



Dear colleagues,

It is with great sadness that I let you know that Roberto Camagni suddenly passed away on April 3rd, at the age of 76 in Milan.

Roberto was Professor Emeritus of Regional and Urban Economics at Politecnico di Milano. He graduated in Economics at Bocconi University, in 1971 in Milan, and spent a full academic year at University of Pennsylvania where he got fascinated by regional and urban studies.

Roberto has always been very active in our Community. He was one of the founders of the Italian Section of the Regional Science Association International (AISRe), which he chaired between 1989 and 1992. Between 2003 and 2005, Roberto acted as President of the European Regional Science Association. Moreover, for twenty years (1987-2016) Roberto was President of the GREMI-Groupe de Recherche Européen sur le Milieux Innovateurs, Paris 1 - Panthéon Sorbonne. In 2010, he received the ERSA Prize and in 2017, he became Fellow of the Regional Science Association International.

From the scientific point of view, Roberto enriched our discipline a lot. The influence of the French school of Philippe Aydalot, of the GREMI group, and the cooperation with Italian colleagues, Riccardo Cappellin for the regional competitiveness analyses, and Lidia Diappi and Giorgio Leonardi, two eminent system analysts, for urban studies, were crucial in his early period. With them Roberto developed concepts like the role of territory in local knowledge creation, the “efficient, rather than optimal, urban size” contained in the SOUDY model, and the formation of urban rent between the city and the countryside.

The 1990s and 2000s were Roberto’s most active period, in which he produced an unbelievable and admirable number of seminal works in all fields of Regional and Urban Economics. In 1992, he published his Urban Economics textbook (later translated into French and Spanish, but unfortunately, to my great regret, never into English!), the first (and to date only) textbook in that discipline published by an Italian. In regional economics, it was in this rich and active phase of his life that Roberto published a constructive criticism of Paul Krugman’s provocative statement that regions and cities compete on the basis of relative comparative advantage à la Ricardo, with the rather dangerous consequence that regional policies have no reason to exist. It was also in those years that Roberto provided evidence of the importance of national (macroeconomic) effects on regional development. He demonstrated a clever scientific balance between macro-economists, who neglected all sorts of regional effects of national policies, and regional economists, at that time concentrated on reinforcement of the “endogenous regional growth model” launched in the 1970s by the industrial districts theory, and who therefore obsessively denied any kind of role of national economic phenomena in regional growth. It was in that period that Roberto became interested in urban planning. Under the influence of his wife, Maria Cristina Gibelli, Roberto’s interest centred on what was then a new approach to urban planning, known as “strategic planning”, and soon became an advisor to several Italian municipalities interested in launching a strategic plan for their city. It was in that period that

Roberto entered the field of “urban sustainability”. He provided a measurable definition of this concept, and launched a large research program, leading a multidisciplinary group of economists and planners. The result was a rich interpretation of urban sustainability from both the economic and territorial perspectives.

From the mid-2000s onwards, Roberto reached full maturity, guiding his research group in many innovative research projects won through tough competition at international level. Together with his school, Roberto implemented a macro-econometric regional growth forecasting model Macroeconomic, Sectoral, Social and Territorial (MASST). It was in this phase that Roberto took up the challenge issued by the European Union to define “territorial cohesion”. He did so by developing a clear and measurable definition of this fuzzy concept, and he launched a simple and effective method to assess the impact of programs and projects on territorial cohesion which was applied in many studies and cited by several authors. It was also in those years that Roberto developed the concept of “territorial capital”. This notion synthesised all potential assets for regional growth, by underlining the economic nature of each of them, and especially each single law of accumulation and depreciation, on which to base appropriate regional policies.

Roberto was also very active as an expert for different national and international bodies, namely EU, OECD, Plan Urbain (France), the Italian Ministers of Public Works and Industry and many Italian and European Regional Governments in the fields of innovation diffusion and regional and urban development planning. In the period 1994 and 1998 Roberto was coordinator of the Groupe de Prospective sur les Villes, Datar, Paris. In 1995 he was nominated expert of the Italian Prime Minister for the ESDP - European Spatial Development Perspective, and was in charge of the Report on Urban Development and Policies, presented at the EU Ministerial Meeting in Venice, May 1996, within the Semester of Italian Chairmanship of the EU.

In 1997, Roberto was nominated Head of the Department of Urban Affairs of the Presidency of Council of Ministers, during the first Prodi Government. In the same year, Roberto was a member of the Committee for the Reform of the Urban Planning Law, Ministry of Public Works in Rome. In 1998, he was in charge of the preparation of the Framework for action for urban sustainable development for DG REGIO of the European Commission. He was expert for the EU ESPON project for the Ministry of Infrastructures, between 2001 and 2004.

He retired in 2017, but he was still very active. During the lockdown period, Roberto wrote a fantastic and admirable piece of work on Adam Smith. Through a work that—he confessed me—lasted two years of full immersion in Adam Smith's writings and immense scholarship, Roberto was able to provide us with an unbelievable opus that uncovers the legacy of such a Great Mind for Regional Science. With such a wonderful publication, published by Springer in “Great Minds in Regional Science, Vol. 2”, edited by Peter Batey and David Plane, Roberto leaves us.

We will remember him forever.

Roberta Capello
Milan, 5 April 2023