REVIVAL OF VILLAGES & RURAL SETTLEMENTS
FOR TERRITORIAL REBALANCE & COHESION

1. INTRODUCTION PANDEMIC IMPACTS

the difficult global situation, due to the pandemic, when over, will certainly have negative consequences in many sectors, so the recovery will certainly not be fast, but hopefully also positive impacts on some aspects of future territorial development.

From the statistics of almost all countries it emerges that Covid-19 grows where there is greater human concentration, so it is more difficult to reduce its spread in large urban agglomerations than in smaller settlements. The measures of prevention, isolation and social distancing have worked and work best in urban contexts smaller in size.

This is not the only pandemic or epidemic that has occurred in recent years, just think of MAD COW, EBOLA, SARS, AVIARIA, etc., nor will it be the last since all forecasts agree that we will have to get used to more and more recurring similar events , also increased by climate change, which was not given sufficient weight until recently.

The close interrelation between man and the environment is clearly visible in the satellite photos of recent months relating to air pollution, which has fallen everywhere due to the decrease in production activities and traffic, an element now present in many of the megacities and large urban areas of all continents. .

The balance that for centuries and until a few decades ago regulated the relationship between the environment and anthropogenic settlements, has been weakening with the various industrial revolutions and has been broken in recent decades by the growing phenomena of unregulated urbanization towards increasingly more urban agglomerations large and alienating: currently there are over 36 cities with over 10 million inhabitants, of which some megacities that reach 50 million, with the majority located in developing countries, especially in Asia, in which a significant part of the inhabitants (30% approximately) lives in precarious settlements and unsanitary conditions.

The phenomenon of urbanization was assumed as inevitable, starting from the principles enunciated by modern urban planning since the middle of the last century, and subsequently accepted by the main international development agencies, including UN-HABITAT itself, whose forecasts, elaborated in last decade, relative to 2050 they considered 70% of humanity urbanized, their update brings this percentage to over 80%. Only recently, essentially following the 2016 UN-HABITAT Quito conference, with the AGENDA 2030 with the 17 objective SDGs for sustainable development, has a profound process of reflection started.

Among these objectives, some, especially objective 11: *"Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable."* And others relating to sectors closely related to urban development, such as infrastructure, health, water, etc. provide indications and directives for an integrated approach and with a different vision on urbanization processes. It is now established that metropolitan areas are among the main causes of climate change, excessive use of land, accelerated reduction of natural resources, concentration of polluting factors directly responsible for the temperature increase.

The current pandemic is therefore a further reason to review the current model with the population concentrated in large cities to the detriment of the depopulation of the countryside. This health

emergency has highlighted the difficulty of limiting infections and managing epidemics in urban agglomerations. In the smaller centers it has been possible to reduce infections and adopt measures to manage the pandemic, and in some villages and rural agglomerations there has also been the total absence of infections, through isolation, facilitated by the mutual support networks existing among the inhabitants. The importance, in this and other types of emergencies, emerges from the presence of mechanisms of solidarity and social cohesion, which by now are not found in large urban agglomerations.

When this emergency is over, it will be appropriate to start a reflection on the many negative aspects of the wild urbanization processes, determined by purely economic needs and conditioned by speculative instances and short-term profits, with no respect for the negative impacts on the environment and society. .

2. REFERENCE SCENARIO

Human settlements always grown in harmony with the territory and the environment and the planet and man have lived up to the last century with an acceptable balance on rural territories, compatible with their natural resources and peculiarities. This model has been progressively modified by industrial revolutions and accelerated by new technologies and global economic connections. Since the last century urbanization has grown without any real opposition and now the dogma that the human being will be almost entirely urbanized is accepted as inevitable.

Why accept this prediction that the majority of the world's population will be in urban areas, mainly settled in macro-cities or metropolitan areas? The Charter of Athens, the manifesto of modern urban planning, has promoted zoning based on land use in recent decades, favoring the growth of mega cities seems far behind the response to new realities must and can be different. Isn't it better therefore to develop the attractiveness of smaller centers, which certainly have more social values and resilience, through interventions of recovery, reuse and adequate strengthening of crimes and services?

Even accepting that the urbanization process is now unstoppable, it is still possible to evaluate and implement measures to mitigate its trend and reduce the negative effects on pollution, environment, land use and natural resources, mainly by strengthening the villages and rural centers by retaining the inhabitants and attracting new residents.

The experience of metropolises, expected to increase in number and size in the short term especially in emerging countries, is predominantly negative and the long-term impacts are unpredictable, but air pollution and water shortages are already on the rise, without developing strategies of defined intervention. The wild use of the territory without any respect for the existing peculiarities and sustainability causes permanent damage to the environment.

The negative impacts on urban dwellers are many, including stressful daily life rhythms for commuting, poor services, lack of: identity, socialization opportunities, adequate housing, services and public spaces. Many cities completely sprung up from scratch, based on global and theoretical models, have failed in numbers, as a hundred thousand have become millions of residents, and urban centers and neighborhoods, even if well planned, have been progressively surrounded by slums and overcrowded precarious permanent settlements.

The modern technologies now available can provide effective tools for the requalification of the rural territory through the adaptation of mobility infrastructures, communication networks, use of renewable energies. Modern agriculture and sustainable tourism can play an important role in improving smaller settlements, local economies, environmental protection, heritage conservation and social cohesion, revitalizing villages and rural settlements, with dimensions and contexts suitable for the life of the inhabitants, reducing the growing pressure on large metropolitan areas.

The fourth industrial revolution will provide further tools that will facilitate work everywhere, access to global knowledge and information, to any educational and health service, thus reducing the need

for frequent mobility, which is a major problem in most metropolises. A wide and efficient network of public transport and logistic systems, (in deliveries we go towards the use of drones in remote areas) spread over rural areas will allow to retain residents in the villages, recovering the original spirit of social cohesion and meaning of belonging to the community.

In industrialized countries, a change in the development model of urbanization is necessary to respond to the financial and health crisis; meanwhile in emerging countries, which have been increasing their standard of living in recent years, this need is also aimed at recovering traditional urban characteristics. The global urban development model, based on the massive diffusion of standardized products and lifestyles, which have proved incapable of supporting and developing the characteristics and qualities of local contexts, in fact risks leading even emerging countries towards a model that is unable to guarantee a sustainable and permanent socio-economic growth of each territory. and at the same time protect the environment.

Each territory needs different degrees of protection and enhancement, articulating the degree of transformation through quantitative parameters and criteria, but above all quality parameters, capable of defining the objectives of the admissible transformations. It is necessary to investigate case by case to understand what are the environmental elements such as: flora, fauna, water regime, geomorphology, historical, archaeological, artistic, architectural, industrial, agricultural, commercial and social resources, which constitute the main resources of that territory. After having analyzed the relevance and origin of these assets, social consensus and participation must be found on which to base an integral and shared proposal among all the actors for development and enhancement.

3. HERITAGE RECOVERY

For the recovery of the heritage, the value of the unique peculiarity of each site must be considered, which is defined as: "*The spirit of the place can be defined as the set of material and immaterial, physical and spiritual elements, which give the area a identity, a specific feeling and emotion. The spirit creates the space and, at the same time, the space invests and structures this spirit ... "*(ICOMOS -Québec Declaration 4 October 2008) and any human settlement, from small villages to larger cities it is made up of tangible and intangible elements. Tangible elements include, in addition to the physical urban structure, architectural elements and typologies, landscape inside and outside the city, monuments, sky-lines, landmarks. Intangible elements include traditional activities, historical functions, cultural practices, traditions, memories, music, food, etc. All cultural references that represent the basis of their value over the centuries.

But this specific unique spirit, defined in ancient times as the "genius loci", has gradually lost its original relevance due to the rapidly growing processes of urbanization and gentrification in recent decades, based on standardized international models and schemes, which are erasing the original peculiarities.

The new metropolises of emerging countries, in fact, are rapidly becoming an allegory of contemporary Western urban agglomerations, with the same problems and inadequacies, often due to a worse starting condition and an excessively rapid increase in residents and users. For these reasons, the need to focus on the enhancement of characteristic elements and territorial resources (cultural, environmental, historical, etc.) is a priority, in order to promote a long-term growth strategy that includes agriculture, craftsmanship, advanced technology. and any activity linked to local culture and tradition.

A great importance in the process of identification and belonging of the inhabitants is represented by the traditional and vernacular architecture. The villages and minor centers are mostly composed of houses and family settlements, whose typologies, in many regions of the world, have remained unchanged over the centuries based on the tangible and cultural characteristics of their inhabitants.

Local architecture has always taken into account environmental specificities such as: winds, temperature, availability of water, sun and other elements, which have contributed to creating models and typologies in harmony with the culture of the inhabitants and the surrounding environment. The same happened with the different materials used, which were the most easily available in the settlement areas: wood, stone, bricks, mud and many other suitable for building houses and also public buildings and monuments, and able to face the climatic situation. detail of each site. Globally, there are thousands of different examples that can be followed, adapting them to modern living standards and new technologies. In this sector, positive projects are being developed in several countries around the world, but for the moment no action to address the reuse and enhancement of traditional construction technologies has been launched globally, only in EU strategies is a consensus growing. in this direction. From an economic point of view this use is feasible, if applied on a large scale it involves lower costs and the involvement of large work forces, helping local economies. From a reuse and application of traditional architecture, the environment will also have positive returns, due to a lower use of land, fewer infrastructures and service networks.The permanence of the inhabitants in the traditional villages and settlements is certainly a precious safeguard for the whole for the whole environment and a tool for maintaining social cohesion.

A rising danger for urban heritage settlements is today represented by that tourism defined as "cultural" which, if not properly regulated and managed, can stifle their values, reduce the original residents, and subsequently cause serious damage to productive activities in the long term. traditional local. Tourism favors the process of outsourcing and the balance of urban functions is altered by massive tourist flows, which must be carefully controlled, to avoid the progressive lack of local identity. Management strategies, special conservation plans, building measures and rehabilitation must be oriented towards recovering the relevant role and place of public spaces to the local, tangible and intangible heritage. For the above, it is appropriate to focus attention on the possible role of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, problems and opportunities for the development of integrated plans of territorial networks of rural areas and smaller cities.

4. ENVIRONMENT & - SDGs

Continued use of rural areas and permanent maintenance is reducing the risks of natural disasters such as floods, forest fires, desertification and so on; this can only be achieved with a permanent population, which has to live in smaller settlements but with the same standard of living as the major metropolitan areas. It is necessary to investigate each urban area on a case-by-case basis to understand the environmental elements such as: vegetation, fauna, water regime, geomorphology, historical, archaeological, artistic, architectural, industrial, agricultural, commercial and social resources, which constitute the main resources of that territory. After understanding the relevance and origin of these specific assets, a social consensus must be reached on which to base a sustainable development perspective. Any investment that does not waste non-reproducible resources, but that is able to increase the value of the urban model and heritage, making them accessible to future generations, according to the now shared definition of sustainable development, can be implemented in environmental enhancement processes. From modern agriculture, from the reuse of marginal territories and from the application of traditional architecture, the environment will have positive returns and local economic development will facilitate the permanence of the inhabitants in their villages and traditional rural settlements, which certainly means a precious presence on the territory. . From a reuse and application of traditional architecture, the environment will also have positive returns, due to a lower use of land, fewer infrastructures and service networks. The permanence of the inhabitants in the traditional villages

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The importance of urban infrastructure and settlements has been underlined in various fora in recent years in various locations and organizations, including the United Nations in 2012 which, at the Rio + 20 Conference on Sustainable Development, stated: "that sustainable transport can improve economic growth and improve accessibility. Sustainable transport enables a better economy while respecting the environment. Improving social equity, health, resilience of cities, urban-rural connections and productivity of rural areas ".

The Sustainable Development Goals of the New 2030 Urban Agenda of the United Nations, adopted at the HABITATIII Conference in 2016-Quito, and specifically the Goal 11 focused on urban development, are today the subject of general attention and analyzed at a global level. These principles have been confirmed in subsequent years by other institutions as UNESCO's and UN Habitat's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development included heritage in its declared Sustainable Development Goal 11.4.

Among the 17 for sustainable development of the 2030 Agenda, transport is mentioned in several SDGs and objectives, in particular those related to infrastructure, cities and human settlements, as in Goal 11 - Making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable "where objective 11.A is indicated*:" Positive economic, social support and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning "*, and in Objective 9 - Building resilient infrastructures, promoting sustainability industrialization and promotion of innovation "which states that*:" Sustainable transport allows a better integration of the economy while respecting the environment. improving social equity, health, the resilience of cities, urban-rural connections and productivity of rural areas"*, the interrelation between human settlements and infrastructures is considered the basis of an integrated and sustainable development.

A program for the revitalization of villages and rural centers extended to a macro-territorial scale would therefore contribute to reducing the phenomena of urbanization and therefore the negative impacts of large urban agglomerations on the climate, which, occupying only 2% of the surface globally, represent 20% of the causes of climate change, as indicated by Goal 13 - *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact*. But also directly to the achievement of various other objectives such as: *Goal 3- To ensure a healthy life and promote well-being for all at all ages, Goal 8 To promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and work decent for all, Goal 10 - Reduce inequality within and between countries, Goal 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, Goal 15 Protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems*. Therefore it is an initiative with important long-term effects on climate change, totally in line with the indications of the 2030 Agenda, which also deserves to be evaluated for its strategic value.

5. ROLE OF HISTORIC TOWNS & RURAL VILLAGES

The current pandemic has further highlighted the negative impacts of the growing urbanization phenomena, so far assumed as an inevitable paradigm in recent decades.

The sudden and forced spread of new technologies that have allowed: home-working, distance education, telemedicine, online shopping, etc., has accelerated processes in just a few months that were expected to reach full capacity not before the next 15/20 years. These changes, by reducing the need for many physical movements, affect the entire pattern of daily life in large urban agglomerations and these are changes that have come to stay.

The health reasons, the need to have: larger housing, more green spaces, accessible meeting places and so on, are pushing, all over the world, increasing shares of "citizens" to move away from large urban centers and seek new localization alternatives.

The possibility of residing elsewhere, reducing the current gap in services and accessibility, thanks to technological advances, is re-evaluating the role of villages and rural centers to make them once again become permanent poles of social aggregation and with a better quality of life.

Italy, which due to its geographical, social and historical characteristics has a very significant number of centers and villages, of which over 5,800 with less than 5,000 inhabitants, can in a short time initiate a substantial reduction of urbanization phenomena, favoring as alternatively the recovery, adaptation and revitalization of these minor settlements. But intended not only as places of second homes with temporary or short-term presences, but repopulated by stable or long-term residents, including among these also potential foreign citizens, and a place of productive, commercial and permanent services.

An important element for the development of the villages can be represented by responsible tourism, revised as a model that respects the environment, heritage and traditions and understood not only as a place for temporary second residences, but integrated into the local economy and interacting with the host communities in a relationship direct and without the many current intermediaries. It is therefore a question of initiating a profound change in the entire model of territorial development, not only for the settlement aspects, but for many others such as: environmental, social, economic, infrastructural, productive, tourism and so on. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed with the participation of all the actors and, in my opinion, in a short time frame in order to somehow manage and direct a growing current and potential demand. the lifestyle of the villages and cities and of rural settlements facilitates daily contacts and reduces the risks of marginalization for some categories such as elderly, mixing with migrants reduces the risks of more accessible ethnic areas, health and school areas, thus helping the social cohesion. The feeling of belonging / participation to a specific site is certainly one of the main objectives to be achieved through types of interventions aimed at improving inclusion and identity. The lack of adequate and qualified public spaces or meeting points in the metropolis also represent a serious handicap to socialization, being the old model of "forum or square" still present in the villages and other smaller realities. Only after understanding the relevance and origin of these assets must the social consensus be found on which to base a development and enhancement perspective. The identification of homogeneous areas of intervention is the result of the close relationship between environment, heritage and culture, in which the attention and follow-up of the necessary perspective changes will define the evolution of the entire area. For these and other global reasons, the need to focus on the enhancement of the characteristic elements and local territorial assets (cultural, environmental, historical, etc.) is a priority, to activate a long-term growth strategy that includes agriculture, crafts, advanced technology and any activity linked to local culture and tradition. Such a global approach also adds value to the territory surrounding each village, considered as a strictly complementary element to be protected and enhanced at the same time, overcoming the traditional division between rural and urban areas.

6. OPERATIONAL HYPOTHESIS

Given the implications of such an initiative which involve substantial changes in the development of the entire national and regional territorial structure, a large joint operational effort is required at all levels in all phases from planning, design, implementation and management. The final beneficiaries, i.e. the villages and minor centers, must be the key players, but given the natural shortcomings of technicians and qualified personnel, they need the external support of public institutions and also of the private sector with a clear definition of competences and responsibilities.

To activate these complex actions, which involve many authorities and responsible subjects of the various sectors involved, for example: environment, agriculture, cultural heritage, infrastructure, education, etc., it is necessary to have a precise and detailed legal-regulatory framework.

In Italy there are already several laws relating to the individual aspects concerned, which can be used, but closely coordinated with each other, for an optimal and non-overlapping application, for example: *"Borghi Law 158/2017, Broadband Law 107/2015, South Plan 2030, mobility, national digital school plans, etc .. "*

It seems appropriate, also in light of the different origins of the available resources, that a single legislation is defined with national governance that groups and regulates the various existing laws and possibly defines new ones for the missing aspects, through the creation of an agency or observatory to hoc for the recovery and enhancement of smaller towns and villages. Then it will be the regional level that will have to establish a territorial, temporal and economic reference planning of the individual interventions delegated to the individual local authorities. Similar examples of programming that can be referred to, for a suitable tool for defining priorities and allocating resources, have already been developed in the past for other sectors such as territorial pacts, area contracts, which allowed shared and abbreviated collective decisions , so think about regional settlement rebalancing pacts, as well as regional landscape plans in some cases successfully applied.

Having a clear and complete legislative framework, an overall programming of reference, for some strictly local aspects it will be the task of each administration to implement individual interventions and projects, but it is essential that everyone has the necessary human resources and given their size this deficiency is structural. So either it is possible to have technicians from other public administrations or to resort to external subjects, to whom to entrust some specific skills, chosen with the appropriate public tender procedures. For example, in a large-scale operation, such as the post-earthquake reconstruction in Friuli, there was a regional control room, a standardization of building interventions, a well-defined price list, and detailed intervention procurement rules that allowed the recovery. of a vast building patrimony scattered in villages, hamlets and rural areas, something similar could be hypothesized for the building redevelopment of villages and minor centers. Also at the European level there are useful references in this sense, such as the complex regulations not only of design, but also of implementation and management for the protection of the historical building heritage.

But the revitalization of villages and minor centers is not only restoration and building recovery, without in fact the now indispensable conditions of physical accessibility, ITC connectivity, adequate basic services and a social and environmental context and above all work, it cannot take place except by retaining the current inhabitants and attracting new residents. Therefore it is necessary to put together all these elements to reprogram the territorial settlement model in every aspect: work activities, infrastructures, educational and health services to be redistributed on the territory to allow a growing number of citizens to live and develop their activities in a social and territorial cohesion overall more favorable than that of large cities.

7. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The opportunity represented by the huge European funding arriving for the next period 2021-2027 is unique and it is an opportunity to be seized. To rebuild a greener, digital and resilient Europe after the COVID-19 pandemic, € 1.8 trillion is allocated. The goal is a more ecological, digital and resilient Europe, between the 1,074.3 million / € of the MFF, the 750 million / € Next Generation EU, and other programs such as Green Deal Europe, Horizon Europe, SURE, etc. Therefore, it is certainly possible to allocate a suitable percentage of the Italian quotas for a territorial rebalancing action through the revitalization of the smaller centers, but it is necessary at least quickly to outline some priority guidelines with general assessments, considering that it is a question of a strategic intervention in line with the latest EU guidelines, including: "traditional policies, such as cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy, to ensure stability and modernization" and the "fight

against climate change, to which 30% of European funds will be reserved, the highest percentage ever for the EU budget.

Such an initiative, taking into account the large number of smaller towns and villages in the South and their potential as poles of local development and tourist attraction, can contribute to a sustainable development of the southern regions based on an integrated network of defined smaller towns. as "smart territories" instead of "smart cities" model.

These considerable sums of public funding are also able to activate with a leverage effect an important mass of private investments in multiple sectors through PPP projects in the sectors of infrastructures, energy and technological networks, services and environmental interventions in a renewed perspective of close collaboration of all local actors, activating a virtuous and continuous mechanism in the smaller towns and surrounding areas.

The ongoing resumption of traditional agricultural and craft activities by young people should be considered thanks to new technologies that allow for different productivity and very different working conditions; as well as the opportunities represented by the widespread recovery of the built heritage, with the commitment of small businesses and artisans in each of the smaller centers and with an ongoing nature, if adequate maintenance is also considered. Finally, tourism and long-term permanence, which does not mean only second homes, by citizens of other European countries are certainly opportunities for significant economic returns and permanent jobs.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

A widespread resettlement and village enhancement program should be tackled with the principles established by the "Social Quality Approach", an approach that addresses urban and rural problems with an integrated vision, not limited to economic factors alone, with the aim of sustainable development . of the territory, environmental protection, the enhancement of assets not only physical. Through this action it is possible to reduce the migratory flows towards the large urban agglomerations, with their alienating living conditions, through the maintenance of the inhabitants in the villages and smaller centers, with characteristics that favor the overall social quality, not only economic, of the residents. An integrated approach such as the EQS, aimed at overcoming the fragmentation of current strategies, contributes to territorial development towards global sustainability, unlike other existing models, especially in Western countries. and therefore the development of a network of villages can become a concrete application of the principles stated through adequate procedural and regulatory tools. The revitalization of the villages therefore represents an opportunity to experiment with the three operational tools of the SQA: profiles, indicators and criteria, within an interdisciplinary framework capable of harmonizing the tensions existing between social development in a broad sense and a purely economic one. For the above and for the unique opportunity represented by the incoming investments, considering the tight deadlines, for some programs we are talking about April 2021, at least having outlined the main projects to be submitted to the EU, it is necessary to activate an action of participation, involvement and proposition by an enlarged audience to more subjects operating in this sector, to sensitize the competent authorities in this direction, in particular those most involved in the planning and negotiation phase with the European Commission. Ministries such as: Agriculture, Cultural Heritage, Interior, Infrastructure and others who have expertise in the sectors involved in a strategic initiative such as this, can sponsor it and insert its principles in their general programs, leaving the definition of individual projects at a later stage. regional and local.

It is certainly not an easy action, because it is a question of reviewing the development models adopted so far, but it is the European Commission itself that in its latest strategic guidelines is changing the priorities with greater attention to environmental protection, cultural heritage enhancement and territorial rebalancing , to implement substantial reforms in the coming years to

which the revitalization of the smaller towns and villages can make a valid and immediate contribution. It is therefore advisable to define as soon as possible the main guidelines for action given the tight deadlines to benefit from the incoming financial resources and also to be able to serve as a possible model for other EU countries, and not only, which face similar problems.

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