Past and Future of Mediterranean Cities

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We can define the city as an ongoing changing event, an interaction between the individual and society, whose latent structures rule the acts of its people. Since the classical Greek world, Mediterranean cities have created a space of dialogue based on the constant human yearning for the future. The emergence of the city entailed and promoted technological and economic innovation, decent work and the insertion of art as a pillar of this innovation. Moreover, beauty became a fundamental component of the urban ecosystem. The new forms of communication can be an ally of the city of the future. To this end, it is necessary to understand the past inherited through culture in order to avoid its mistakes. Rationalising the bureaucracy of urban spaces and considering cultural activity as an axis of development are, moreover, key factors for Mediterranean cities of the future to enjoy optimistic prospects.

Past

How can we describe the past of Mediterranean cities? Perhaps, as follows:

An account of the different urban ecosystems that meets the challenge of history, which specifically means interpreting the effect of the human factor on the development of events; or, also, by recourse to sociology: a comparative analysis of the urban habitat and its social and legal contexts, as Max Weber suggested in *The City*, which outlines the characteristic features of Mediterranean urban civilisation encompassing religious beliefs, civic ethics, relations between leading groups and the population, desire for recognition and artistic taste. It is a way of approaching knowledge of the cities as a structuring phenomenon.

Thus, Weber and Mumford, with a pinch of the analysis of Braudel's economic dynamic and a few drops of Marino Berengo.

The city is an *event*, which is why it is constantly transforming; it is necessary to follow shifting processes, adaptations to the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of time, which turn the experience of a few into that of a whole community. Individuals and society. The "latent structures" rule the acts of its people; we only need to identify them in each of the decisions adopted and understand their meaning; we only need a little skill to realise that Mediterranean cities can never be defined in static terms. It is necessary to offer an explanation for the changes based on the constant human yearning for the future.

In the classical Greek world, cities created a space of dialogue, of debate on the political forms best adapted to the idiosyncrasy of a

region; in the Athens of Pericles, to cite a relevant example, it happened that the interest in freedom gave way to democracy as a form of government. The tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides stage this desire for an audience willing to heal their wounds from a long war against the empire of the Persians ("the Greco-Persian Wars"); therefore, they are cathartic plays, said Aristotle; serious tragic plays, in which people barely smile under the gaze of the gods. When following them closely, on the stage and later reading and studying them, it is essential to recognise how the events of the emotional life of the residents of a city are described. To a certain extent, tragedies create the urban landscape through a reflection of the creative spirit, which becomes daring in the face of danger and wise in the face of the challenges of military technology. All the truths that poets submit to the consideration of their fellow citizens become the foundations of a way of living.

In the Hellenistic world, Mediterranean cities embody the idea of a moral universalism expressed in forms related to *Le souci de soi,* to express it using Michel Foucault's title for volume III of his *Histoire de la sexualité* to define the codes of behaviour developed by stoicism and Epicureanism. This definition, according to which the self is the only point of support in an era without imperatives or convincing religions, nevertheless aspires to the happy end of the human condition. Hellenism forged the idea that only individuals were capable of creating an ecosystem to achieve happiness, a means of surviving in an inhospitable world they saw in the rural regions or in the worlds without culture which they called "barbarian". This idea was spread by Alexander the Great, which explains his decision to found numerous cities bearing his name, beginning with Alexandria in Egypt, the icon of the urban ecosystem of the Hellenistic period. This political decision is sometimes labelled as imperialist. It is considered the result of Alexander's malice towards the others, when in the end what he did (and what his generals did after his death) was to build an urban network to foster technological and economic innovation. The problem here is the coarse presentation of *this* history, because, at the moment of truth, cities such as Alexandria, Antioquia, Ephesus, Smyrna and many more were ruled by a cosmopolitanism that embraced all beliefs.

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In the Roman world, Mediterranean cities knew the value of being the headquarters of the secular and later religious administration when the Empire became Christian during the 4th century; that belief underpinned Rome as we know it. If it is considered the "eternal city" it was because in the move from the Hellenistic (pagan, as is often said) cultural matrices to the Christian between the years 410 and 450 (as studied by Charles Pietri), the city's origin was never forgotten. This is why Titus Livius' work is still remembered: a historian of reference despite being contaminated by the fact of not being Christian. In this respect, the idea of separating classical culture from its religious meaning was a gift that this idea of the eternity of a city gave to the world; the legacy of the classics is a broad creative space of culture.

Indeed. Perhaps we can better understand the role of the city in the difficult times of the large migrations of peoples, *Völkerwanderung* as German historians say, wrongly called "barbaric invasions". As for their function as a catalyser of culture, the hermits of the deserts and their heirs, the monks, were not very hopeful. Their attitude was monstrously

negative from the beginning, without taking into account the effort that was made to make art into a principle of innovation.

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Art: this word referred to what today we regard as technology; art is expressed in architecture, sculpture, mosaics, silversmithing; also in a rhythm that seeks to understand nature, a musical rhythm, which therefore was an art, a technique; in the city of Rome, Pope Gregory the Great summarised this idea which gave way to Gregorian music. This attitude became even more visible in silversmithing. Here smiths changed the world. Today we are tired of the coarse formulations of those centuries as *Dark Ages*: they have set the tone for far too long, and have absolutely no basis. We no longer want to read that period in the style of the followers of the Enlightenment who scorned the changes in iron technology, which not only enabled the production of double-bladed swords, the stirrup that eased the life of the rider who went on horseback to fight or the axes with which it was possible to chop thousand-year-old trees, including conifers, but also the new farming tools, the iron wedge and the mouldboard for the plough, the horseshoes. It is important to realise that without this innovation it is difficult to understand the process experienced by many Mediterranean cities that wanted to become a place of paid work; here again is a new system of values, as well as a long conflict to achieve a decent income. Because, how was it possible to create circles that supported the technological innovation process without this decent work? But innovation in the Mediterranean cities in the Middle Ages, in Italy and in other places, was supported by a social fabric. How could it be otherwise? Again art as *tecné*; that is, as *know how* emphasising the *how;* an applied technique.

Why was it necessary to innovate? What was its cost? A brief visit to the urban setting around the year 1120 provides us with the key. The starting point for Mediterranean cities is Palermo, as Paris is for the cities of Atlantic Europe. The question in both cases was about knowing which art would be capable of supporting an urban system adapted to the economic growth of the cities: in less than two generations, it doubled or tripled the number of inhabitants. After an intense debate between the supporters of the city and the monks who reformed in the spirit of the Cistercian Order, the hermitic idea of existence was adopted as a lifestyle around a network of cities. We could cite dozens of cases in which the impact of art on the lifestyle of the cities was debated: I have chosen one that took place in Milan around the debate on how to complete the cathedral works. Some years ago, this was studied by James S. Ackerman[1] and Serge Moscovici commented on it with his special wisdom. The foremen were concerned because they did not know how to complete the building. They called a mathematician to help them; then the question arose. *Ars sine scientia nihil est*; the objective was for the technique to be supported by theoretical knowledge, primarily mathematics, as Gabriele Stornocolo made clear. A commitment to extreme innovation. But the result was unexpected. The foremen claimed the importance of applying inventions. It is necessary to *know how*; that is, to complete the building. It is a key moment. Almost at the same time another Tuscan city, Siena, asked the same question about the effect of politics on cultural creation through a painting, *The*

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1. *The Art Bulletin*, No. 31, 1949.

Allegory of the Good and Bad Government, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. A manifesto. In the end, we are faced with the greatest challenge that Mediterranean cities have had to confront in centuries.

The city must be beautiful. The introduction of the concept of beauty as a foundation of urban development and artistic heritage caused a tremor. In Italy it gave way to what, since Jacob Burckhardt, has been known as the Renaissance; in Egypt, the aesthetics of the Mamelukes; and in Nasrid Granada, the creation of a palace as a global work of art, the Alhambra. Everything at the same time. Simultaneity that indicates a fundamental tendency.

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Where are we? In the 15th century, Mediterranean cities were committed to placing beauty at the core of an urban ecosystem, with the technical limitations of their time, but wonderfully. Here, those who consider recourse to culture to support economic life an offence are turning their back on what came later; the Baroque cities: Naples, Rome, Venice. These invested large amounts in a revolutionary urban development made of stone and water, filled the urban experiences with meanings, turning them into a raison d'être until, with the Enlightenment, what was pursued was the need to go deeper into the Roman or Greek ruins. These are the expression of the passage of time, of a legacy that must be recovered to support reason as a driver of economic growth and social cohesion. The airs of the Atlantic revolutions, from America or France, reach the

Mediterranean, larded with a romantic aura that "frees" Greece and places Italy before its challenge: unification. The residents of the cities face the rhythm of history; cities such as Alexandria, Algiers, Trieste or Rijeka emerge, and between them they weave the utopia of recovering the cosmopolitan universe of the Mediterranean cities in the Hellenistic era. Cavafis is waiting at the end of this path.

Future

What future awaits Mediterranean cities?

I remember that I discussed this point with Alain Frachon, former editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*, some months ago while I was explaining to him the contents of my book on Europe, in its French version: *Le grand roman de notre histoire.*[2] He made me realise that the historian must provide an answer to these kinds of questions; and do so in a responsible and critical way; this is why, he added, today it is interesting to know what is happing in Algiers, Tunis, Cairo, Smyrna, Istanbul, Rijeka, Venice, Naples or Barcelona to understand if they will be able to transform into world-cities as Berlin, Hamburg, Amsterdam, London or Paris did or are about to do.

Put briefly, there is only one way out of the current situation of the Mediterranean world, and this inexorably involves supporting the values of Europeaness.

Optimism? Why not? What is wrong with it?

The bigger commitment today consists of a positive, open and, therefore, optimistic awareness of the possibilities of technological and cultural innovation. What is perceived behind the storm that we call economic crisis is a renewed relation between creation and tradition that can overcome the remains of nihilism still

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2. *Europa: las claves de su historia*, Barcelona, RBA, 2012.

present in determined urban circles. This is also perceived far from the Mediterranean, in eastern European cities, which are the subject of Karl Schölgel's book *Marjampole: oder Europas*[3], which offers an excellent analysis of the spirit of the cities to face the challenges of the next decades.

Let us stop for a moment at a key observation: the new forms of transport (high speed train lines, low cost flights, motorway networks) are favouring the emergence of a cosmopolitan atmosphere and of a moral universalism, necessary elements to turn the cities of tomorrow into centres of innovation. To make it possible, there are three actions that are compulsory.

First, the need to explore in depth, through the study of the past, the debate on the role of culture in the design of the city, as life in the cities cannot be subject to universal laws but rather historical propositions. The city is much more than an urban system; it is culture, where real sociability is made and maintained. If in Europe, from the 11th century onwards, the city has been a driver of the development of ideas it is so because its lifestyle has been gestated in the creation of a critical spirit that we see from the secular lawyers from the Middle Ages to the late 19th century intellectuals involved in denouncing excesses of power. But the way history is made today, warns Tony Judt, is a response to the social wound inflicted in European society between the two world wars. For this reason, the history of the 21st century must above all be an agreed narrative to teach citizens what happened, in what order and with what result.

Today we are aware of the impossibility of facing the construction of the future if we continue quoting the past out of ignorance.

Thus, the unavoidable condition in order to conceive the future cities consists of reasoning how and why innovation in the 21st century does not involve forgetting the 20th century but understanding and overcoming it through critical reason with its successes and failures. This is why I propose, as Witold Gombrowicz advised, continuing on the *inherited journey*, as long as this journey is possible and persists into the future.

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Any sentimental residue of this idea is swept away if we take into account the testimonies of Joseph Roth, Paul Celan or Rose Ausländer on the end of European cosmopolitan cities. A call for attention to avoid this special path, this *Sonderweg*, which led to the annulment of the creative spirit which, in retrospect, can be considered high treason to European culture. The very act of recovering the testimonies of these magnificent writers to make them understandable today, as did, among others, Claudio Magris on his journey along the Danube[4], means the recognition of the role granted to the past in the construction of the future and, therefore, obliges us to take them into account in forums of debate such as this. On these experiences we have a testimony full of nostalgia: *The World of Yesterday*, by Stefan Zweig[5], a story about the ways of living in the European cities where artistic avant-gardes developed alongside the scientific and musical revolution. If today's historian has a

3. Munich, Carl Hanser Verlag GmbH & Co., 2005.
4. *Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea,* New York, Macmillan, 2008.
5. University of Nebraska Press, 2013.

civic responsibility it is, in fact, that of providing the knowledge that avoids facing the future without understanding the past.

Secondly, the rationalisation of bureaucracy will enable the future cities to strain the micropowers of governance, to use Michel Foucault's expression, and passionate dissidence through a sieve of irony and rigour. This aspect positively considers and values the sense of public responsibility of impersonal transactions, thanks to which citizens will understand the need to change living habits in the cities if they want to successfully face the problems of transport, energy supply or security. I base this point on something more than circumstantial evidence, as the process has already begun in some cities with notable results: I am thinking about the projects in the neighbourhoods of Gängeviertel and Wilhelmsburg in Hamburg. This could be done in some Mediterranean cities.

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Urban developers must turn the *fait divers* into a creative principle, as already happened in other periods. In the Renaissance, for instance, the creation of a utopia, such as that of Filarete in the tower of Sforza Castle in Milan, Sforzinda, strengthened the new architectonic order of Alberti, Bramante or Palladio. What is interesting here is that utopia inevitably created a real need that turned beauty into the nexus of union between the urban system and individual rights. In the future cities, recourse to beauty will serve to send a message: technical advances must be at the service of citizens, otherwise they will lack social value.

I am not revealing the outcome of this process taking place before our eyes; I am simply drawing attention to the historical shift that took place in the past when beauty was one of the main urban objectives. The future cities need to transform investments into an art for social well-being, as these new spaces (which for many are utopias) will dilute the miasmas that today condition social behaviour in the cities: violence, theft, fear, solitude and frustration.

We have been here before.

For many of us, reading E. M. Forster's novels gave us an early understanding of the reasons that prevented Edwardian London from finally being the 20th century metropolis. The drama of those years was the inexorable continuity between the wealthy neighbourhoods described in *Howards End* and the working class neighbourhoods reduced to poverty and misery. We do not want this reality for tomorrow; it would be the group suicide of Europe.

Thirdly, the future cities will rest on the principle of the influx that comes from cultural activity: a principle capable of offering social cohesion and individual freedom without resorting to force. Postmodernist expression? Or mere commitment to reality to avoid exclusion and oblivion by fostering passion and memory? Needless to say I believe in the latter; the principle of the influx is the only one capable of creating a social atmosphere for the promotion of the debate of ideas. In any case, it would not be going too far to point out that it was Peter Drucker who imagined the business management led by this principle. This made him argue that the future is not an established or predictable fact and it is only possible to think in terms of solving the problems of the past. In this respect, I believe that Mediterranean cities must be conceived as a historical event; in other words, a continuum in which past and present are modified through the perspective opened by the future. No city is ideologically determined forever; it is a living body which transforms to the extent that its residents do. It is therefore an act of choice.

The future of the Mediterranean cities will depend to a great extent on choosing intellectual capital as a driver of their development instead of exchange of goods or tourism exploitation. And it will be so because in their transformation commercial centres or theme parks will become centres of innovation capable of mobilising public opinion in their favour. There will be blind spots of course; it is always so in history, and in this the future will be no different to what the past has been.

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The situation that seems to be coming is similar, give or take some obvious differences, to that experienced in western European cities in the 12th and 13th centuries. Urban development did not emerge from an economic transformation but rather from a lifestyle that, according to Marino Berengo, managed to dismantle the conventional East-West categories, which in those years were being stimulated by the ideals of the crusade. It also emerged from reaffirming lines of action to improve the material conditions of the population, transform their culinary habits and cultural tastes, and seek experiences beyond their own space that enables us to classify the civilisation built by those cities as a civilisation of open horizons.

In this respect, I believe that in the next few years we will witness two things. First, a change of prism of what the cities of this common space that we know as the European Union must be. It will be necessary to decide what kind of tax organisation better suits their innovation needs; also what relation those cities will maintain with the national spaces of which at present they form part. It is necessary, moreover, to regard each of them as a part of a single European history, although with their own circumstances and objectives. The second thing that we will see is the inclusion of culture and the arts in a privileged place, instead of relegating them to a marginal city council department as if they were an appendix of citizen objectives. This idea, which to some may seem a mere aspiration, will somehow crystallise when the importance of the intellectual capital within the information society is determined. Just as the invention of enterprise, to use the term coined by David S. Landes, changed European urban life in the 12th and 13th centuries, the digital experience will have largely unsuspected outcomes today.

What I have just said needed to be said, and in fact is already being said. I have sought to do so here through this broad, conflictive and generous concept, an agreed narrative that sheds new light on the past and aspires to do the same for tomorrow.