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## Privatization and Urban Design:

### How to Improve Rome’s Transportation System

Every single object that surrounds us is a piece of design: the pen that we use to take notes, the bed upon which we lay on, and the screen we use to watch a movie have been designed to be as useful as possible. Their structure has been accurately planned to implement their function so that their design is directly correlate to their practicability. Similarly, when it comes to urban design, it is important to combine the functionality of the infrastructure with their design so that the city can be as efficient as possible. One of the main aspects of a city that needs to be meticulously planned is its transportation system, which in big metropolises such as New York, London, Barcelona and Rome has a vital role in the cities’ productivity. However, in Rome the public transport system is a disaster: there is not enough money to buy new busses and trams, and the few that are available are obsolete and deteriorating. As a result, public transport is inadequate to guarantee good services. Therefore, the Capitoline’s administration need to improve Rome’s public transportation system complying with the restricted municipal budget and without changing the city’s urban design by privatizing the transportation system and redesigning new transport routes.

An efficient public transportation system, according to Philippe Rode, is one of the main indicators of productive city management. As James E. Killen states in his analysis of the evolution of the Irish transport system, the social economic well-being of a country strictly depends on how the institutions manage to integrate private and public funds. It is important for the Rome’s government to evaluate how other countries have succeeded in improving their public transportation system to understand which strategies may work for the Capitoline’s system too. However, Killen overlooks that due to a lack of public funds, it is not always possible to combine public and private reserves. Hence, the transportation system needs to be completely privatized to avoid a negative impact on the State’s economy. This total privatization, explains the Transport Economist Chris Nash, does not exclude the possibility of public administration from setting the superintendence of the system. In fact, the public authority can establish some guidelines that the private companies need to follow; if the private companies do not act in accordance to these instructions, the government can revoke the contract.

As the traffic and logistics’ researcher Todor Stojanovski affirms, even if city management is important, the city’s urban design has a vital role in the public transportation system. Urban design, according to Stojanovski, is the ensemble of the components that define a city such as the streets, the sidewalks, and the crossroads. These elements need to be combined so that they can facilitate the passage of major transport systems such as busses and trams. Nevertheless, in some countries this aspect is often underestimated so that the streets are thought of only for cars. According to the design’s definition proposed by the architect and designer Lucius Burckhardt, it is important to change the focus on design from the mere aesthetics vision of the world around us, to a practical way of solving new problems. Burckhardt anticipates Stojanovski by 30 years: the only way to solve the public transportation system’s problem is to redesign transport-friendly cities and to focus on design as being the principal tool that can improve the general system. However, cities cannot be simply replanned from scratch. As Burckhardt asses, there are certain external parameters such as historical monuments and plazas that designer need to take into consideration when it comes to design. In a city, these external parameters correspond to the city’s heritage that cannot be simply destroyed to permit the construction of new roads. Even though Stojanovski states that cities need to be replanned from scratch, he also claims that in certain circumstances, like those expressed by Burckhardt, the combination of different transportation technologies should allow the means of transport to operate by utilizing not only streets, but also underground or elevated routes.

In 2014 the Capitoline’s administration declared bankruptcy for a debt of over 800 million euros (Davies), making it difficult to find new funds to improve the public transportation system. Some economist may argue that the Rome’s financial status does not allow the purchase of new means of transportation; however, they should consider that the Roman transportation system could be privatized, as happened in England, or semi-privatized, as happened in Ireland. On the one hand, as Chris Nash claims, in England four different types of transport privatization have occurred: simple privatization, privatization plus regulation, privatization plus deregulation, and franchising (101-103). The first three have completely privatized the companies that provide the services while franchising “ permits the attachment of conditions regarding prices, services, or investment to the franchise” (Nash 103). Nash concludes that franchising is recommended every time that the institutions want to administrate the system, but due to a lack of funds they cannot provide the service (103). On the other hand, in Ireland there is a competition between the public and the private sectors. While some bus lines are assigned to private companies which are required to respect the public regulations, others are under the direct supervision of the government which has total control of the company. This competition improves the transport services in two principal ways: it guarantees a cheaper service by the private company and a competitive service by the public one (Killen 108-109). An honest competition between the private and the public sector ensures that both companies stimulate each other improving the services’ quality.

Even if it is true that the privatization of Rome’s public transportation systems may cause a loss of public income, it should be considered that the local administration has not been able to earn money from this transportation system. According to the official balance of ATAC, in 2015 the company has lost 79, 194, 384 euros while the year before the loss amounted to 141, 375, 261 euros (ATAC 4). These data suggest that the current administration has not been able to exploit the potential of the company, and that the privatization of the system may bring benefits not only to the services but also to the balance. Considering the financial situation faced by the Capitoline’s administration, the best alternative that could save the Roman transportation system is franchising. Franchising would not exacerbate the critical financial situation faced by the Roman administration, but at the same time it would allow public regulation. Yet, the administration should clarify the terms by which the company bid to win the contract in order to guarantee a better customer experience and not to make money itself. In addition to the local administration guidelines, the company should also follow the European directives that regulate the size of the busses, the means of transport, and the access to public information from the private companies (Reeven, 710).

Once the administration has established the budget and the types of transport that will operate on the territory, it should focus on how to improve the routes paying attention to the cities’ urban design and external parameters. As an Italian popular proverb says, “ Rome wasn’t built in a day.” The current design of Rome is the result of centuries of history, so it is not possible to destroy the Colosseum or Castel Sant’Angelo just because they impede the improvement of the transportation system. These monuments represent the external parameters that Burkhardt declares to be fundamental in the design process. However, since these external parameters cannot be modified, the administration should focus on others aspect of design that can improve the transportation system as well. The quality of the roads and the quality of the rail networks, for instance, are two of the “ infrastructural features that define transport system” (Rode). A lack of ordinary maintenance of these infrastructures has led not only to a deterioration of the means of transport, but also to a lack of services since road and rail networks are often close due to extraordinary maintenance problems. Moreover, Stojanovski asserts that “ the challenge for urban designers, planners and developers when there is a need to introduce new public transportation system in urban areas is to integrate the urban form with the desirability cores of the public transportation infrastructure” (78). The desirability cores are all the zones that link neighborhoods and public transportation infrastructures such as the bus stops and the metro stations (Stojanovski 79). Designers should accurately plan their position since they promote both the connection between the main areas of a city, and the livableness of the district.

In Rome, the transport designers have not considered the desirability cores, and the bus and metro’s stops are haphazard. Consequently, sometimes the bus stops and the metro stations are positioned really close to each other while at other times they maybe one or two kilometers away. Stops and stations that are equidistant from each other are indispensable features of a well-organized transportation system since the citizens should be able to reach these desirability cores by a walking distance. Distinguished professors of Transport and Economics Knut Haase and Michael J. Klier point out that “ transportation planners have to analyze the benefits of modified public transit services before improvements are realized. For example, planners use cost-benefit analysis to examine how many people will profit from a, e. g., new transit route” (196). Haase and Klier propose an algorithm that allows the company to forecast the number of passengers who will benefit from a new route to decide if it will be economically convenient (196). By using this algorithm, the company that is responsible for the transportation routes may revolutionize the Roman transport by establishing new itineraries and analyzing the current ones to understand if they are convenient both for the company and the citizens. Moreover, the company ought to choose the right means of proposed transport by taking into consideration the width of the streets and the likely number of passengers that will use that route. In the tiny streets of Trastevere, for instance, the mini busses are the means of transport that will work nimbly while on big streets like via Nomentana and via Tiburtina, double-decker busses would be the best choice. However, the company should also consider that the number of journey planned for that specific routes has to be reevaluated since the capacity of mini busses and double-decker is different from the capacity of traditional busses.

The improvement of Rome’s transport system is possible, but it will require time and work. On the one hand, the administration has to find a company that is willing to manage the transport system and that is able to solve the numerous problems caused by the mismanagement of the previous government. It should establish the guidelines that this company needs to follow to provide a quality service to the citizens. The Capitoline’s administration should also guarantee an adequate maintenance of public infrastructures to ease the difficult task that the company will confront. In particular, it should be in charge of the resurfacing roads since the poor maintenance of streets is one of the main causes of the busses being regularly out of order. On the other hand, the company should redesign the transport’s itineraries and their desirability cores to improve the costumers’ experience. Once the company has reassessed the Roman transportation system, the government may decide to semi-privatize the transport network to have more control over the system itself and to use public funds to improve it further. In fact, the privatization of the system is not the end of government’s control on transportation, it is an opportunity to improve a system that was not working anymore. The administration should consider privatization as the renaissance of the Capitoline’s transportation system, and not as its death.