



POLITECNICO  
DI TORINO

# Honors thesis

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COURSE IN ARCHITECTURE

*Abstract*

## **PLOTS WITHOUT CITIES. READING SPRAWL**

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The research focuses on the interweaving between literary imagination and the instruments of urbanistic analysis. It considers various developments and features concerning some kinds of urban spread in Italy.

Referring to various narrative genres and world authors reading the sprawl plots, the research identifies 46 works of 28 Italian writers. They were published in the last 30 years and set in Italy. They are mainly science fiction-, environmentalist-, pulp novels and narrative reports.

It develops in six essential points:

- Appellative of the spread cities
- Diffusion dynamics
- Causes
- Features
- Types
- Costs

They will be specified by secondary points summarizing the comparison.

The research underlines

- The relationship between the urban spread and agriculture
- The lacking inbuilt order in the Italian spread cities
- The megalopolis concept
- The gated communities dystopia

Furthermore it inquires

- The extrapolation of ideas and metaphors describing pictures and exploring the dynamics of the spread cities
- The usefulness of potential worth concerning the narrative instrument in a city and territory analysis.

The research underlines the contrast between city and countryside by considering the spread cities as a result of two clashing instincts: firstly the longing for a *locus amoenus* being far from the traditionally compact city, though going to the expense of the place pleasantness preservation. Secondly, the will to spread civilization by imposing it on nature. It is substituted by the symbolic wood destruction (the fairy tales' forest) and this place guards the deepest atavistic fears (mainly the fear of death). It is dark and entangled, logically in contrast to the order of the built-up.

The strongest literary image is a city, generically meant as anomalous and elusive. Therefore it refers to an alien life (science fiction suggestions) or to a virus mutability (hyper realistic suggestions).

The unacknowledged alien describes the loss of the "place self consciousness" by the inhabitants. By contrast, the disease metaphor strengthens the incomprehensibility, inevitability and unstoppable consciousness of the urban spread now still far from a cure. The virus idea sides that of the systemic and metabolic disease, the superimposition of the city/life and that of the disease/spread as an inevitable side of life. It refers to the traditionally

compact city, a place where contradictions coexist as life develops within. By contrast the spread city acquires a different meaning proving itself to be a multifaceted contradiction.

In that sense, the informatic technologies suggest dematerialization idea and the need to rethink the new urban forms or parts of them. It succeeds following a multipurpose untraditional logic like the fuzzy one, in order to get out of the countryside/city dualism and to understand the nature of the contrasts grounding the spread cities.

The fascinating idea of megalopolis comes to light: the attention is focused on the lifestyles of the spread inhabitants and on the potential influences of the northamerican models mirroring in the schemes and types of urban spread by the cinema influence.

It has to be considered, that narrative shows some less immediate information than the cinema. In fact it is less violent and less passive, so two possible and potential valencies for its fruition can be extracted.

- An initial approach to the scenarios of the urban spread linked to the build up of something imaginary (may be proposed to school age children)
- An introduction to the debate about the themes of spread cities helping the representation of a community area from a subjective point of view. This could be aimed at the civitas involvement in order to provide a strategic planning.

Ideally it should be the genuine voice of the weak's interests and of those excluded from the decisional processes. Together with the architect's work this would be a contribution to the definition of the public, collective and common interest.

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