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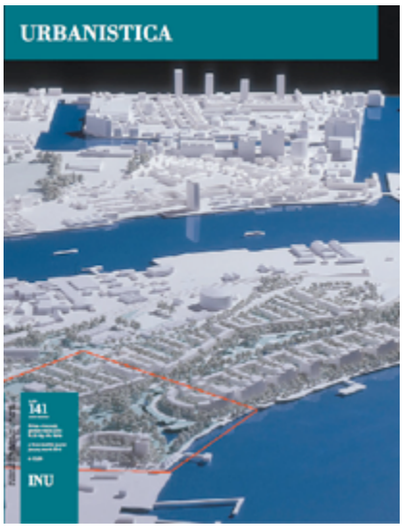

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Cities beyond the car

Valeria Di Blasio

The level of environmental, economic and social unsustainability of the actual urban mobility system based on the car, has reached such a level that a radical and immediate change of direction is required. During a century car from a freedom, speed and progress symbol has become the sign of a new slavery and traffic by now is an integral part of the urban life: it influences our habits, subtracts time to social relations, causes stress, is harmful to health because of accidents, environmental and acoustic pollution; it wastes family income, erodes the public space. Cities themselves are no more able to bear masses of circulating vehicles, particularly in Italy, where the motorisation rate is among the highest in the world.

The analysis of some data shows evidently how the urban mobility issue in our country must be faced through a resolving and systematic approach:

– every day 14 people die due to road accidents and about 900 injured. The social costs evaluation of road accidents for the year 2007 amounts to 30 billion euro, equivalent approximately to 2% of Gdp of the same year;

– in the most important Italian cities up to 11 days per year are spent in queue, that is about 260 hours; according to a research of Aci (Automobil club d'Italia), the economic value of the time lost in traffic is about 40 billion euro per year;

– World health organisation estimates that people lives shorten by 9 months due to particulate matter emitted by motor vehicles, while in almost all the large cities the overcoming of Pm10 limits set by the 1999/30/EC directive relating to air quality occurs a number of days twice over the maximum level allowed;

- transport come out as one of the sectors mainly responsible of the greenhouse gases emission (28% of the total, mostly caused by the road transport), as well as the one where the growing rate is higher, against the trend with respect to the objectives fixed by the Kyoto Protocol.

Car is the most utilised transport mean in Italy and the rate of people movement by public transport is really marginal (about 13%), above all because of an heavy deficit of public transport, particularly by rail.

This general crisis of urban mobility system calls into question the city organisation itself that affects the transport model of people and goods.

Mass motorisation and urban diffusion have increased hand in hand: car allowed in fact the dispersion of housing density with disastrous effects on environment, territory consumption and social inclusion.

The separation, long lasting in Italy from decades, among territorial policies, urban planning and transport-infrastructure policies, determined an increasing dependence by private motorised transport; moreover during last years the global request of mobility has been further on increasing due to phenomena of cities expansion and metropolization.

From the European Union are coming several signals of attention to urban mobility problems. 'Towards a thematic strategy on the urban environment' highlights the need of an holistic planning that considers all the territorial components and the green book of 2007 'Towards a new culture for urban mobility' defines the issue of cities mobility as 'of vital importance' and it affirms the crucial role of analysis, proposal and mobilisation of European union in supporting local policies.

It is therefore necessary to overrun the national and European agenda of transport policy, emphasising not only great works and international connections but paying more attention to the local public transport. The mobility urban Plans must be implemented also at provincial and regional level, making them indispensable to access to financial support and binding with respect to other planning instruments.

Climate emergency requires an acceleration towards the change of mobility model and city planning can accomplish in this sense a fundamental task, by integrating territorial usage with transport offer and promoting a compact city model, more efficient relating to time and energy saving in people movement and more sustainable thanks to less land consuming.

To enhance better conditions of urban accessibility it is necessary to reduce road and foster the transition towards an alternative system of urban mobility, founded on the strengthening of all the forms of local collective public transport, on the diffusion of shared transport (bus on demand, collective taxi, car and bike sharing, etc.), on easy conditions for people movement by foot and by bike, and finally based on the reorganisation of goods transport in the cities and the adoption of 'city logistics' projects. To do all that a new system approach is needed; the few existing cases of good practise are not sufficient, since they appear unfit in respect to the issue dimension, to its evolution, to the exponential increasing of negative effects.

Occasional stops provided for vehicles with high (low) level of pollution emissions, or traffic restriction measures, as the alternation of numbered licence plates, don't help to clear the city air.

Initiatives aiming at the rationalisation of private transport means, based on the closing of specific city zones (limited traffic zones) or on the parking management (limited parking zones) brought poor results, above all in large cities.

Another measure adopted by some administration authorities concerns the introduction of 'ticket' to be paid by private vehicles to enter the city or the most traffic-congested zones. However the economic management of mobility demand could be unfair because it hits behaviours, regardless of people income and different opportunities to access to goods and services.

Beyond little steps made by some administration autho-

rities, it is necessary an extraordinary effort to determine an inversion of the modal choice in favour of collective transport, through a quality and quantity jump in the offer of train, tramway, bus, subway.
Car sharing, car pooling and bike sharing represent valid solutions, but to become really effective they must go beyond the experimentation level.
To project a new mobility system and development solutions fit for the issue, it is required to start from the knowledge and awareness of the state of things, from the transparency of decisions, from the clearness of objectives and from the verifiability of results.
To notify the data about the actual state of mobility and make it possible to compare them with the future situation, each administration authority should adopt an Environmental and social mobility budget, providing all data, periodically updated, concerning the mobility situation and the damages caused by it: environmental and acoustic pollution, accidents rate, linked health costs, energy consumption by the sector, congestion, economic costs.
It is fundamental to provide structured procedures of people participation that allow them to determine the objective priorities and to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the adopted measures. As much important is the diffusion of new cultural values and new life styles that permit a gradual achievement of solutions alternative in respect to private cars.
It must not be expected that the 'invisible hand' will be able to trigger and manage this transition process. Participation, public debate, cultural confrontation are rather the bases of a possible and necessary change.