

**SURNAME:** Caridi

**NAME:** Giuseppe

**MAIL:** giuseppe.caridi@alice.it

**Theme:** COMMONS

**Sub-theme:** Common goods

## **Toward the soil as common good**

*Giuseppe Caridi*

### **1. For the ethics of soil**

In the last few years many contributions have highlighted, starting from different point of views, the key-role of soil in the current stage of the national and international scientific debate. Two conceivable approaches emerge and both, even though closely complementary and related to each other, seem to be developed in activities of critical observation with an attitude of mutual indifference (and impatience).

On the one hand the aspects having a technical peculiarity prevails; what counts it is the definition of methodologies, criteria and tools for the soil use control. On the other hand, the attention is focused on the epistemological aspects with an aim of re-defining the modalities of thinking such a resource; a need that also emerges about the need to indicate the overcoming of the development notion intended as indefinite increase of mercification, as well as of the same notion of development taken in as a natural and positive condition. Within this second approach the various lines of conceptual revision establish a very variegated framework of critical issues which testifies a drastic phase of re-configuration of the theme and for which is already very early to focus clear convergences. Anyway we can find a strong trend to very attentive attitudes to “formal” economical/juridical aspects instead of “substantial” aspects congruent with a particular idea of soil toward a system of clear and precise values. In this sense we can highlight the lack of an explicit stance about some basic principles that it’s necessary, very shortly indeed, to mention. The first one is connected to the aware or not adhesion to neo-liberal ideology. This has consequences on the theme of the management of the urban revenue whose absolutely dominating role has brought about a reorganization of the building sector where the financial component of the soil plays an increasing role (“financialization of the building block”). Second, the support to the dismantling of the public government system of urban and territorial transformation (authoritative planning) operated by the so named planning of informal answers (informal deregulation) that has enabled to sanction mechanisms according to which the waiver to planning indications has almost become the rule to be followed. Through a process with a really uncommon character that, in the last twenty years, has been directed to rewrite principles, methods and tools of urban and territorial planning through the “myths” of the political actions (tax shields, securitization and sale of state assets, “*Tecnotremonti*”, Lupi’s proposal, question of local finances, fiscal federalism, etc.) and the “rituals” of the technical actions (concertation, “planning by doing”, planning for projects, great works and the ephemeral structures, emergencies and compulsory administrations, compensations and related operative tools: special programs, real estate funds, etc.)

Third: the parallel subordination of private interest over the public one (as it happens in the so called project financing). Furthermore since the second half of the 80s, the mistake to force a particular series of normative acts has occurred and these have caused an increase in building activities. First of all the “amnesty for infringement of local building regulations” which have characterized urban planning facts in the last quarter of the

century (1985, 1994, 2003), and marginally there's also an articulated and smoky issue of measures for the building sector (House Plan 1, House Plan 2, etc.) also at regional level. Concerning the disciplinary scope of urban planning, notwithstanding the rich and various framework of speculative tensions and critical debate, the soil continues to be the most indefinite and uncertain among the central terms of its vocabulary, even though it represents the main conceptual and operative element at the basis of the disciplinary epistemology.

Urban planning history both in the debate developed around its founding contents and in its "practice", highlights the centrality of soil<sup>1</sup>.

Each action of transformation deals, in fact, with the soil, because it always involves its features, criteria with which its use is organized as well as the concrete modalities of actions are aimed at favoring such organization. This is true even when the action is not directed to create "manufactures", but it has for example other features. This determinates also a specific orientation on the criteria defining the settlement and so on the setting of project and building activities.

Anyway, in a cyclic path the cultural and material connotations that settlement and its development assume in a certain historical period influence the modalities of perception very much and so the use of the soil. It is possible to emphasize how the majority of the disciplinary working out lines about the soil issue very often avoid to express the basic question concerning the current ideological and cultural trend assumed by soil, its own essence that is a mere passive element of banal goods; and consequently they don't pursue objectives aimed at unhinging those processes have contributed to cause it<sup>2</sup>.

Personally I believe it isn't enough to focus only on the research of specific technical solutions but rather the central issue concerns in the meeting between "shared values" (intended as social regulations) regulating the social behavior and "interests of settled communities". It is necessary to solve this gordian node and wonder: can the umpteenth cementification counts more than our future?

This kind of answers daily cause accuses of ideological approach. So it is not useful to fake, this happens because the deep value of soil is invisible for the eyes of whom knows to have no arguments but its blind egoism. In my opinion a useful perspective of work should put at the centre of the urban planning elaborations and practices, a fondative point of view: the conception of soil as common good. This request of common goods before being "technically amorph" (Mattei 2001), should be a central issue within the debate on the urban planning future. I think also that is urgent a clear and precise political and social position concerning the specific issue of common goods.

Concerning the political contents (and therefore the important practical consequences) of this issue it's possible to highlight a deep and diffuse difficulty (or a sense of superficiality, extraneousness, and even explicit annoyance), also in the sphere of the most committed politics to combining complementary requiring a conversion effort of its consolidated way of thinking and observing.

This have conducted to a substantial flattening of every dialectic line especially relevant to that part of society which, for the experiences of the last fifty years, should express positions concerning the revenue issue, the aware and democratic control of soil uses with

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1867, writing *General teory of urbanization* Ildefonso Cerdà wondered about the name for the discipline he was contributing to theorize. So he decided to use the term urbanization making it deriving from *urbum*, the handle of the plow, tool with which the ancient Romans founded cities by marking its boundaries. Dividing, delimiting, allocating the country soil represents the original function of founding a city.

<sup>2</sup> To this they make to counter the many disputes brought by civil society, which is now impossible to give account, that power a new widespread intolerance towards liberal and market policies and, as a result of land use (broadly speaking through land grabbing and the issue of food security) and private appropriation of public goods (first of all the question of water resources).

the intention of removing inequalities connected to its access/control. These, in fact, are not peculiar and circumstanced issues which are included in a good political agenda, but rather the hinges for the building up of a future project where some little and unavoidable references at the basis of our democracy (equality vs discrimination, freedom vs repression, poverty vs wealth, rights vs injustices,, sustainability vs exploitation, etc.) can be re-thought, and re-learned, considering the powerful transformations of the last years.

In my opinion and in relation with the disciplinary sphere of urban planning, the issue of common goods should become a line of conceptual revision of the modalities of control and managing the territorial dynamics; in other terms the *corpus* on which the conceptual framework of reference has to be

re-outlined. The issue of soil as common good and also the interpretation in strategic terms of its control (from the point of view of its production and reproduction) is fully becoming among the terms of the urban planning debate (Caridi 2010). In order to ensure this different vision of the soil it's necessary a fundamental change of paradigm in the way to define and tackle it.

It is necessary the "knight move". In the chess game, knight is the only piece that can step over the other ones. And then moving from a black square it always arrives in white square. And the other way round. So in tackling the soil it's necessary a mind-changing overturning the perspective that, today, relegates it as a sterile support for the market, thinking and arguing rather in terms of common good.

The gradual recovery of a perception of the soil as common good enables us to activate a dynamic aimed at taking the soil away from market logics have determined in the last ten years not only an inexorable and progressive cannibalization, but also a complete expropriation of every "collective" meaning. Because of common goods are a goods class that is projected in the social experience as bases of every form of acting as well as results of social interaction (Donolo 1997), it's necessary working in order to emphasize the interconnection between processes of territory governance and requests emerging from the settled societies. Moving along the perspective of the soil as common good brings about first the need to encourage the creative tension of settled communities; a tension that is result of awareness and active participation, and that it's expressed through interactions and conflicts inside as well as outside. In this interaction between actors, the public administration (or however the public actor having project skill) is called to play a central role; not only for its operational skill, but especially for its functions as community representative. This involves to give to the relations of proximity between inhabitants and local resources a central role, rebuilding identity matrixes, emphasizing the constitutive and ethical value of social relationship and solidarity, working to reaffirm a culture of the public sphere. Hence, leaving sediment for collective projects able to redefine the future of work and living.

## **2. Two necessary conditions to change the perspective**

The investigation of dynamics related to the use and so to the soil consumption in relation with the processes of transformation of the cities and country, is a need that can be analyzed starting from two perspectives which must be tackled together. The first one concerns the soil consumed for settlement aims (referred both to the residential segment and to the productive and infrastructure ones), the second one is the agriculture soil that has been abandoned over the time. As for the Italian context, there are many data about these two questions, but it results quite patchy (for survey interval, for the considered territorial units, etc.) however we can advance some considerations.

As for building consumes has been established that, in Italy, from 1995 to 2006, 3,1 mld of cubic meters of buildings have been authorized (source: Istat). Starting from these data

and considering the unique activity of legal buildings, Paolo Berdini (2009) calculated it has been built on a 750.000 hectares of soil, a surface like the territory of half Calabria region. To these data we must add illegal building consumes: there are 402.676 illegal buildings realized from 1993 to 2004, according to Cresme estimates worked out by *Legambiente* (Legambiente 2010). This for a population that in the period from 1991 to 2001 has increased only in 0,4% (source: Istat). This specific Italian situation characterized by a very low demographic growth and a consumption of soil that is among the highest in Europe, it has been talked about the paradox “the brick without growth” (Settis 2010). In the sense that “the link between demographic and economic growth on the one hand and urban growth on the other is no more linear: the urbanization is shown with more and more pervasive and complex modalities and in the last decades it has seen an acceleration not seen before and relatively autonomous as for the recent demographic and economic trends” (Istat 2009); and this suggests an evolution in a consumerist sense of territoriality, that is the process of building up the territory based on the relations actor/ environment. These are the numbers of priced soil, held and then, through the cementification, lost forever. But next to cannibalized soil there is another burning soil, on which the terms of the urban debate should be focused: the agricultural abandoned soil. This keeps growing at a steady pace. Over the last thirty years the soil removed from agriculture can be estimated with an average of 100,000 hectares per year (Buono and Riccardi 2009): we have lost 3,1 million hectares of agricultural surface used (SAU), and even 5.8 million hectares of total business area (SAT) in the period between 1982 and 2007<sup>3</sup>. In 2000 only 65% of the Italian land area was made up of soil managed by farms (Iseppi *et al.* 2005), this means that in the three decades from 1970 to 2000 only 18% of the Italian land area is out of the primary productive system (Chang *et al.* 2001). These data allow us to briefly propose some phenomena which must be highlighted because they are in line with our logic considerations. A confrontation between data relevant to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> General Agriculture Census (source: Istat 2000 and 2010) allow us to advance more precise considerations. In detail we can highlight how i) SAU (-2,3%) and SAT (-8%) decrease; ii) the number of agricultural farms decreases very much (32,2%); iii) the medium business dimension increases both in SAU (+44,4,%) and SAT (+36%) terms.

Yet the debate about urban planning is limited, though in a climate of increasing attention, only to record the phenomenon. In other words, the country air seems to make free even the planners<sup>4</sup>.

Here I'm trying to suggest two work-lines that, if properly followed, can be the conditions to substantiate the soil as common good.

*First line of work.* It is necessary to clear the hurdle represented by the lack of information and considerations, reflex of little researches having the soil as study theme. Suffice it say that “there are no updated and detailed data about soil use at national level”, as showed in the sad ending of the movie

“*Il suolo minacciato*” (2010, direction and subject by Nicola Dall'Olio, produced by WWF Parma and Legambiente Parma). It is then necessary to set up researches able to identify methodologies in order to investigate the settlement transformations in relation to the

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Istat* definition, the total agricultural surface (SAT) is the whole agricultural used surface (SAU), of forest companies, of the agricultural not used surface (SANU).

<sup>4</sup> Fortunately this is not true for everyone. Just to be clear it's necessary to underline the Edoardo's approach, who, not since today, has produced studies and researches on these issues. In detail the urban planner Salzano's efforts are proved by contributions that can be found on the website eddyburg, by the works promoted by “the eddyburg school” as well as through the well-known “eddyburg law proposal”. In this framework we can include the book by Gibelli M.C. and Salzano E. (eds., 2006).

theme of soil (and to its use), based on already validated and new parameters of interpretation which are able to quantify and qualify the various types of use. This involves the description and interpretation of the phenomena of transformations have interested the settlement contexts in the last few years with the aim to recognize shapes and identities in the relations with agriculture, urban processes as well as with productive off-farm dynamics.

Identifying the different causes that contribute to determine these changes, it is central assessing the impact that policies of programming and spatial planning carried out in the same period have had, as well as the change of the economic, political and social framework. These research paths must be able to integrate synergistically investigation of the phenomenon, its interpretation and critical evaluation, and the proposals for planning at different levels.

*Second line of work.* As said above, till today the strategies of soil resource management have been based on the consideration of soil as a mere economic and/or productive resource. Before working to reverse the perspective I think we have to work with the utmost attention to "formal tools" of planning and land management. Here, in my opinion, it has to be placed as strategic objective the social use of the planning tools. In the toolbox of planning and programming there are many tools, many have state that are redundant and produce a complicated, cumbersome and contradictory system; but, above all, they have exhausted their "heuristic charge" of interpreting and foreshadowing the reality. These considerations are certainly sharable; but I think it is still possible a reinterpretation of these tools, their conscious and especially creative use as to contribute to tackling the subject with positive results. This is the challenge of the effectiveness of the plan in the new millennium, and it is not so much related to technical issues, as it has been in the past years, but to their political essence and to the possibility of their social use which can give creative and self-determination ability (hence design) back to settled communities. For the purposes of our discussion, and in order to work in the direction aimed at empowering the cycle of urbanization, those tools that laws rely on local institutions (Regions, Provinces and Municipalities) play a pivotal role. Here I think it is a priority objective to re-give centrality to the municipal planning. At this level, the request of soil as common good is stronger because Municipalities are the local institutions that have, as a rule, the task of defining the concrete dynamics of settlement and the modalities of soil use. More in general the ability of local bodies to field actions based on methodologies of soil use that are able to focus the attention on the theme of common goods (i.e lands of civic use, for the state property in public ownership, for lands confiscated to organized crime, etc.) should be stimulated; or, however, able to promote virtuous experiences such as those connected from the one hand to farm and proximity agriculture, and to the practices of cooperation networks (aiming at favouring the collective consumes and not the individual ones, solidarity and not competition), and on the other to the revision of the concept of empty/ not built and to the consequent definition of policies of social appropriation of these not built areas (carried out through the issue of the so called urban gardens).

Still along this line of work, however, particular attention should be paid to the possible synergies between "formal" and "differently oriented" tools. Focusing on the institutional planning, and in particular the municipal one does not mean to give up the opportunities offered by the other tools: therefore we should pay particular attention to the possible synergies between "formal" and "differently oriented" tools. While, on the contrary, those tools which tend to chagrin the cogency and the strategic value of plans and to expropriate inhabitants of their creativity should be absolutely fought: among them, Program Agreements are probably the worst example, because they are tools altering the definition of the modalities of soil use in a too much easy ways.

It is clear that the issue about soil use and strategic control/operational management of soil as common good are two faces of the same coin: two issues that necessarily need to be faced in parallel. They should also be placed within the more general framework of the so-called protection of common resources. The set of practices aimed at critically interpreting issues such as the privatization of water resources, the progressive erosion of public goods and services, the weakening of democratic mechanisms of appropriation/use of resources by the settled communities represents privileged references. In this sense, starting from the previous two lines of work exposed it would be appropriate to work for proposing some first planning suggestions which may represent the basic elements for the articulation of an overall strategy of action (articulated according to criteria of priority as for modalities and time) about the issue of the soil as common good.

### **Bibliography**

- Barberis C., (ed. 2009). *La rivincita delle campagne*, Donzelli, Roma
- Berdini P., (2009). "Il consumo di suolo in Italia: 1995-2006". in *Democrazia e diritto*, 1
- Buono M., Riccardi P., (2009), "Il male comune", in *Report*, Rai Tre (31 May)
- Caridi G., (2010). *Figure identificative del suolo nel Mezzogiorno*, PhD thesis, Dip. AACM – Università "Mediterranea" di Reggio Calabria, Reggio Calabria
- Chang Ting Fa M., Piccinini L. C., Taverna M., (2001), "Analisi economica e aziendale di strategie di riqualificazione ambientale e paesaggistica". Greco V. (ed.). *Il paesaggio come risorsa dello sviluppo sostenibile*, Regione Siciliana, Palermo
- Donolo C., (1997). *L'intelligenza delle istituzioni*, Feltrinelli, Milano
- Gallino L., (2011). *Finanzcapitalismo*, Einaudi, Torino
- Gibelli M. C., Salzano E., (eds. 2006). *No sprawl*, Alinea, Firenze
- Iseppi L., Chang Ting Fa M., Piccinini L. C., (2005). "Concentrazione e associazione nell'uso dei suoli agricoli nei sistemi colturali italiani". *Agribusiness Paesaggio & Ambiente*, 2
- Istat, (2009). *Rapporto annuale: la situazione del Paese nel 2008*, Roma
- Legambiente, (2010). "Un'altra casa?". *Legambiente*, 15 July, <http://www.legambiente.it>
- Mattei U., (2001). *Beni comuni. Un manifesto*, Roma-Bari, Laterza
- Ostrom E., (2006). *Governare i beni comuni*, Marsilio, Venezia
- Settis S., (2010). *Paesaggio costituzione cemento*, Einaudi, Torino