [bonding] function. Furthermore he gave the necessary information on the premises and objectives of the Round Table, also clarifying the motives that have induced the curators to proceed with the contributions by personalities from the world of journalism and politics known for their commitment to the question. This was to begin the debate and set it on the basis of an initial recognition of the state of the art, in which the reflections would be led back to the normal questions of a Capital, from its representativeness as a great historical city to its institutional recognizability. But what does normal mean when it refers to a Rome that always appealed to its exceptionality and uniqueness in the various planning opportunities to which it was called upon to offer its contribution? The invitation

5. Cfr. Walter Tocci, *Roma. Non si piange su una città coloniale*, goWare, 2015.

addressed to the speakers was then to relate to the main objective of the Round Table, consisting in opening a discussion among persons of differing background on certainly a difficult and complex a topic, but one endowed with a question whose answers can no longer be ignored.

A first interesting response referring to the city as such came from Francesco Erbanì's intervention, a devoted explorer and expert on metropolitan Rome, *Roma disfatta. Perché la Capitale non è più una città e cosa fare per ridarle una dimensione pubblica*⁶, and *Roma. Il tramonto della città pubblica*.⁷ One must, according to Erbanì, verify how much, in the relation between Rome and the Country, incompetence affects it carrying out its role as Capital recently indicated in the press⁸ as the worst evil, without it being a weak parody of the well known exposé in "L'Espresso" in the 50s, *Capitale corrotta Nazione Infetta* (Corrupted Capital Infected Nation)⁸ and which given the results of the latest elections does seem to have provoked and adequate reaction in public opinion. The point of departure is always the question of the image and through it the relation between city and nation. What representation of itself does it offer the rest of Italy? Among the symbolic sites of the capital are with their prestige the archaeological area, Renaissance and Baroque Rome of the historic center, but paradoxically alongside them today the suggestion of those places where Carminati (underworld figure linked to far right terrorists and to public officials) and his associates of Mafia Capitale would meet. Another aspect of the question regards the weakening of that same symbolic function of the sites, so much so as to justify the question whether Rome is still the capital. In the course of the last twenty years the city has scattered over a vast territory with overall extremely low housing density where consequently services cannot cover it. A residential dispersal that is not worthy of a capital. Other than what one could say today about Naples, where the urban structure, thanks especially to the subway, has remained essentially compact, maintaining optimal relational conditions. With obvious positive repercussions for the future of democracy. For Rome it means finding at the highest levels of urban conformation the unity of the various bodies into which the world of scattered peripheries has

6. Vezio De Lucia, Francesco Erbanì, *Roma disfatta. Perché la Capitale non è più una città e cosa fare per ridarle una dimensione pubblica*, Castelvechi 2016.

7. Francesco Erbanì, *Roma. Il tramonto della città pubblica*, Laterza 2013.

8. Salvatore Merlo, *Capitale inetta, nazione infetta*, "Il Foglio" 25 giugno 2018.

fragmented. In conclusion: Rome is a surprising city in its changes, including its impetuous ones, which go far beyond the problem of the deterioration of its "peripheries." Mobility also refers to political moods. One sure necessity is that the sites be connected between each other thanks to a more general reciprocal greater understanding. As resident and citizen, Erbani acts as a spokesman of an objective more than ever shared if referring to the normal city: that the expansion of the city which in decades past was subject to the greatest uncontrolled housing speculation find its compactness and be once more provided with services and infrastructures. This is the reason that even a cycling and a pedestrian lane which today connects Balduina with the western peripheral expansions of the city (an itinerary realized along the rail tracks, in bad state of disrepair...) may seem a promising symbolic handshake between distant sites and not only physically.

The invitation to participate which followed was extended to Giuseppe De Rita, well known sociologist and historical founder of CENSIS, curator since 1967 of the annual Reports on the state of the Nation. The speaker began by stating that his speech will be short and it will be on a single theme. The topic will refer exclusively to the subjectivity of Rome. He will try to answer the question: But what city is Rome? As in the 60s when referring to Turin the answer could not but be that it was the city of FIAT. Rome is the city of the Institutions. It does not have its own subjectivity, it lives on Institutions. A tradition that extends from emperor Augustus to the Popes. When Rome becomes capital various urban Institutions are created, different from those of papal dependency. An institutional city was created thanks to state institutions, but not of the State. Compared to London or Paris with their activities as great Capitals. Today Rome is overwhelmed by the mass of tourism attracted by the historical heritage. There are no other great resources. Since 1870 there spring up mainly seats of state administration. But let us think of other aspects of the city, typical of other moments in its history. Think back to the time of the war and Pacelli's postwar. These were periods when solidarity among citizens concerned with preserving the quality of the life of relations arose. The Church active in its parishes had understood that Rome could be made into a city of solidarity. Later the bureaus of the state employees won out. The last to take an active interest in the city was Paul VI. Memorable was the famous inquest on the Ills of Rome. After his pontificate things got ever worse for Rome. Cardinal Bertone reported that while

accompanying the pope towards Castel Gandolfo he confessed that he would have preferred not to see what would present itself along the way. In closing, De Rita limited himself to asserting it is necessary to react to the present lack of prospects – in the sense of a greater autonomy of the urban society from the Institutions. And quoting Giuseppe Gioachino Belli “Er zuo sta bbasso, e ‘er mio sarta sur tetto.” (“His stays low, and mine jumps to the roof”, from the poem “un cuadro buffo” by G. Belli in Roman dialect)

Continuing with the proceedings of the Round Table the third speaker, Vittorio Emiliani, journalist and writer always active in the defending the landscape and the Cultural heritage,⁹ is invited to intervene. In starting his intervention he straight away declares that there is no need to “self flagellate” as did, instead Alberto Moravia with his *Contro Roma* (“Against Rome” refers to a 1975 collection of essays, published by Laterza, including Alberto Moravia’s criticism of Rome) and Soldati’s *Roma è Morta* (Mario Soldati, author and film director). It was men of the North, like Giuseppe Cederna, Italo Insolera and Leonardo Benevolo who defended Rome from the “vandals.” And he continued: we must always remember that Rome became a capital after the Risorgimento revolts when all the Italian regions were involved. It was not like Paris or London that from the very beginning were at the center of all the relative unitary processes. In 1861 Italy did not unite and, before Rome, Florence was the capital. The special law of 1881 was not designed for Rome as capital, but in the first instance for investments in real estate. An uncertainty which is then at the basis of a fundamental misunderstanding regarding the relationship between the Capital and the State, central of federal. Very burdensome historical legacy. The history of the attempt to react to such a legacy is long. There we find the experience of Sanjust di Teulada thanks to whose municipal government we owe the beauty of the first modern neighborhoods of Rome. Villa Borghese was acquired by the State so as to be the Villa of the Romans. Mussolini then intervenes by investing significant sums of capital in public works dictated by demagoguery, such as the

9. Vittorio Emiliani, *Roma capitale malamata*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2018; Vittorio Emiliani, *Lo sfascio del belpaese. Beni culturali e paesaggio da Berlusconi a Renzi*, Edizioni Solfanelli, Chieti-Roma, 2017.

deviation of the Tiber's riverbed. A hierarchical city is created, beyond whose limits the first "borgate" (rural-urban fringe) and a few industries emerge.

In the postwar period the city administration is straightforward, a branch-office of Palazzo Chigi. There is no lack of attempts to relaunch the city, even major ones. Now at 1984 with Craxi's Special law in which 340 billion Lire are invested. An international competition is held for the new Auditorium, conveniently on invitation. In order that the works be realized Pieraccini's contribution is necessary. Now 67% of expenses are covered by revenue. Finally the Cura del ferro (Iron Cure, transport plan with rails) sponsored by Tocci in the 90s. Rome, however, has not reached a condition worthy of its destination as National capital. There is talk of a city that despite recurring to continuous special laws and programs has not resolved its problems. Today there is the problem of its relations with the Region, which is stronger, even in terms of representation. In a comparison with Rome there is at the center the question of metropolitan governance. We must pick up a propositional discourse, with a clear idea of the potentialities to be retrieved. Think of the prestigious institutes which have been lost, to the other headquarters of national importance which have moved out, beginning with the headquarters, once Roman, of RAI's Symphony academy. A mistake! Just as one can point to the area of the Foro Italico, which, though headquarters of CONI, National Olympic Committee, is now in a terrible state of disrepair. And lastly the relationship with the Church. In Rome there are twenty thousand sites of the Confraternity. We must promote them!

As we can see the interventions are quite different, but the coordinator points out how the topics begin to intertwine. The floor is given to Massimo Teodori, journalist and politician (not professional as he likes to point out), essayist and writer. He immediately declares himself "alien to experts" and prefers to present himself as an observer, not as a citizen, today an overused term, but as a resident. His first observation is also a recommendation directed to the objectives of the Round Table: abandon looking for a solution to Roma as capital. It is a term that non longer has any meaning, neither in the present

nor the past nor the future. We have proof when we see pass by us, though not eliciting any participation, the municipal administration vehicles with the wording “Roma Capitale” (Rome Capital). It only made sense in two historical periods when it was the capital of a free Italy, in opposition to the Church, with Rome capital of Christianity. That is, when the then political class with Nathan as mayor created what best was possible with a city reduced to seven-hundred residents. Then Mussolini, who wanted to structure it in his image. The rest is just talk. With no projects for the future. Milan could, Rome not, continues Teodori in his talk. We must ask ourselves, who has the real power? The municipal administration does not. The builders no longer have any, reduced to a sort of jelly. The Real Estate Company against whom Leone Cattani fought once had it. Now the masters are many. It is those who make up the cast of the state *Great commis* (ironic term meaning high state officials or functionaries). Proof is that they are the ones who the great corruptors turn to. To delve deeply, let's look at what happens in the historical center. It is its patrimony of cultural heritage that is now at risk. It is precisely the main resource of its economy, due to a low level tourism that is drowning it. If we let things stand the way they are these riches would destroy the riches for which the tourists come to Rome. And the old would destroy the new. But – we ask – who today is capable of reacting to the decision to place tickets in all tourist sites and to prevent coach buses from parking? Rome is administered as an aggregate of small dimensions. I would only have words of desperation, not of hope. Here we need a general of the Carabinieri (military corps with police duties) with enormous prestige and capable of taking a decision. To conclude. I do not believe, so ends Teodori, that we can entrust the Magistrates or that Casamonics (criminal organization) is the fundamental problem. The first duty is to let go of the grand Visions. Let us adopt the point of view of inhabitants of a normal city. Let us draw up a list of what is needed: 1st, 2nd, 3rd and so on. For a normal decent city. A wakeup call. Face the emergency of problems such as what De Rita says, is eating up the city.

At this point the Round Table is tending towards the conclusion with two final speakers planned, in which an account will be given of

the existence of potentialities that politicians have not so far taken into account. We begin with Giovanni Caudo, professor of Urban planning at Roma Tre University, who will refer to research he and the scholars he has promoted have carried out.¹⁰ The intervention is accompanied by projections of images regarding Rome and its relationship with its territory. The speaker begins by recalling the need to bring back the vision of Rome to the conditions of a normal city, a real national question. He then further maintains that at the same time we must try and seek every possible way out of the impasse. With a gaze projected towards the future, but also to the roots of the problem. 148 years of life of the capital are nothing. First Rome was just a town, with 200,000 inhabitants. The Plebiscite passed unanimously. Today Rome has reached the dimensions of city-territory. Of which Rome then are we talking about? What are the reasons which the city has been able to grow in so short a time? What happened in these 148 years? Maybe we weren't able to understand. To understand it we must follow various trajectories. What changed when European capitals adopted the single paper currency? Since when has Rome lost its shadow and lost its soul? Now we need to rediscover the meaning of the city. Rediscover the relation between the Administration and the historical city, with references to its ancient roots. Between 2003 and 2008 the property of the Public administration is no longer ministries and barracks. Now it is the totality of the public lands that must be governed. Just think of the need to intervene on the site around Tiburtina station. Should we just resign ourselves? Does the question of the transformation regard us or not? To refer to the other root, the cultural city. In an original perspective view even the low density could become a value, it means the presence of agriculture in Rome. The method is always thus: probe the future starting from the roots. Look at this image of the area of Ponte di Nona. A large empty space. Possibilities open up. There are houses but no streets. This is our history. Dignity of life guaranteed to hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. Justified pride. On the question of the debt: we need to keep in mind that it was created to help function the capital machinery. Think of the reclamation in the periphery of entire

10. Giovanni Caudo, et al, *Roma altrimenti, le ragioni nuove dell'essere capitale*, con Postfazione di Walter Tocci, Independently published, Roma 2017.

neighborhoods. A debt that was created to assist new residents. Among the paths to follow there is still the one of decentralization: power must be given to municipalities, whose external perimeter coincides with the shape of the city. Around the Grande Raccordo (Great Ring Junction) new medium sized cities have sprung up. It is necessary to see to their *governance*. And finally the last trajectory which regards the dimensions of the Roman territory. While for Paris ones speaks of the Great Regional metropolis (Métropole du Grand Paris), for Rome we need to consider all of the territory that gravitates around it. It is a territory inhabited by a population which corresponds to, in a national comparison by number of inhabitants, to the second Italian Municipality, after Milan. It includes part of Umbria and of Abruzzo, and has become the economic engine of central Italy. It is a vast area, the so-called Central Area. Politicians haven't noticed, but the market has. At its center is the question of the Fori, but now it is necessary to organize it on the scale of its entire dimension. We live from the riches it produces.

At the close of the debate Walter Tocci is invited to speak. An active politician and scholar of Rome and its institutional function as capital since the period in which he covered the role of vice-mayor of Rutelli's Council. He was profusely thanked for not having wanted to miss the Round Table despite having undergone surgery only a few days prior. At the beginning of his intervention, Tocci did not forego a first important reference to the Crisis of Rome Capital. We are – he declares – at the change of an entire historical cycle. It is therefore the time to face the question of the capital *in itself* and *for itself*, pitting the two positions in a dialectic relation. First of all it is important to consider as a good in itself the historical past of the Grand history, to be fully aware. In the *for itself* of the present city the moral values have been drained. Of Rome we now gather the character of a Colonial city. Almost as if it belonged to a class of an external reality. For other capitals it took four to five centuries for them to acquire autonomously their specific character. Rome thus as a city of new foundation. But in what sense is the process to be interpreted: assertively or derogatorily? Simply capital of something. We must then roll up our sleeves, because many roads have opened up.

Before us the vision of interrupted trails. On the one hand the path of positivist idealists of the clash of ideas that led to the democratic city, in a romantic, idealistic and trusting vision. On the other, the raw reality of the Ager Romanus, the astonishment of the intellectuals that would come to Rome finding around it a desert. And immediately the question: how to resolve this contrast? The answer cannot but take into account the passing of the paradigm, attempt the development. The sense which is at the basis of the Colonial city is not necessarily negative. Rome must be helped for what it will know what to do, on an international dimension. A city that can attract young people from abroad is necessary. In this aspect we are weak, but we also have the possibility of becoming a Studies and training center. There are already niches which we can count on. The potentials for attraction are much higher than what the present offers. Think of the centers of research and meeting places, to the university and cultural facilities. If we look at them put together they constitute a not insignificant resource. Think of Rome's territory as a regional reality. The example of Barcelona tells us that great leaps forwards are also possible. Just as for Barcelona's relation with Catalonia so Rome needs a Regional platform. It is a question of funds. But around GRA is the issue at stake. The large infrastructure cannot perform the function that belonged to the historical Asse Attrezzato, at most it can carry out that of the Asse Attrezzato of unregulated development. But one must also see the potentialities. A great topic of studies and planing is that of the scientific knowledge of the urban reality that deal with the zones beyond the Grande Raccordo. Many young scholars are involved who produce interesting developments in research and planning. Overall, the possibility of glimpsing possible positive solutions in the transformation of that same existing reality entails an operative relation with the State. Future destinations in which to intervene of Ministries, Schools, Barracks, empty lots must be studied. And never sell cheaply.

Today the prospect of holding a referendum on public transport seriously presents itself. An initiative which would also be the means to consult its citizens. There looms a great opportunity to redefine the Concept of Public service, the innovation of what it means.

This – affirms Tocci in concluding his intervention – are the topics of the *Capital for-itself*.