

URBAN CENTER

UNA CASA DI VETRO
PER LE POLITICHE URBANE

a cura di Bruno Monardo



Nella cultura di governo della città il termine *Urban Center* designa una serie di strutture il cui denominatore comune risiede nello svolgimento di attività di servizio per le comunità urbane ai fini di soddisfare la crescente domanda di democrazia partecipativa nei processi di trasformazione degli insediamenti. Traendo spunto dalla storicizzazione del fenomeno e dal confronto tra i consolidati modelli statunitensi e le recenti esperienze in campo nazionale, il volume si interroga sulla maturazione delle missioni dell'*Urban Center* nel passaggio da asettico spazio d'informazione a luogo privilegiato per la costruzione trasparente di politiche urbane condivise.

p.

Stefano Stanghellini

7 Presentazione

Bruno Monardo

9 Ermeneutica dell'Urban Center

**La cornice di riferimento:
urbanistica partecipata e marketing urbano**

Paolo Colarossi

39 Piani di quartiere. Appunti su alcune esperienze di progetti urbanistici partecipati

Pierre Laconte

58 Urban marketing. By whom? for whom?

**Stili interpretativi e modelli consolidati dell'Urban Center
negli USA**

Ronald Shiffman

65 The Pratt Center. A contrarian model for promoting the city

Diane Filippi

77 The SPUR Urban Center

Lynn J. Osmond

91 Chicago architecture foundation. An architecture center for the 21st century

Declinazioni e forme evolute dell'Urban Center

Murizio Carta

111 Urban Centers italiani: agenti creativi per il rinascimento urbano

Maria Cecilia Bizzarri

130 Conoscere, comunicare, condividere le trasformazioni del territorio. L'esperienza dell'Urban Center di Bologna

- 146 *Elena Carmagnani, Antonio De Rossi*
Urban Center Metropolitan di Torino
- 165 *Francesco Ceci*
La "Casa della Città" di Napoli: resoconto di un esperimento
- 180 *Ambra Dina, Filippo Lovato, Omar Tommasi*
Candiani 5 Venezia
- 191 *Anna Giorgi*
Urban Center di Milano

**Riflessioni di metodo per la costruzione
di un Urban Center**

- 199 *Luciano De Bonis, Anna M. Uttaro*
Immaginare la trasformazione urbana.
Gli Urban Center come luoghi di comunicazione
estetico-relazionale
- 223 *Postfazione*
Manuela Ricci

URBAN MARKETING BY WHOM? FOR WHOM?

di Pierre Laconte

1. INTRODUCTION

There is some agreement that large conurbations are the emerging 21st Century magnets of development, in Europe as elsewhere.

The nation-states, born in the 19th Century, to replace the Ancient régime empires, had the dominant role in the 20th Century.

The competition between conurbations in the global economy, and also their cooperation (sometimes referred to as “coopetition”), are expressed through a variety of networks and a variety of marketing outfits intended to increase their individual visibility independently from national visibility and from their municipal components.

Hereafter one will examine two cases of metropolitan image building, as different as possible from each other: Bilbao and Brussels.

2. BILBAO. A CASE OF STRONG WILLED IMAGE BUILDING THROUGH A PUBLIC-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

Bilbao's metropolitan area is around 900.000 inhabitants; the municipality is around 350.000. This is a bland medium size city, traditionally depending on the iron and steel-based economy.

The abrupt collapse of this sector in the 80's generated an acute crisis of the City and Region's economy and society as a whole (loss of confidence and self-pride). It also brought the realisation by some planners that the city should shape a new economic, social and physical vision in accordance with the requirements of a modern knowledge based society, rather than attempting to look at new industries to generate activity and jobs.

The new vision - and the urban image building associated with the new vision - would concentrate on place making and public art, on quality of life and urban pride, on optimal accessibility from the outside and mobility inside. The focus was the transformation of the industrial waterway (Ria) that crosses the city and the conurbation around it.

The implementation of the vision was only possible if it included eye-catching urban icons and a strong and very visible urban transport component.

The urban icon was provided by choosing emerging star architect Frank Gehry to conceive and build a museum using the name of a star-

museum: the highly publicised Guggenheim, and by creating a new Centre for culture and congresses, both on the Ria brownfield, and next to the City Centre.

The mobility component was the *new metro*, developed at the level of the conurbation. Although the size of the city was less than one million inhabitants, often considered as the threshold for a metro, the choice for this mode was justified by the emphasis on the linear development along the waterway and the key areas along it, what was favouring a corridor effect. It was also justified by the will to recuperate existing urban space and creating new ones, through design. The choice of Norman Foster for the stations was fully congruent with that purpose. One decade of operation has corroborated the success of this modal choice.

In addition to the institutional commitment to build the museum and the metro, another original feature of the Bilbao's approach to both urban place-making and transport image building has been the tool conceived to capture the value increment generated by these huge public investments programmes, to put that increment to the public benefit, and to spread the image of an urban renaissance.

This tool has been the *Public-Public Partnership* called "*Ria 2000*". Land necessary for the projects, such as railway yards and old warehouses, were put under the control of a single hand, instead of a multitude of public fiefdoms pursuing their own agenda. These fiefdoms included State agencies, the Province and some 30 municipal governments.

In addition a consortium at metropolitan level called "*Metropoli 30*" ensured promotion at regional level.

One crucial step in Bilbao's renaissance was the agreement by all the key institutional players to delegate the development of some of their real estate to a non profit corporation collectively owned and controlled by them: *Ria 2000*. The Port Authority was persuaded that its historic know how in handling and storing goods should no longer be used in the urban part of the waterway. The Railways were persuaded there was more added value for them in joining the city-wide vision than sticking to their own investment plans and image building. The most improbable tract of waterfront industrial land (although located at five minutes walk from the central Place of the CBD) was cleared and partially used for the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum and for the Congress Centre. The remaining of the riverside "brown field" area Abandoibarra became land ready for development, entirely controlled by *Ria 2000*. This approach is diametrically opposed to the so-called Public Private Partnership (PPP), by which the public sector delegates to the private sector the development and its profits while taking charge of the land acquisitions. The Public Partnership first sets the rules and real estate base and then approaches the private sector in a transparent way through tenders.

The *Ria 2000* huge profits were used to rehabilitate difficult areas such as the slums of the crime-ridden Old Bilbao. The waterfront of Old Bilbao has been made entirely pedestrian. A new *tram line*, with exclusive right of way, follows the waterfront (opened in 2002). Old Bilbao now starts to attract new investors. The existing *commuter rail line* running south of the waterway has also been modernised and complements the spectacular new metro in serving the developments along the waterway and elsewhere.

Impressive as all this success is, new challenges, and some of them substantial, lie ahead, that cannot be solved by image building. There is a very significant public transport provision in Bilbao, indeed few metropolitan areas of less than a million can claim to have five different rail based systems (Metro, Renfe, Euskotren, Feve and Tram) and, on top of that, the high speed network is arriving soon.

As other cities have illustrated, this process can be more difficult than building the cultural infrastructure and the transport systems in the first place, and building an urban image around them. Given the strength in public-public partnership shown in the Bilbao metropolitan it should be within reach. Integrating the land use and mobility content with urban image would be very much appreciated by the ultimate clients, the citizens and visitors of Bilbao and would sustain in time the renaissance image that has been achieved.

To sum up the Bilbao renaissance and development since the early 90's till now resulted from a proactive partnership between public actors at the service of a global image building at urban and metropolitan level.

3. BRUSSELS. A CASE OF OPPORTUNISTIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A LOW PROFILE AND WITHIN A CONTEXT OF INTERNAL COMPETITION

Brussels has flourished for centuries under the influence of foreign powers, while simultaneously keeping a rich local culture alive. To a certain extent the city has been determined by external forces, through foreign rulers and planning decisions taken beyond its borders. The City of Brussels is the heart of the Brussels-capital Region, comprising 19 communes including the City of Brussels, and of the Central Belgian mega-city, described in Peter Hall's 2006 Polynet study, which extends to Antwerp and Ghent. In this respect, Brussels is a microcosm of the present decentralized Europe.. The Brussels-capital Region is the Capital of both the French and the Flemish language Communities, the Capital of Belgium and the host to international institutions and citizens from many nations, while simulta-

neously being highly protective of its Communes, neighborhoods and traditions. It has been europeanised long before the birth of the European Union. But by keeping the strength of its local culture it has set an example for European unification, proving that diversity in unity, the slogan of Europe, can actually exist.

The Brussels-capital Region has never been able to administrate its territory efficiently and to develop its urban destiny through a single regional policy, tying together European and local interests and aims. It keeps an extremely low profile (no “urban centre”, no single tourism policy, no urban development agency, development being *de facto* left to private developers). Instead of assembling land for projects it let the State sell the assets it had. Today’s Brussels-capital Region is submitted to economic constraints imposed from rival neighboring Belgian regions. The airport area, located in Flanders, and the Ottignies-Louvain la Neuve area, located in the Wallon Region, are developing faster than Brussels and are in a “coopetition” relation to it.

However its political isolation within the Belgian centrifugal context has *de facto* played in its favour and helped it to become the political capital of Europe, without actual support of its national government. It can be called a heteropolis, or cosmopolis, where people from elsewhere like to develop their own projects, or simply find a tax haven.

The opportunistic development of Brussels is illustrated by the European Parliament, now located in Brussels except for eleven plenary sessions per year held in Strasbourg. The Belgian Government was hostile to hosting the Parliament, by fear of the French Government, which supported Strasbourg. The private sector, aware of the Parliament’s wish to be close to the European Commission, decided to build a “Congress Center” that happened to fit the needs of a Parliament. When finally the Parliament was able to move to Brussels, the facilities were waiting for it.

In terms of infrastructures the situation is equally polycentric. The location of the European institutions resulted from the location of its initial building. This location was in a residential area, next to a public park, where no infrastructures were readily available, while huge empty spaces were available around the North station, close to the city centre, and linked to the airport in 15 minutes. This location however suited developers, who saw the opportunity to buy low density residential buildings and build high density offices in their place. Only many years later, because of the pressure of the European institutions, a set of access infrastructures were gradually provided, including a direct rail link from the Parliament and the Commission to the airport, to open in 2009¹.

4. CONCLUSION

Urban marketing raises the question of who is initiating it and whom it serves.

In the case of Bilbao, the economic and social difficulties brought together the public institutions and made them accept a grand city project and the institutions needed to successfully implement it. This project was at the service of both the city and its metropolitan region.

In the case of Brussels, a city with a long tradition of dependence and grabbing of opportunities, no grand city project was proposed. The attraction of the city-region and its 19 municipal components to international investments resulted not from a proactive marketing but from its opening to projects proposed to it.

¹ These example and others of similar nature are analysed in "Brussels: Perspectives on a European Capital" - P. Laconte and C. Hein, Eds - to come out in 2007 (www.ffue.org) .