

THINKING AT THE MEGA-REGIONAL SCALE

THE CASES OF THE SOUTHERN EUROPEAN DIAGONAL AND THAMES GATEWAY

JUDITH RYSER UK / SPAIN

This contribution focuses on the regional context of spatial development. It argues that in a globalising world, spatial planning can no longer be undertaken in geographic isolation by solely focusing on a particular area, usually determined by administrative boundaries and political competences. Spatial planning needs to explore various scales simultaneously – others call them ‘layers’ in this book – identifying key issues at each level, discovering their interdependence and relating them to each other. This is particularly relevant for a city like Wrocław with its extremely turbulent history of spatial-political transformation and identity and changing relations with its surrounding regions and countries during its existence.

INTRODUCTION

- > Regions used to be the weak link between nations and local authorities, often without an elected government and very limited competences. At a time when cities assume an increasingly important role in the local and global economy their regional position and influence matter at both national and international levels. ‘Shrinking’ space, owing to ever speedier means of communication, contributes to the importance of regional spatial strategies, not least for infrastructure investment.
- > Beyond American planning traditions, the first mega-region was conceived in the 1960s for the north eastern coast of the USA where several supra-regional development strategies were implemented successfully. Since then nine other mega-regions were construed in the USA which are pursuing supra-regional policies to achieve economic prosperity. Together these policies led to the current proposal of a national strategic spatial plan for the USA as a whole (Knowledge creation and sharing planning workshops, 2004 & 2005).



1. ‘Blue Banana’

The frantic development pace in some emerging countries have produced similar meta-regions. In Asia the Tokyo – Osaka corridor in Japan, the Pearl Delta, or the conurbations around Shanghai and Beijing in China can be construed as a meta-regions in their own right.

The paper discusses the key concepts, origins and rationale of large scale spatial strategies which aim to foster sustainable development by means of competition, cooperation, complementarity and self-reliance. It illustrates these with two types of meta-regional strategic thinking: Building the European Diagonal (Ryser, 2008) conceived by the Fundacion Metropoli in Madrid in cooperation with partners of the Proyecto Cities network; and the Thames Gateway, a politically driven spatial mega-strategy for the East of London.

EUROPEAN MEGA-REGIONS

In Europe, the Randstad and the Ruhr come to mind as mega-regions, besides many other emerging mega-regions within the framework of the European Spatial Development Strategy (ESDP).

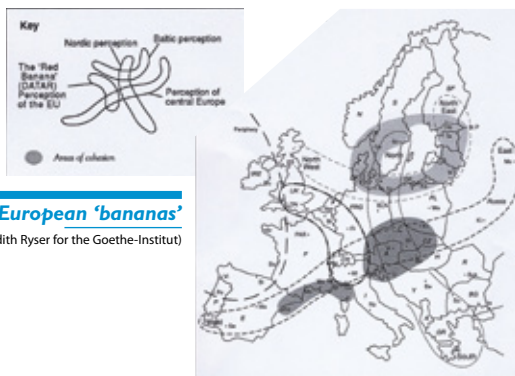
EUROPEAN ‘BANANAS’

RECLUS, a group of geographers led by Roger Brunet devised the ‘blue banana’ in 1989 to warn French decision makers that France could be left out of Western Europe’s emerging Megalopolis due to excessive centralisation on Paris. DATAR¹ published the ‘blue banana’ concept (Fig. 1). It encompassed the most dynamic and urbanised mega-region of Europe, comprising London – Brussels – Amsterdam – Cologne – Frankfurt and Milan while omitting Paris. It also contained important barriers, such as the Channel, the North Sea and the Alps. In macro-economic terms, the ‘blue banana’ was perceived as a backbone to strengthen industry and services in the then European Community of (then) 12 member states. It was based on historic trade routes, large industrial conglomerations (Manchester, the Randstad, the Ruhr, coal mining areas in the Walloon region and the Lorraine, etc.) which bore the consequences

¹ DATAR: Delegation a l’Aménagement du Territoire et de l’Action Regionale, a French government organisation in charge of national spatial strategies, now DIACT, Delegation Interministerielle a l’Aménagement et a la Competitivite des Territoires.

of capital accumulation. Contrary to the initial intension of extending this potential development corridor to other cities, the blue banana region became economically even more powerful in attracting businesses, inward investment and innovation, as well as international organisations.

- > Nevertheless, already then a southern 'golden banana', (ranging from west of Valencia to Genoa, Fig. 2) was conceived to accommodate modern industries, such as electronics, aeroplane manufacture and R&D in advanced sciences with the ambition to become Europe's sunbelt and counterpart of Silicon Valley.
- > A comparative analysis of urban development in Europe after the re-unification of Germany (Ryser, 1991, 1993, 1998) produced a series of historic 'banana' linkages (Fig. 3). They include connections by sea between ports of the Mediterranean and extending to the heart of the European continent, Hanseatic cities in the Baltic realm, trade routes along the Danube and the Visigoth concentration of industry in central Europe, with Wrocław belonging to at least two of these groupings. The study illustrates my notion of 'archaeology of spatial memory'.



3. European 'bananas'
 (Judith Ryser for the Goethe-Institut)

SPATIAL REPERCUSSIONS

> OF GLOBALISATION ON EUROPE

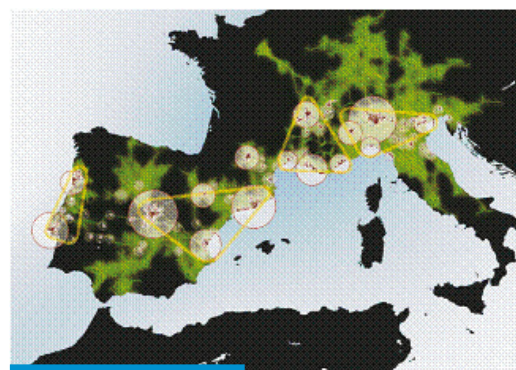
With the emergence of globalisation conventional wisdom postulated that all economic power is concentrated in the north west of the European Union (EU). The 'banana' had evolved into a 'Pentagon' (Fig. 4) comprising some 83 million



population which constitutes the sole European polycentric metropolis capable of competing in the global economy (Hall, Pain, 2006). However, the Pentagon, driven by its key cities: London, Paris, Frankfurt, Cologne, Hamburg, Brussels, the Randstad, Zürich, Geneva, Lyon, Turin, Milan is in contradiction with EU policy of territorial economic and social integration. One of the fundamental political objectives of the EU remains the eradication of regional disparities and the promotion of socio-economic integration, meaning that the less affluent regions are entitled to benefit most from EU solidarity. The concept of the southern European Diagonal fits into this rebalancing perspective.

EUROPEAN SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

The European Union (EU) has no jurisdiction over planning or urban policies, guarded jealously by the Nation States. Yet the EU has competence over spatial policies aimed at redressing regional disparities and fostering economic and social cohesion within the EU space. Considered the drivers of regional prosperity cities were included in the regional spatial development scenarios explored by the European Union before the Council of Europe² produced the European Spatial Development Perspective (see also Faludi, 2006). The EU adopted the ESDP which became part of the guiding principles for the allocation of the considerable regional structural funds aimed to assist the less developed regions. This includes investment in high speed rail (Fig. 5) which can bring greater spatial justice to lesser developed regions.



5. TEN (high speed rail) and their socio-economic influence on connectivity, study by Fabio Casioli.

4. Pentagon and European Diagonal (West East Connection with Diagonal cities)



2. External connections

² European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional/Spatial Planning (CEMAT). European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), Potsdam 1999.

- > A plank of the ESDP is polycentric development. This means that dynamic cities should not only compete, but cooperate and develop complementary characteristics of excellence. Polycentric networks would be able to absorb the weaker settlements within their region while becoming competitive as a whole in a globalising world.
- > Dealing with this dilemma the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe *'redefined the public interest for territorial development'* in cooperation with the Council of Europe (UN EC, 2006). They postulated the general adoption of polycentric city networks throughout a wider European region where many countries are aspiring to EU membership. After the demise of communism these countries incorporated the ESDP principles into their new planning systems to further their accession chances. Thus they endeavoured to link their cities to others, including across national borders, sometimes regardless of the viability of such networks in economic and social terms.

CURRENT URBAN AND REGIONAL DYNAMIC IN EUROPE

- > Spatial development does not stand still. During the EU enlargement process, both settlement structures and urban economies have changed dramatically. Many cities were re-connecting with their historic hinterlands, especially in those regions which had been severed by the iron curtain. Examples are the Vienna conurbation where 'Centropole' (Central European Region), an alliance of politicians from Lower Austria and surrounding regions of Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic is devising a spatial economic development strategy, and Berlin which is cooperating with both shrinking cities and new dynamic places in Brandenburg and parts of Poland.
- > With the EU 2004 and 2007 enlargements, EU resources had shifted to the latest newcomers from the more deprived east among the 27 EU member states to establish both 'hard' and 'soft' connections considered necessary, including at the mega-regional level to foster a knowledge society throughout Europe. One of the most ambitious

mega-regional EU project is to strengthen the north south links between the Baltic and the Adriatic (Fig. 6). This would benefit Wrocław as it is situated at the crossroads of two of these corridors which provide an incentive to conceive spatial development strategies regionally and even across national boundaries.

The concept of a southern European meta-region as a counterpoint to the north western European 'Pentagon' has built on these geopolitical shifts, aware that it could also benefit from the overlap between the 'Diagonal' and the 'Pentagon' with Milan, Italy's most powerful city, as the key articulation.



6. Baltic Adriatic EU corridors

In the longer term though cities and regions need to become more self-reliant, take stock and raise awareness of their own indigenous strengths and weaknesses and identify what they can gain from wider spatial cooperation, especially since the global economic crisis.

THE EUROPEAN DIAGONAL

The European Diagonal concept has been conceived by the Fundacion Metropoli (Ryser, 2008) to valorise the European south. It is based on its indigenous, historic, socio-cultural, economic,

environmental and physical assets and, most importantly, its dynamic underpinned by political leadership and entrepreneurial spirit. This mega-region, comprising some 31 million population concentrated in its major cities, has an enormous potential for economies of scale and scope. Its challenge is to harness its genius loci, rely on its cultural ties and harness its own resources to achieve a prosperous future.

‘HARD’ CONNECTIONS

> The European south had prospered with EU membership. ‘Hard’ connections have been established within and across national borders in the south and the Trans-European Networks (TENs) – the high speed rail network – and the motorway road system – are still being extended. Better connections are also being established between Mediterranean sea ports, while southern airports are targeting and consolidating regional trans-national routes. Together these ‘hard’ connections created greater integration within the southern European mega-region and were accelerating its economic growth which was twice that of the north until the global economic crisis, albeit from a lower point of departure.

‘SOFT’ CONNECTIONS

> The shift of funds from the south to the eastern regions of the EU left the south to fend for itself. This has generated a greater reliance on ‘soft’ connections, such as complementary specialisation of cities, networking of knowledge centres, pooling of resources to develop innovative technologies, learning from each others’ governance and human capacity building, comparing and sharing experiences of concrete realisations, etc. Establishing ‘soft’ connections has great potential to enhance regional economic cooperation in mega-regions. New cross-border allegiances were forged between sub-regions, such as cooperation across the Alps between Grenoble, Lyon, Turin and the Ligurian coast. Within countries, closer ties were established between city networks, such

as Milan, Genoa and Turin; however other cities remained in competition such as Nice, Marseille and Aix-en-Provence.

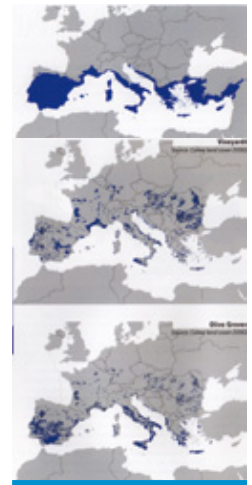
COMMUNALITIES

There are many communalities throughout the Diagonal, both historic and contemporary. Ancient Greater Greece, the Roman Empire, the Habsburg reign of the 16th century, the Muslim world of 1700 encompassed large areas of the Diagonal, the Genoa Republic of Liguria reached across to-day’s France and Italy in the 18th century, while Catalan and Basque speaking populations continue to live across France and Spain.

Common material features of the Diagonal include olive groves, vineyards, fertile soil, a clement climate with many days of sunshine throughout the year. Its ‘common’ the Mediterranean sea (*mare nostrum*) fostered trade and cultural exchanges since times memorial (Fig. 7). Its potential for renewable energies from wave, wind, solar, geothermal and bio-mass power is a particularly timely asset. It shares a young and educated population and an economic Diaspora connecting the European Diagonal to other continents and, until recently a buoyant economy. Besides a rich common cultural heritage comprising cities, landscapes and nature it can draw on a well connected urban network with rich historic assets. The European south enjoys an easy going lifestyle, thereby attracting activities, people, second homes and a broad range of tourism. They all contribute to its cultural diversity and high quality of life, symbolised by its widely coveted café society.

BARRIERS

There exist also many physical barriers in the European south, not least the Alps and the Pyrenees, yet, ancient trade routes and military conquests have been able to overcome them. At present, the EU brings its nation states closer together, inter alia through costly infrastructure which has greatly improved connections within the south. ‘Soft’ barriers include language. Since the



7. Cultural communalities: nature and cultivations

Latin language lost its prominence, the south does not have a *lingua franca* akin to English in the north. Yet, its diversity adds to its desirable lifestyle and contributes to the richness of this region. The south also shares comprehensive problems, such as water shortage, desertification, recurrent forest fires, soil erosion, excessive exposure to immigration, and dependence on widely fluctuating seasonal activities such as tourism. In facing its challenges the south would gain from a shared approach to harnessing its compatible assets and developing solutions and technologies in common.

LEADERSHIP

- > The Diagonal concept exists to inspire those who are in a position to make use of these underlying reflections and willing to incorporate them into their strategic thinking. True to its pro-active approach the Fundacion Metropoli mobilised initially the mayors of five cities: Lisbon, Madrid, Barcelona, Marseille and Milan, together with a number of chief executives at the head of large scale development projects within this meta region of a fast growing urban population. These leaders have been co-opted to a first exploration of the Diagonal concept and asked to identify concrete projects which could be of common interest.
- > The support of decision makers involved in large scale interventions is crucial for the approach of the European Diagonal as it aims at concrete projects. Contrary to conventional land use planning the protagonists of the Diagonal do not propose formal plans and procedural, prescriptive, regulatory or legalistic processes. Instead, they are counting on leadership, vision and ambition, risk taking and bold, large scale commitments toward innovative urban transformations. In this sense, the concept of the European Diagonal is not a traditional planning tool; it is a dynamic instrument capable of mobilising key stakeholders into cooperation to get creative ideas translated into reality.
- > The Diagonal concept rests on the view that its communalities could become a basis for large scale allegiances which would devise long term

strategies to the benefit of the meta-region as a whole and thus place it into a globally competitive position.

SCALING

The Diagonal concept is an instrument to devise a spatial strategic vision, building on the many unique components and clusters of excellence which already exist in this mega-region and from which innovative economic, social, cultural and environmental initiatives can evolve at different scales. At the centre of the Diagonal concept is a spatial vision for the whole region within Europe, starting from its experimental core, the five cities in Portugal, Spain, France and Italy. Conceived as an 'Ecosystem of Innovation', elaborated below, the Diagonal is open-ended in time and space, capable of scaling up and down. It can reach across continents, as well as creating clusters and polycentric city networks and taking advantage of local innovative initiatives (Fig. 8a).

META-SCALE

In Europe the Diagonal can reach eastwards to the central European regions, reviving ancient connections while building on a new dynamic which they have acquired by joining the European Union. Beyond Europe, the Diagonal has a great potential of strengthening its network of cooperation with Latin America and the Mediterranean basin.

Already the mayor of Casablanca who considers his city as the gateway of the north to the African south is keen on the Diagonal concept and sees connections between his city's own development needs and many common strategic development opportunities.

THE DIAMOND CONCEPT

Within this broad conceptual framework of the European Diagonal implementation of specific innovative development strategies requires a step by step approach. It needs to take place at various scales with interactions between them,

8a&b. Diagonal, its Diamonds and linkages between and beyond



³ The concept of urban Diamond was borrowed from the region of Antwerp, Brussels and Gent, coined as the Flemish Diamond.

as well as between and within layers of common interests. Cities and networks of cities are the level at which Diagonal-wide visions can be translated into practice. For that reason the Diagonal is structured into a series of smaller scale spatial configurations within which cooperation can facilitate implementation.

- > As different initiatives require actions at different scales, the Diagonal is conceived as a multivariate assemblage of cities, regions, local specificities, functional communalities and economic development goals. They are best realised by operating simultaneously at different scales while establishing vertical connections within this dynamic. This ‘urban ecosystem’ idea led to the conception of ‘urban diamonds’ within the Diagonal³ (Fig. 8b).
- > Urban Diamonds include smaller cities and can benefit the hinterland between them. Such Diamonds have their own development dynamic, but it might be in their interest to establish functional synergies beyond individual Diamonds with other Diamonds across national boundaries. One political virtue of the Diamond concept is that smaller cities can act as catalysts of cooperation between larger rivals.

CITY SCALE

- > The crucial scale at which dynamic innovation can be generated is the city level. Cities have become the key drivers of the economy in a globalising world. They need to initiate progress and change and remain constantly ready to respond to new geo-political events and scientific developments. Thus understanding cities, how they function at present, what has influenced their development in the past and how they can constantly reinvent themselves and realise their potential to remain competitive in the future is of the essence. The five core cities have participated actively in contributing the necessary knowledge base to understand their individual dynamic and explore how they could establish synergies to reach an increasingly efficient use of their assets and

resources. The ProyectoCities methodology used to analyse these cities and examples of innovative projects is presented in the next section.

GRASS-ROOT SCALE

At an even finer grain, dynamic urban interest groups influence the future of their local areas and sometimes beyond. They act from the bottom up, through their creativity and commitment to their adopted spaces and places. Often they take on neglected ‘spaces-in-between’ which they regenerate and return to the urban public realm. Once restored such spaces tend to undergo gentrification. They are reclaimed by others, such as land owners, public authorities, developers, etc, after the interventions of those who have acted on these spaces – derelict sites or abandoned buildings – have generated value which are then paradoxically beyond their means.

Ambiguously, initiators of such place-bound urban change – often artists, marginals, activists, those attached emotionally to their area – are recognised as creative forces capable of regenerating urban spaces and even breathing new life into areas beyond. However, officialdom and profit motives tend to overrun them eventually. By gentrifying such newly regenerated areas newcomers push out the initiators of creative urban transformations without compensation, and affect existing local communities adversely which may have benefited from the initial creative regeneration efforts. Unable to afford the new real estate costs they are forced to move out while the transient creative forces seek abandoned ‘non-places’ elsewhere. This raises the issue of gentrification and whether it is a compulsory by-product of the urban regeneration process.

SCALING AND DIALECTIC

Contradictions between the many diverse interests are unavoidable at these or other spatial levels, ranging from supra – super – meta – mega regional scales to cities and neighbourhoods. While the protagonists of urban innovation

resort to temporary allegiances to advance specific projects, their exposure to different interest groups contributes to general territorial and knowledge capacity building. Whether in the form of participation or confrontation, the dialectic between divergent interest groups remains a creative engine which breeds innovation through experimentation and direct action.

- > At all scales, the most creative actors who wish to change and improve their cities and regions can benefit from large scale cityscape and cityscope synergies and their potential to further their ambitions. In reverse, Diagonal-wide innovation strategies can draw on creative interventions at every scale. This scaling dialectic reflects southern unity in diversity.

**SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT
BEYOND STATUTORY PLANNING
UNDERSTANDING, IMAGINING
AND MAKING SPACES**

- > The Fundacion Metropoli has developed its own approach to understanding, imagining and making spaces, combining research (investigation), project design (innovation), and institution building (incubation). Together these interdependent instruments used in sequence and alongside each other are able to generate creative visions for places in need of innovative regeneration and competitive development, and to mobilise actors capable of transforming ideas into reality. It is resorting to its ProyectoCities methodology and setting up 'agencies zero' with decision makers and resource holders outside existing institutions

to bring innovative developments to fruition by creating synergy between multiple initiatives at different scales.

PROYECTO CITIES METHODOLOGY

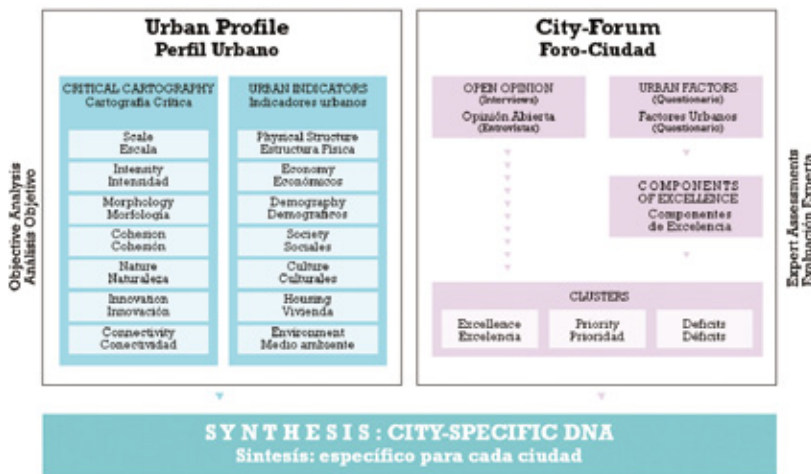
With its strategic partners, the Fundacion Metropoli has developed its Proyecto Cities methodology (Fig. 9) which has been applied to twenty pilot cities initially. Since then it is being refined to assist other urban and regional actors in their development strategies. The methodology consists of objective analysis, based on critical cartography (Fig. 10-13) and some two hundred urban indicators. A City Forum, composed of key protagonists and local decision makers, provides expert assessment. Drawing on informed local opinion and concrete experience the City Forum evaluates 'urban factors', identifies 'components of excellence' as well as deficits and establishes 'clusters of excellence' together with priorities for action. This pursuit of knowledge creation and sharing produces a synthesis: a sort of 'city specific DNA' as a basis of innovative urban and regional development strategies.

The analytical and practical knowledge of a city is a precondition and core asset of pertinent city development. This urban knowledge base is extended to a wider context, the city region, and also to neighbouring cities with potential polycentric links to constitute synergetic 'urban diamonds'. Moreover, cities may achieve mutual benefits from cooperating across a supra-regional level, in this case the Diagonal as a whole.

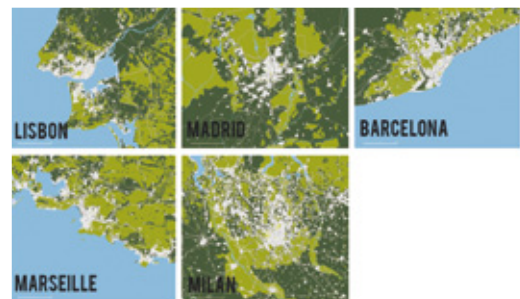
APPLYING THE PROYECTO CITIES METHODOLOGY TO THE DIAGONAL

The initial stage of the Diagonal project was to identify the 'DNAs' of the five selected core cities and to earmark examples of best practice with which they had been able to sustain an outstanding competitive edge. The innovative characteristics of these projects, specific to each city, carry lessons for other cities regarding governance, design, realisation and learning process for future steps of development.

PROYECTO CITIES



9. Urban Forum - Urban Profile



10. Proyecto Cities Example: morphology and nature

The typology of these cities was captured in terms of scale, intensity, morphology (Fig. 12), cohesion, nature (Fig. 10), innovation, and connectivity (Fig. 11). These features were identified and put into comparable form. Together with other city-specific characteristics (Fig. 13) they constitute their essential 'components of excellence'. The 'clusters of excellence' derived from this analysis form the basis of integrated spatial, economic, socio-cultural and environmental development, with a view to long term sustainable development.

- > Based on the findings of the ProyectoCities analysis, European Diagonal resorts to a multivariate and multi-timeframe approach providing flexibility in time and scale to implement innovative projects within this mega-region. Urban projects change and evolve during long term and large scale implementation, which takes place inevitably alongside urban development processes driven by their internal dynamic and existing power relations.
- > In this sense the southern European Diagonal development concept goes beyond traditional statutory planning, which tends to be confined to land use issues or national physical development criteria handed down to lower tiers (relying on a static understanding of space). Instead, the Diagonal rests on the notion of an 'urban ecosystem of innovation' with sustainability in mind to deal with uncertainty, risk, turbulence, environmental impacts and on-going long term trends of evolution.

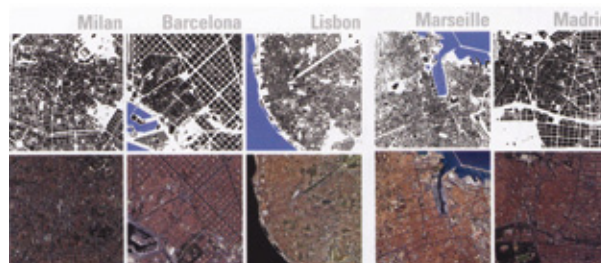
URBAN ECOSYSTEM OF INNOVATION

- > Systemic thinking in pursuit of synergetic effects was the chosen way of the Fundacion Metropoli (Ryser, 2010) to come to terms with the contradictory nature of urban development processes: phenomena of destruction and regeneration linked through relative space and time. It harnesses opposition and creative tension, and relies on dialectic interaction to reach consensus about a 'relational understanding of place' (Harvey, 2009) to generate mutual benefits for a period.

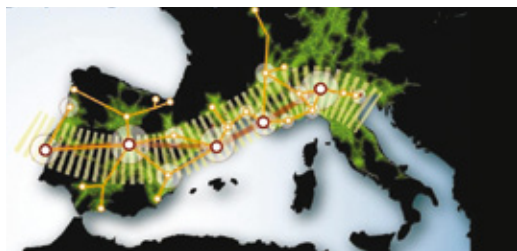
The starting premise is that global competitiveness depends on ecosystems of innovation in an interdependent world in which cities play a major role. Beyond polycentric city networking, urban ecosystems of innovation are drawing on key life forces in city regions to foster innovative processes towards sustainable development.

What this analogy borrows from biology is that living organisms are constantly engaged in a set of relationships with every other constituting element of the environment in which they exist. Steered by constant feedback organisms they are able to adapt to changing circumstances while evolving within the ecosystem and their surrounding environment. This they owe to their capacity of innovation and adaptation which constitute their force of survival and evolution in a competitive environment. Although tending toward stability, ecosystems are constantly unsettled by random unforeseen and unforeseeable events which may induce setbacks but can give rise to innovative change.

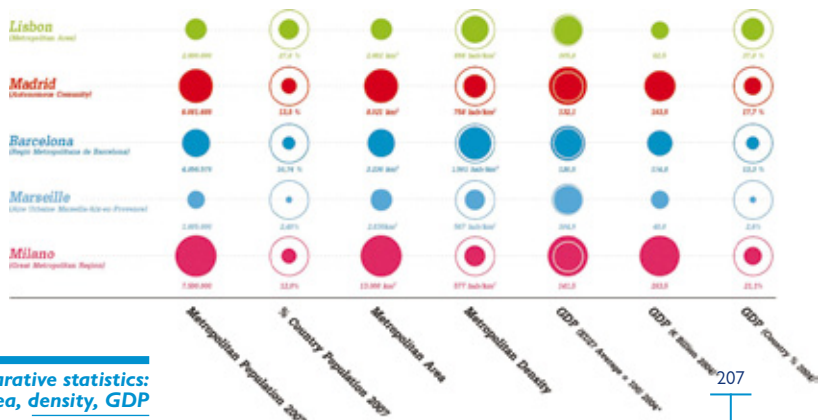
Similarly, cities and their components of excellence need to be adjustable to unpredictable changes introduced by physical or socio-economic forces within given constraints. Increasingly metropolitan in nature cities operate at a growing regional scale as relational, polycentric and a-spatial networks. Their pursuit of sustainable urban development goes far beyond spatial physical planning. They are responding to political dynamics, mobilising economic and social stakeholders and resorting to new models of operation. A prerequisite of innovative development is the ability of cities and regions to invent and set up novel institutional structures inclusive of vital driving forces and responsive to changing circumstances.



12. Proyecto Cities Comparison: scale, intensity, morphology, cohesion



11. Proyecto Cities Example: connectivity

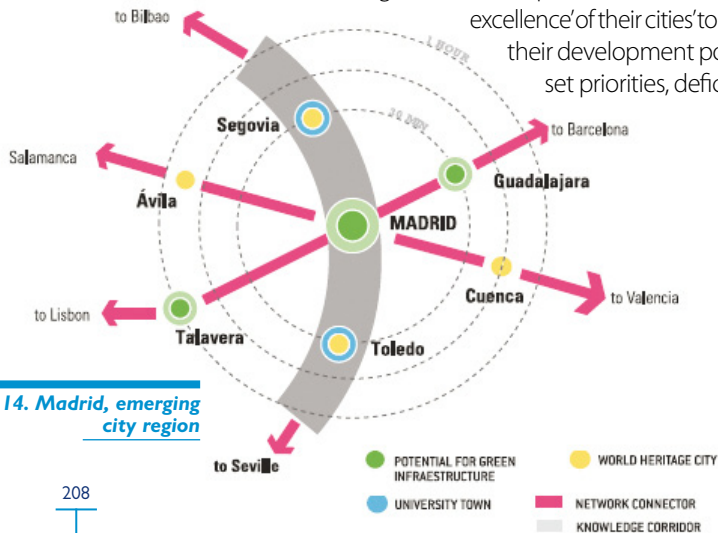


13. Proyecto Cities Comparative statistics: population, area, density, GDP

- > Cities remaining competitive through innovation resort to clusters of specificities which constitute them as 'ecosystems of innovation'. Concretely, in a knowledge society cities foster life long learning; support science and technology; attract, nurture and retain talent for innovative production and services; generate evidence based policies, tailor-made institutions geared to deal with change, innovative funding organisations and competitive settings for trade; and they promote cultural excellence and social harmony, together with fertile ground for the arts. Most importantly, they include a high quality and sustainable urban environment and a public realm where civic expression, chance encounters, freedom of speech and tolerance can flourish. They maintain a welfare system for the inhabitants, together with public accountability and ethics, which secure social order, safety and security, as well as openness which includes networking with the world at large.

THE DIAGONAL AS URBAN ECOSYSTEM OF INNOVATION

- > Translating this analogy with biology to the Diagonal situation, symbiotic relations between cities in the Diagonal would depend either on the specificities of each city and their complementarity, or on communalities in which cooperation and pooling resources would be mutually beneficial.
- > Before engaging in such mega-strategies, it is necessary to have a clear knowledge of the communalities, specificities, complementary characteristics as well as drawbacks which cities could mitigate through cooperation and complementarity. Applying the Proyecto Cities methodology to the five cities, and drawing on the experience of practitioners who have converted projects into material urban fabric have made the specific assets of these cities apparent. Interventions by protagonists of these cities show how able they were to build on their knowledge of the 'components and clusters of excellence' of their cities to identify their development potential, set priorities, deficits.



14. Madrid, emerging city region

FINDINGS

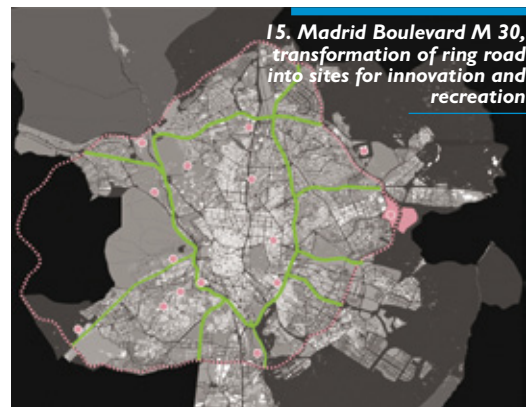
From the study of a number of cities in the Diagonal which have been regenerating themselves through sustainable innovation it has become apparent that the notion of ecosystems of innovation applies to different urban scales. It can relate to initiatives in specific locations of intense innovative processes, such as science parks or experimental laboratories; the city can act as an ecosystem itself; and even whole city regions can constitute ecosystems of innovation. What unites these experiences at different scales is that their long term perspective includes sustainability principles, akin to survival principles in biology. Like systemic principles in nature, these findings act as positive feedback. They help evaluate development strategies and governance put in charge of their implementation. A succinct presentation of selected projects should illustrate these premises.

LISBON, PORTUGAL

Lisbon is building on its successful legacy of the Parquexpo World Exhibition of 1998 (presented elsewhere in this book). Suffice to say that the management agency set up for that purpose is able to sell its expertise to other regeneration sites. Initiated by the public sector and implemented by the private sector, Parque das Nações has become a successful eastern expansion of the city, endowed with major infrastructure and transport connections with the city centre, with lessons for many brownfield sites throughout the Diagonal.

MADRID, SPAIN

Madrid has undergone enormous expansion and transformation since Spain's membership of the European Union. Until the financial crisis, its buoyant economy was attracting n-igrants and students. At the metropolitan scale, Madrid renewed and enlarged its public transport and road infrastructure, turned its airport into the sixth largest of Europe, and extended its central commercial spine into its expanding city-region (Fig. 14). It regenerated its urban fabric, rediscovered



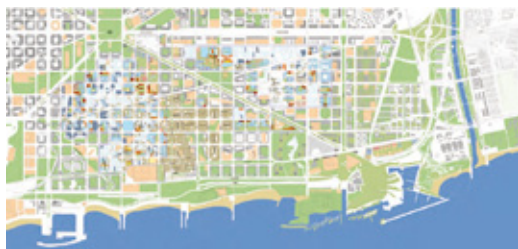
15. Madrid Boulevard M 30, transformation of ring road into sites for innovation and recreation

its culverted rivers, valorised its cultural assets and catered for the creative classes.

- > Madrid 30 Boulevard is a new urban development space gained by tunnelling the inner ring road to decongest the inner city where a third of Madrid's population lives. It frees a vast area encircling Madrid's almond shaped inner core and connects it to its dense urban surroundings.
- > Madrid's Olympic games bids for 2012 and 2016 were situated on this reclaimed site which will now be used for universities, incubation of creative firms, a major railway station, new central activities and sports facilities. Forming a vast green boulevard in the tradition of Madrid's public realm it will include gateways in all directions with ecological corridors connecting the inner city to the outer transportation ring. This ecological strategy of overcoming deep divides in the existing urban fabric is a lesson for many other Diagonal cities.

BARCELONA, SPAIN

- > Barcelona's initial large extension was planned by Ildefons Cerda in the 19th century with a grid structure. Barcelona had an expansionist policy since the liberation of Spain from the Franco regime and regenerated itself intensively from within as its topography constrained further expansion. Attracting world events (Olympic games, World Forum, FIFA world cup, World Architecture Festival, Trade Fair of Industrial Design) it transformed its waterfront, created large new public realm with beaches and mixed activities, and converted its traditional industry into places for the knowledge society. @22 is the latest large scale restructuring project (Fig. 16). It is turning grid blocks occupied by derelict factories into incubation premises, housing and cultural uses.
- > A new transport hierarchy throughout the Cerda block structure is freeing internal roads for slow traffic, cycles and to create a more viable public realm. Transforming a long standing city structure into a more sustainable environment can act as a model for other Diagonal cities.



16. Barcelona @22 regeneration of industrial fabric within restructured Cerda grid

MARSEILLE, FRANCE

Marseille, now second city of France, is transforming itself with enormous infrastructure investment. The public Euromediterranee company is and a complete renovation of the waterfront. Displacing the commercial port the Euromediterranee company is in charge of the transformation of the whole harbour area. and much of the inner city (Fig. 17). It has introduced new tram lines, refurbished the central railway station to accommodate high speed rail and renovated the extensive historic residential area. Before these substantive interventions, artists had occupied a disaffected tobacco factory near the central railway station and turned it into a place of experimental performance art and multimedia production, attracting other IT firms which made Marseille into the second media centre of France. While Europemediterranee learnt lessons from Lisbon' Expo, other cities can benefit from the innovative institutional regime set up by the artist cooperative to prohibit developer takeovers.



17. Marseille, urban transformation and waterfront regeneration – Belle de Mai media park

MILAN, ITALY

Milan has ambitious plans to completely restructure its urban fabric. Land freed by the dislocation of the trade fair to the edge of the city provides a unique occasion to regenerate the inner city, extending the city into the outskirts at high urban densities and replacing its old industrial fabric with premises for the 21st century economy of creative activities, fashion and design.

Conversely, the green wheel concept brings green wedges in spike form near the city centre and surrounds the city with much needed green lungs (Fig 18 & 19). Lessons drawn from the Diagonal cities Lisbon and Zaragoza for the world exhibition planned for 2015 are an incentive to bring both these development strategies to fruition. Conversely, the green-grey continuum instituted by Milan's green wheel is an innovative model for others.



19. Green wheel and densification at city gates



18. Milan: urban restructuring, displacing the Fair and devising a strategy for the city region



20. Skyscraper syndrome of urban transformations: ubiquitous modernity produced by star architects in Lisbon, Marseille, Milan, Barcelona, Madrid

KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND SHARING

- > These examples of large scale strategies illustrate that politicians, entrepreneurs, the knowledge and creative sectors and other urban drivers generated some 'unity in diversity'. They shared some common approaches which they adopted to diverse circumstances. What the Diagonal network explores is how to share lessons from such projects and their potential of wider application through open source exchange of knowledge, experience and best practice. Several Diagonal cities have attracted global inward investment to host successful world events, and derived a sustainable legacy from these events for their cities and regions. Many more cities have taken measures from within to compete successfully in the knowledge society. Most have established synergy between universities and techno-parks to constitute innovation hubs where scientific knowledge can be transformed into products and services and brought to market worldwide.

CREATING LIVEABLE CITIES

- > By their very nature cities are the catalysts of creative exchanges and innovation, of culture and stimulation, of progress and the many civilised freedoms enjoyed by contemporary society. Occasionally, the urban realm is the scene of changes for the better, achieved through public protests. On the whole though, urban regeneration, integration of cities with their hinterland, merging cityscapes and landscapes into urbanity are wilful initiatives of cities in their pursuit to remain competitive to the general benefit of their citizens by attracting creative and entrepreneurial newcomers, retaining and training their indigenous human resources and marketing their city. How city protagonists achieve this varies with their vested interests. More progressive decision makers may be persuaded that excellence of design, good maintenance and sustainability contribute to a win-win situation.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Numerous examples show that the most liveable cities are those which mobilise the active participation of citizens in their well being. Obtaining the engagement of citizens, nurturing their sense of ownership for the places where they live, work, play and learn, and involving them in urban interaction are lengthy processes. They are subjected to the impatience of politicians though who depend on short election cycles and need to demonstrate tangible results, most easily achieved with physical interventions.

THE 'WOW' FACTOR

What distinguishes the development sector in how it intervenes in the urban fabric from those who inhabit it is that the former operates without emotional or cultural ties to the places it aims to transform, usually by demolition of the physical environment and destruction of the social fabric. Often supported by the corporate sector in its keenness of the 'wow' factor to attract investment and newcomers it resorts to architectural fashion to express power and dominance (Fig. 20). Propagated by star designers this finds its physical manifestation in ubiquitous sky scrapers, gated communities and private transport, often displacing existing people and activities.

CIVITAS

Creative expression is not confined to grand architectural statements. Individuals who live and work in cities often care for the urban spaces they occupy and identify with the existing physical and cultural heritage with which they interact. Many invest themselves actively in preserving their communities, regenerating the urban fabric and contributing innovative activities to the local economy. Examples are legions of local people who are attached to their environment and try to save it from destruction. Others like artists take over indeterminate spaces and put them back into use, as opposed to those without attachment who commodify these environments

for profitable monetary gain alone. Intermediaries whose stake in such places is the public interest may act with good intentions. The green wheel of Milan is a genuine effort to regenerate the city by greening it for the public good, but in this process it eliminates premises which constitute a collective memory for those who have roots there. The latter tend to acknowledge the need for change, the reality of the market economy and their alternative proposals allow for these constraints. Too often though such bottom up efforts stand little chance against corporate might. Local communities are forced to give up, move on and start again. Nevertheless, despite asymmetry of means, such efforts are influencing the legacy of city culture. They mobilise minds of citizens who feel disenfranchised and shape the responses of commercial players.

- > Sometimes they manage to persist in their pursuits which subsequently become an integrated part of mainstream urban renewal. For example, the take-over by artists of a redundant tobacco factory in Marseille and the conversion of these spaces into places of innovative entertainment, experimentation and learning has been supported by mainstream establishment figures such as Jean Nouvel who designed extra studios for them. Their contribution to urban regeneration is as important as the ‘wow’ factor transformations along the waterfront and may be more sustainable.

OUTSTANDING CHALLENGES FOR CITIES

- > Globalisation has accelerated mobility and, with it, cultural diversity and complexity. Cities are the receiving spaces of such enriching changes, but they are also the places where parts of urban society undergo loss of identity, fear of the other, social exclusion and poverty, growing economic inequality and political polarisation. Good city governance is of the essence to harness diversity positively and to prevent confrontation and conflict, corruption and envy, abuse of power and domination. Managing urban change needs to be inclusive and open to outside influences, following

the concept of urban ecosystems of innovation. The fast evolving global world requires urban change. Sustainable cities are those which inspire city-pride and a sense of belonging, regardless of whose regeneration solution prevails. Those capable of continuous negotiation and consensus seeking, those who cooperate in producing widely accepted solutions guaranteed to last, those from all walks of life who involve their creative talents from the outside and within are the ones most likely to transform the potential of place into liveable cities.

FUTURE POTENTIAL DIAGONAL-WIDE PROJECTS

So far five cities of the southern European Diagonal, were mobilised to share sustainable development strategies and opportunities. Casablanca joined later and other cities in the Diamonds are showing an interest. This cooperation for which the Fundacion Metropoli acted as a catalyst enabled these cities to learn from each other by pooling their knowledge and devising development strategies together. A host of challenges remain for future cooperation. The most obvious ones are climate change, sustainable water management, strong economic fluctuations due to seasonal activities such as tourism, as well as dealing with the growing influx of immigrant populations, which are not all young, dynamic and educated but comprise economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from the poor south. A key challenge is to turn added cultural diversity into assets of the cities without antagonising the native population.

COMMON PURSUITS

These issues require radical solutions throughout the Diagonal which the constituent cities could bring about by pooling their resources, knowledge, experience and most importantly political will. Even the OECD has recognised the potentially powerful role of cities in shaping the economy of the knowledge society. The OECD started its interest in cities on the initiative of

Madrid, followed by Milan⁴, both key cities of the Diagonal which are keen to assert their importance in the overall development process. Other players need to be co-opted to pursue ambitious common goals which require long term lead times to come to fruition. Physical tasks include finding solutions to deal with flooding, forest fires, water scarcity, heat waves and other rapidly increasing climatic changes. The Diagonal has ample opportunities to experiment with alternative energy generation, including at a large scale in its vast amounts of sparsely populated areas where it could harness sun, wind and wave power. Socio-economic tasks include dealing with migration, seasonally fluctuating activities and the transformation of the existing economy from agriculture and industry into creative industries, based on accompanying R&D.

- > The Diagonal cities would gain from facing obstacles together, such as the contradiction between short term political cycles and long term lea-ways of technological innovation and experimentation. Together they are endowed with a strong and growing academic support system, physical connections and digital networks. They are aware that they need to provide favourable conditions to attract the necessary entrepreneurs who would be willing to carry such ambitious projects further, and to obtain the support of international funding organisations. This puts them into healthy competition but can also strengthen their respective positions, provided they are able to develop complementary specificities and cooperate on large scale, long term projects which require supra-national investment.

PROSPECTS

- > The Southern European Diagonal is in its infancy. The book produced by the Fundacion Metropoli gives a flavour of the huge potential in this mega-region for ambitious large scale, long term initiatives beyond operational political time horizons. Research shows the importance of protagonists in politics, economics, arts and

science in vision building. It is equally relevant to gain the support of the population for these supra national ambitions by demonstrating the synergetic benefits they produce for specific cities, as well as the mega-region as a whole. What used to be 'the poor south' of Europe may well be able to leapfrog important stages of development which the north has accomplished over many years to reap the benefits of the latest scientific knowledge, technologies and entrepreneurial know-how. The key to stimulate physical, economic, socio-cultural and environmentally sound development beyond mere redistribution is to build on indigenous resources and tacit knowledge through cooperation across the European Diagonal mega-region. Self-reliance, pride of place, cultural heritage, historic networks, participation in a promising future all form part of assets which can contribute to collective sustainable evolution. In a next phase the Diagonal would have to produce concrete 'urban projects' with appropriate tools of implementation to turn a mega-vision into real possibilities.

THE NOTION OF 'URBAN PROJECT'

France has coined the phrase '*projet urbain*' < ('urban project') to mean significant strategic interventions in existing metropolitan areas and city-regions. Their aim is to reduce spatial, social and environmental inequalities; anticipate climate and energy change; and stimulate employment, economic excellence and global competitiveness. A comparison of 'large urban projects' in Europe explored their similarities (IAU IdF, 2007). In many countries regional development is in a weak position, unlike in France where the voluntary sub-regional strategies SCOT (Schema de Coherence Territoriale) have produced some innovative results. Most comprehensive urban regeneration sites in Europe seem to range from 50 ha to 400 ha. Only the scale of Thames Gateway stands out with its 100.000 ha of which 3.150 ha are earmarked for development⁵.

⁴ OECD. What Policies for Globalising Cities. Rethinking the Urban Policy Agenda. Conference 29-30 March 2007, Madrid. OECD. Competitive Cities and Climate Change. Milan, Conference 9-10 October 2008. Higher Education in Regional and City Development. Berlin 13-18 September 2009.

THAMES GATEWAY

- > The reason to briefly mention Thames Gateway in the East of London is to show the difficulties of translating a mega-regional vision into implementable spatial development projects based on traditional planning instruments. Over forty years of planning did not suffice to rebalance London towards the East. Instilling some spatial coherence into this enormous flood plane proved an insurmountable task in the hands of so many local authorities and specially created development corporations, including the agencies for the 2012 Olympic Game site and the redevelopment of the Stratford East town centre. London Docklands with Canary Wharf took thirty years and two business cycles to reach the current stage while construction is continuing. The designated line for the high speed train offered another opportunity for the regeneration of the East of the London Metropolis, although supplementary stations in the vicinity of London contradict the purpose of fast city centre to city centre connection.
- > The new coalition government of the UK has pledged to abolish even the existing skeletal regional institutions, together with the ambitious regional housing targets, while the heritage programme of the Olympic site is already slipping without rescheduling nor earmarked finance. It is difficult to envisage a coherent spatial strategy without an appropriate creative institutional structure for such an enormous and difficult site. Terry Farrell's blue-green vision (Fig. 21) proposes an innovative alternative, based on the environmental characteristics (components of excellence and clusters of excellence) of the Thames Estuary and its historic settlements. His vision is perceived as some guiding framework for punctual 'urban projects' over the long term, especially now that investment for the necessary infrastructure may be slow to materialise.

RELEVANCE OF REGIONAL STRATEGIC THINKING FOR WROCLAW

Although the administrative boundary of Wrocław is large with ample land reserves and agricultural activities the links between Wrocław and its region do not seem to form part of the planning concept of the city itself. Silesia as a region (or lower and upper Silesia) does not seem to figure prominently in the spatial context of Wrocław which tends to be preoccupied mainly with its own sprawl and that immediately beyond the city boundary. New motorway connections are planned, together with a ring road to take heavy traffic out of the city centre, while the rail connections are said to be inefficient. However, European capitals of Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia are nearer or equidistant with Wrocław's own capital. No plans exist to revitalise the Odra for communications by water which may bring some benefits (e.g. the transportation of bulk material for construction and infrastructure). Spatial development strategies for the region and their relevance for the development of the metropolitan area of Wrocław would be beneficial. Lessons of multi-layer spatial strategies could be borrowed from the European Diagonal to connect Wrocław with a network of cities in Silesia and capitals further afield. Relating Wrocław to its region could revitalise its cosmopolitan tradition which has been flourishing over so many centuries.

⁵ In comparison, the complete long term regeneration of the Port of Rotterdam will take place on 1.500 ha.



21. Blue-green development strategy for Thames Gateway by Terry Farrell.

source: Terry Farrell and Partners, London