

Piero Bassetti, Presidente Globus et Locus
Workshop “Global city regions and macro regions in Europe”
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Since its inception, the Association Globus et Locus which I chair, has paid active attention to global and local dimensions and the connections between them, with the aim to support institutions in a difficult task: tracking down contemporary society’s problems and potential solutions that characterize the global–local nexus at the time of globalization. It has set up a research and planning address to encourage its members to take up the challenge that glocalisation poses to any present-day organisation.

Places (*loci*) criss-crossed by flows, and flows pervading *loci* – a process that renders the world increasingly “glocal”, throwing out of kilter our interpretive theory and practice. It is in this interlacement of glocal and global, *locus* and *globus*, that we claim to seek the roots of our world’s complexity.

Hence, one of major topic that has emerged in our activity is the relationship between territoriality logics and functional logics in macroregional areas and in city governance programs. Cities have gradually become hubs for the economic development of entire regions: they are now the centre for the attraction, production and diffusion of knowledge and innovation. At the same time, urban environments have to face new challenges.

We stems out from the idea that functions and different ‘communities of practices’ that are related to them (in the commercial, financial, knowledge, communication and information sectors) are shaping new “territories”, if compared to traditional space–time parameters. These communities follow transterritorial logics of expansion and existence, and define—in their own nature—new relational spaces, transcending regional and national dimensions. These new spaces—mobile, fractured, with shifting coordinates— are characterised by strong expressions of transnational mobility of goods, people and symbols: this trend tends to weaken the idea of borders and to quicken communication processes, making them even more immediate. In this ever-changing context, institutions— that are strongly linked to specific territorialities, and contained within political, jurisdictional and administrative borders—face a new challenge: they are asked to manage, understand and regulate these urban processes with new tools.

In 2005 as part of its target, the Globus et Locus set up the project “Milan, node in a global network” at the proposal of the Milan Chamber of Commerce. The result of the project has been to provide the Milanese institutions with an update on how glocalisation is changing the Milan system, with a road-map of proposed projects to meet and respond to the challenges facing the Milan “node” today. What that project has brought to light is that analysing the Milan networks and involved areas is nowadays an ongoing work-site in need of feed-back from its actors, as well as empirical surveys and new statistical projections.

From our research into “Milan, node in the global network” we have received a strong impression of Milan as a “gateway-city”. This idea now needs developing and implementing. That can be done if one is able to review Milan’s main strategic functions from the angle chosen, as a “gateway”. How the gateway figures is not immediately apparent. The global economy is growing steadily more impenetrable as interconnections increase. These may take forms that are invisible - neither transparent nor measurable: hence the need for new measuring yardsticks. As the economy turns impenetrable, so society acquires a kind of camouflage (it is hard to identify the social subjects driving the whole global city: often they belong to trans-local networks and have little incentive to play locally); institutions also face the difficulty of giving local actors a strategic overview that will enable them to make decisions but equally to make sense.

Measuring the global (or potentially global) ebb and flow means knowing what “gateways” the stream is flowing through: here, though, we are often up against immaterial services, knowledge, relational goods. In the knowledge “economy”, gateways are also cognitive systems via which knowledge passes, points at which an integration takes place between abstract global knowledge (universally valid) and idiosyncratic local knowledge (somehow distinctive and specific to Milan). As a global city, Milan can thus be represented as a matrix criss-crossed by global and local knowledge. Gateways are the junctions points, where the global city flow-streams pass: streams of knowledge, information, goods, services, and people of course; flow-streams possessed of a high level of global knowledge.

The gateways of the Milanese global city/region we have studied are both material and immaterial in nature: the logistic and transport system; the airport system, a continental-scale hub for the southern European system; the international trade fair; the fashion/design/creativity system, seen as one single (though diversified) means of access to global and immaterial channels of knowledge; the research/innovation/ human resource training system.

In this context some questions can be usefully raised:

What are the new public policies in the ever-changing scenario of global cities, more specifically that of Milan? How can they be promoted and optimized? How can these new urban politics find a balance between territoriality and functionality? How can governance work on a reality more and more interested by different kinds of flows?

I think that our Biennale and this workshop represents an occasion to discuss these important issues.