

Territory and its Identity: the Case of Bari (Italy)

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Abstract: This paper aims at a new interpretation of the term “territory”. The interpretation consists of a new use of a “territorial approach” which heightens a territory’s identity. Not only does this approach study the identity of a territory but it puts in evidence its physical, environmental, cultural, historical and economic peculiarities. However, its final purpose is to point out policies of preservation of a territory to use such a methodology its necessary first of all to define the concept of identity.

The concept of identity

First of all, it is necessary to define the basic concepts at the base of this paper, that is to say the concept of “identity” and that of “city”. Then our analysis will address a case-study: the territory of the city of Bari.

The concepts of “region” and “identity” have been part of geography since a long time. The two concepts, as well as their connection, have evolved throughout time. In fact, historically, the concept of identity was bound to that of countryside or region or place. For instance, Vidal de la Blache in his *Tableau de Géographie de la France* (1978/1908) stated that «une *contrée* est un réservoir où dorment des énergies...dont l’emploi dépend de l’homme. C’est lui qui en la pliant à son image, met en lumière son *individualité*. Ce mot de *personnalité* appartient au domaine de la Géographie humaine» (Vidal de la Blache 1978: 8). The “individualité géographique” is innate in every place and derives from climatic and geological factors but also from flora and

fauna. Thus, on the one hand identity is a disciplinary claiming, but on the other it refers to the “substantiality” of the soil, to its physicality and to its rural nature.

The concept of “substantiality” is better understood, by taking into consideration Vidal’s inclination to adhere to what is “concrete”, that is to a geographical map and therefore to what can be mapped¹.

The strong relationship between reality and its topographic representation comes to its utmost degree some decades later when some Italian geographers (for example Marinelli 1917, 1924; Toschi 1973) formulated the concept of homogenous region.

During the 70s and 80s, new-humanistic geography related the concept of identity to that of place which had been newly defined. Nowadays, in spite of a topographic map, the question is about the territorial representation which depends on the fixed environmental, cultural, historical and landscape features with which the social group identifies (Copeta 1992). Moreover,

human identity presupposes similarity with one's place, which in this case becomes a symbol of identity.

Such re-elaboration of the concept of identity was inspired by the theories of some phenomenological-oriented sociologists (Berger & Luckmann 1974) who stated that identity is no longer substantial neither personal, identity is equally a social and an individual construction, which can be considered as a combination of relations and representations, which utilizes a system of meaningful symbols (for example language) and which develops in a variety of life styles (Sciolla 1988).

Today a new reformulation of the concept of identity and above all of its new "utilizations" are evident. According to this new perspective, territorial planning claims its authority and, for this reason, territorial identity is introduced in town planning projects. Such approach is called "territorialistic"². Moreover, it redefines finds out "the identity of the territory and its evolutionary character" (Cinà 2000) giving priority to identitary features of a territorial patrimony.

In Italy, this approach has been also acknowledged at a legislative level. An example is the town planning laws of Region Tuscany (Regional Law, 16th January 1995, n°5 art. 24), whose system of regulations is called *Statute of Places*. This statute grants a correct environmental, historical, cultural and relational framework of the territory through structural invariants. This law, therefore, reforms the principles and methods in matter of government of the territory and directs all private and public activities in favour of the sustainable development of Region Tuscany. Region Liguria agreed with the territorial approach in its urban planning law, too (Regional

Law, 4th September 1997, n°36 arts. 18-25). Such legislative system is called *Founding Descriptions*. Both town planning laws aim to become the centre of a new social project. Following this new tendency, the term region disappears in favour of the term territory whose boundaries become the limits of identity and alterity. Territory is what is not identitary, what is not local. In our case study - that is the territory of the city of Bari - identity is considered as a resource, as an alternative descriptive category which is useful for the policy concerning the protection of the territory and of the urban centre. Protection means preservation from an environmental and social point of view of identity and of the links which unites the community to its territory and the values connected to it, it means restoration of areas without any identity and of the deteriorated ones. The aim is to trace the course of the restoration of these territories.

As already stated, the concept of identity has been newly formulated. For this reason, in our research, we prefer to adopt a context which is relational influenced by various factors and linked to memory. It is relational and depends on a constant process; it is also bound to memory and from Remotti's point of view (1996) it has both an inner and external perspective. The inner perspective concerns some characteristics regarding the essence of the same concept of identity. This concept is defined as follows:

- it is a resource
- it is artificial, invented and constantly needs negotiations
- it is description, in fact, it reinforces identity

- by means of a tension between identity and alterity, because the former exists to the expense of the latter
- because of the risk to live only from identity which means losing alterity.

The external perspective concerns the relations between identity and alterity which are generally defined in this way:

- identity denies alterity (for example territories becoming museums)
- identity recognizes alterity
- alterity is coessential, because identity consists in alterity, too.

Even if identity is a matter of decisions, a social construction, it is possible in every moment to determine its nucleus made up of constants that is of those characteristics which form its “structure”; they are at the base of the evolution of the concept itself. Since our case study regards a Mediterranean city, it is necessary to define what a Mediterranean quality is.

Mediterraneity

The first geographer to study Mediterraneity as a structural characteristic was the Scottish Mackinder who, in 1904, developed a ternary method, according to which the Mediterranean Sea was the third pole between the European Asiatic Continent and the Oceanic one. Therefore, Mediterraneity was recognized as a separated “area”, with a proper personality, which moved from a marginal position to that of a mediator between land and sea (Mackinder 1904: 431-2).

Nowadays there are several studies about the Mediterranean Sea (for example Farinelli 1998; Giovannini & Colistra 2002; Campione 1998), but in this paper our study will take into consideration only to the theories of the Greek geographer Leontidou who is particularly interested in Mediterranean cities.

Leontidou states that “Southern European cities do not fit into elements of Anglo-Saxon evolutionary models” (Leontidou 1993:349). The Mediterranean cultures differ from the Anglo-Saxon ones because their economic systems, their societies and their politics are the “alternatives” to Modernism. In the Mediterranean cities post-modernism cannot be located after Modernity, but it is rather a cultural innate alternative to the Mediterranean life-style. Mediterranean cities have developed in an alternative, no-linear way, not necessarily passing through Industrialization.

In short, Mediterranean cities have changed from a pre-industrial development to a post-modern³ one, but “most of Mediterranean post-modernism is not exclusively related to recent developments in high-tech; it has a deeper history and social causes” Leontidou (1993: 949) affirms. Therefore it represents a cultural alternative deeply rooted in the history and in the society of Mediterranean peoples.

A post-modernist nature is also obvious in the way in which the city was built in order to preserve its cultural heritage⁴. The Mediterranean cities reflect the informality and the urban spontaneity which are the result of a “democratic” progressively planning, achieved throughout time. These two features are at the base of an anti-planning attitude that on one side identifies itself with the individuality and personality of the city; on the other side, it risks

to become illegal building and urban fragmentations, therefore lack of respect for the town legislative planning.

A further feature is informal economy which has a pervasive nature in Mediterranean societies (for example small shops, workshops, seasonal jobs or job contracts, subcontracted job, besides a multitude of other jobs). Leontidou (1993) associates the informal economy to post-modernity, so job is no longer bound to the place, to the factory because it has become flexible. This means that those economic activities seen as pre-industrial and which have never disappeared from Mediterranean cities by finding autonomous forms of organization of places of works, are reevaluated.

On the base of Leontidou's (1993) considerations, we have elaborated a set of structural elements able to understand the identity of the territory of the city of Bari⁵; such elements have been called "constants" and will be referred to as local peculiarities.

They have been defined through a selection of what we have observed and by means of an archival-historical study.

An example: the territory of the city of Bari

Bari is a Southern city on the Adriatic Sea, it is set quite in the middle of the Apulian coast. (Latitude 41.0867° and Longitude 16.8976°). It has about 316.000 inhabitants. From an architectonic and urban point of view, Bari has a complex structure, since it is made up of three distinct parts reflecting the different periods of its urbanistic

development and also of different forms of associative life (Figure 1).

Similarly to all other Mediterranean cities, Bari has never known the gentrification phenomenon, so that its historical centre is characterized both by a business and housing nature. From a social point of view, the family retains a very strong identity (young people although adult continue to live in the home of their parents). The family balances a welfare that ensures only the basics and primary social services (for example almost inexistent is the policies of housing with special rent for young people). In the city of Bari social life is characterized by slow temporal rhythms which are complementary to the ways of fruition of public spaces. This is evident mostly during summer when the night is a very long one. From an urbanistic point of view, mostly along the coasts, it is easily recognizable what Leontidou (1993) defines "antiplanning attitude" which is evident in unauthorized building (illegal housing) made easier and possible by frequent *amnesties*.

The specific constants of the city of Bari are:

- altitude
- morphology
- urban shape
- architectonic identity (including the colours of the buildings)
- cultural and archaeological heritage
- green areas
- road networks



Figure 1. The territory of the city of Bari.

- seafront and public spaces analyzed according to their fruition and symbolic use.

Thanks to such constants we are going to analyse:

- A) the historical centre
- B) the nineteenth-century city
- C) the contemporary city.

A) The historical centre

The old Barium was born on a little peninsula of about 40 km², vaguely triangular in shape at 7 m. above sea level. A relevant part of the historical centre is considerably higher because of the

stratification of the remains of the ancient city of Bari. The oldest Barium lies on a karstic ground as all the rest of the city of Bari. During the Bronze Age it was already inhabited. It was also a peucetium centre⁶, whose defensive walls can be still admired in Santa Scolastica Convent. The different foreign rules - Roman, Longobard, Saracen, Byzantine, Norman, Swabian etc. – influenced not only the culture but also the organization of the urban space and the style of the architectonic elements typical of the historical centre⁷. Today, the urban structure is still medieval with some elements belonging to High Middle Age. This structure was born in order to satisfy residential needs (such as living in the community). Therefore the road system of the historical centre is subjected to the building industry: houses and small houses were built at street level, and so

were houses-towers⁸, palaces, churches and convents⁹ mostly all white coloured.

The road system, probably Arabian, is made up of roads, lanes, courts (these are still today meeting places of everyday life, quite an extension of one's house). Since Bari was a Roman city, it is crossed by a part of the Ancient Appia road which is referred to with the place-name of Ruga (road) Francigena because in the Middle Ages it was the last part of the *cammino* before shipping for the Holy Land. The old walls protecting the city were demolished when the modern city began to be built and today only an area overlooking the sea remains. The glacis have become one of the most frequented streets by flâneurs of the night. Notwithstanding this particular urban tissue, there are two wide great areas: Piazza Ferrarese e Piazza Mercantile. The main architectonic places, that is the cultural heritage, are representative of three main powers:

- ecclesiastic
- political
- economic

First, the ecclesiastic power is best represented by Saint Sabin Cathedral, erected in the V century in the west side of the inhabited centre, and then rebuilt for the last time in the XII and XIII centuries, and Saint Nicolas Basilica (XI-XII centuries). They were built in Romanic-Apulian style. The Basilica is the corner-stone for the cult of Saint Nicolas. It was of great importance during the Crusades period. Moreover, there are a myriad of churches and convents which were the reference point of several ethnic races which lived in Bari in the

Middle Ages: Saint Gregorio of Armenians (X c.), Saint Mark of Venetians (X c.), Saint James (XI c.) built in the direction of the beginning of the Route to Santiago, Saint Luke of Stiris (of Illyrians XII c.).

Second, for centuries the political power was represented by a Norman Swabian castle (but it was built during the Roman Empire), in fact, this foundation belongs to the period of Magna Carta. Noble powerful families owned palaces as for example Dottula Palace (XII c.) belonging to an influential Byzantine family;

Third, the economic power was only partially represented by Ferrarese and Mercantile Squares, markets and merchants places.

It is important to underline that during the XV and the XVI centuries several noble palaces were built, now in part restored and re-used: Simi Palace, Sagges Palace, Zeuli Palace, Gironda Palace, Efreml Palace, etc.

An important feature of the daily life of the inhabitants of the historical centre is represented by the phenomenon of still living in "community", that is, people easily gather in blind alleys and *claustra* in order to have dinner or simply to chat all together. This private use of the public space is the reason why women take a particular care of the lanes in front of their houses (they brush and wash it), as if they were real part of their houses.

B) The nineteenth-century city

This part of the city, that today is the core of everyday life in every sector, was planned in 1813 by Murat, who thus started the project of enlarging the old city. The city was voluntarily planned in a different

way from the historical centre, since the architect Gimma, who designed it, focused above all on “healthiness and functionality” criteria. The result was the plan of a chess-board map with a system of orthogonal axes (today they are elegant, well frequented main streets, thanks to the presence of many shops and banks). These axes were built in opposition to the historical centre and they aimed at separating a building from another one.

The division between the two parts became tangible after the demolition of the walls when a long main street was constructed in their place: Corso Vittorio Emanuele. This main street was “closed” by two squares: the one on the west side is today a garden, the other on the east side, which was an extension of Ferrarese Square, today is a connecting road. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, the historian Malpica described the two cities as follows: “Here two ages face each other with (...) looking at each other and challenging each other (...) one characterized by great memories, animated by merry people, by the merchants’ shouts, by the seamen’s swarming (...) Greeks, Dalmatian, people from Corfu, Venetians (...), the other silent and uninhabited”.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the historical centre was abandoned. The situation got worse in 1931, when the construction of the seafront¹⁰ cast into oblivion the historical centre.

The residential buildings of the centre of the South-east part of the above mentioned four sided structure is of great value, since it is almost made up of historical edifices (the so-called Umbertino district), built during the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

The West side of the quadrilateral structure is less qualified because of the existent old buildings in decay. They were recuperated and offer a shelter and a residence with a low rent, to not well-off people and immigrants. The most important architectonic buildings, besides the other above mentioned buildings of value, are the three theatres two of them are (now being restored), the Townhall, the Chamber of Commerce and the Bank of Italy.

C) The contemporary city

The nineteenth-century city is divided from the contemporary one by a long axis (called Estramurale) and by railways. Even if there are eight linking points, the two parts of Bari are two separate entities. The contemporary part of the city has a radial structure, constructed in the second post-war period, and planned by the architect Quadroni in 1976. It begins with the Estramurale stretching up to the neighbouring municipalities and houses, which today have become cities within the city. Moreover, some main axes have then become real territorial axes, for example G. Petroni Street and Fanelli Street. Another structural sign of the city is represented by the Tangent axis (Tangenziale) an important connecting long road. Once the Tangent axis represented the limits of the city, today it has been widely passed. This part of Bari is characterized by the phenomenon of dispersion and fragmentation, a phenomenon above all present in the non urbanized territory. This gives place to urban gardens and residual areas. Sometimes there are environmental, degraded areas in need of restoration. The

building industry present in this part of the city is that common to all suburbs, which are in fact without architectonic identity.

The only existing green area is Due Giugno Park that reinforces the chronic lack of green zones of Bari. The contemporary city is composed by different districts, some have an older structure (Carrassi) with belongs to the beginning of the XX century, others, on the contrary, are more recent. All of them are constituted on total lame principle: one or sometimes more than one main street which is the focus of the social and economic life of the district. This main street has also an identitary quality.

The seafront, public spaces and their fruition

Now we will take into consideration the two other constants, the seafront and the productive activity. First, we want to consider the constant of the seafront as it is especially relevant from the point of view of its fruition and because it is fundamental for the social life of the city. With regard to the city of Bari, it is possible to distinguish a day fruition from a night one, and a winter fruition from a summer one. The night fruition of public spaces during summer is particularly interesting: it “shows” another way of enjoying the city.

In the Mediterranean culture great value is given to the seafront and to public spaces, because they are *places*, that is they have symbolic value and are landmarks and traces for social relationships and urban identification; moreover, they reinforce a sense of belongings and rooting.

The seafront is long about 12 km¹¹ together with the connected business

activities. The harbour is an integral part of the life of the city. In other words, it is possible to refer to a “double fruition” due to the fact that its day fruition differs from the night one, so that during the day the seafront is used as a connection axis, while by night it becomes a meeting place. As far as the seafront is concerned, in any case, the night fruition takes place above all during summer.

It is different to underline that from north to south different seafronts exist; in the north of Bari the seafront begins with a private beach, then there is a seafront particularly loved by the people of Bari especially during summer nights. The night fruition takes place where the harbour ends continues up to the fish market and at last at the town public beaches: “Pane e Pomodoro” and “Torre Quetta”. They are open all day and night so, it is possible to bathe, to eat and to stay talking with friends on the seashore also by night.

The night fruition is more relevant than the day time, because it allows to discover characteristics typical of the Mediterranean way of life. First of all people enjoy the slow temporal dimension of the night and the possibility to live all the public spaces and thus to “enjoy the city” by relaxing at the seashore all night long. Referring to this point Leontidou (1993: 947) states “it is here, in the Mediterranean cities that we find cities that never sleep (...) southern urban neighbourhoods are busy and live longer, many of them until very late at night”.

This love for the sea is also expressed by some expressions typical of the dialect of the city, as for example – to go – to stay – to eat *ngann’ à mar*, which means “at the throat of the sea”, to be the nearest possible to the sea. The fruition is favoured by the

presence of several stalls, which sell food and drinks to better enjoy the seafront, the usual users have their own “equipment” (chairs, tables, etc.) so that they can eat their food near the seashore or on the pavement near the sea. All this is due to the pleasure of being together by respecting the typical Mediterranean informality and spontaneity.

During summer, the seafront becomes a “public place enjoyed in a private way”, that is to say that its space is enriched by the manifold meanings that people ascribe it, thus becoming pivotal for the people and for their identity (Pettrignani 1972). This is the way to understand why the sea, its colour, its perfume, the lapping of the waves, the sea breeze are considered as an integral part of the city and its inhabitants: it is a resource to be enjoyed. Moreover, the sea is a symbol of belonging. All these ancient rituals are the proof of the inhabitants’ rooting.

As far as the *places* are concerned, they are endowed with symbolic value. Three main streets have to be mentioned: Corso Cavour and Via Sparano, which are ideal places for shopping and for the *flâner*, and Corso Vittorio Emanuele, which is the borderline

between the historical centre and the Murat district. There are also two squares in the historical centre, Ferrarese and Mercantile Squares, which have a double fruition by day and night.

The day fruition of Corso Vittorio Emanuele is due to the development of the trade activity. By night it becomes an appendix of Ferrarese Square. For this reason it is always crowded (everyday in summer and during the week-ends in winter).

Ferrarese and Mercantile Squares have been re-qualified thanks to Urban I and II Plan and from degraded social places, they have become enjoyable places where the night life begins. A great number of night clubs, bars, pizzeria and restaurants are located here. They attract a lot of users who feel the appeal of these places in this sense: they have become symbolic places.

The productive identity is well explained in the census of population and houses (Table 1). From this table it is possible to underline a feature present in Bari since many centuries; Bari (national quote about 20%) is a strongly tertiary city. But we have not to forget a certain share of informal or illegal job is, in any case, overspread so

Table 1. Population and houses census, different periods (source: ISTAT).

YEAR	Total resident population	Total Employed Population	Employed population in the primary sector	Employed population in the secondary sector	Employed population in the tertiary sector (inferior and superior)
1961	312.023	86.053	7%	36%	57%
1981	371.022	111.391	2%	26%	72%
2001	316.532	98.237	2%	23%	75%

that it is statistically difficult to number the unemployed people.

This brief analysis is based on the belief that territorial identity must be understood and studied as a resource. This kind of work is useful in the study of the policies for the protection of the environment and of the territory for the safeguard of the relation territory/inhabitants and the meaning and value of such a relation.

Moreover, because this analysis has as its fundamental point the traditional fruition of the different and peculiar places of the city, it may lead to a revaluation of the places so far as they are patrimony of the users. In this sense it is also possible to think of an operation of recovery of the urban decayed and identity spaces to give them to the fruition of the inhabitants.

Notes

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1. F. Farinelli states that "the topographic map is – according to P. Vidal de la Blache's Géographie – an objective reality".
 2. *Territorialistic approach* – the term is "territorialistic" is used to mean an evaluation of the identity of territory.
 3. In this topic Leontidou advances a theory opposite to Braudel's one (1996). Her theory is nowadays the most successful.
 4. Almost all Mediterranean cities present the stratigraphy of their histories.
 5. In this analysis we refer only to the territory of the city of Bari, and not to that of the municipality; moreover some far suburban quarters have been excluded as for example San Paolo and the industrial area, as well as all the small suburban centres which have their own identity as for example Torre a Mare, Palese.

6. Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy in their *Itineraries* showed Bari as an important harbour already in pre-roman age.
7. See for ex. Saint Sabin Cathedral where Byzantine, Greek and Arab elements are fused all together in a roman Apulian structure.
8. They were often annexed to big palaces and were built to defend the city.
9. The city was very rich of numerous churches and convents.
10. Along a tract of the seafront there are some public buildings which are auto – representative of the Fascist regime.
11. 2 km are excluded from our analysis because they are set by the harbour which is important from a tourism and commercial point of view.

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