

## Rome Capital City Planning

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During the last 130 years Rome was transformed into the capital of a nation state –Italy- that never existed before as a single country. Its impressive past, as capital of the Roman Empire or as a centre of Christianity constituted both a source of inspiration and a rhetoric obstacle for those who tried to shape it into a modern metropolis. Five urban plans, until today, were designed in the attempt to guide and control its development, but the real forces behind it often worked against the official planning policies. It then happened that some of the most significant urban developments took place outside the spatial boundaries of the planned city, therefore calling for continuing adjustments of the previous programs. The main public buildings occupied initially some of the most relevant church properties, but soon it was clear that more ad hoc seats were needed: this brought changes in the historic fabric while, later, helped to develop peripheral areas. However, no radical renewal, like in the 19th century Paris, took place. Actually, it was during the 20 years of the fascist regime that a clear attempt of shaping a capital city, with all its symbolic apparatus, took place. After the second world war the city was invested by the profound migratory movements that accompanied the rise of modern industrial Italy: housing shortage went along with land speculation and illegal developments. Institutional changes giving more power to the mayors, better planning and favourable economic circumstances helped in the recent years to align the city to European standards. All throughout such time, Rome succeeded in preserving most of its extraordinary built heritage, although it was often in peril due to the obstacle it imposes on the functioning of a modern metropolis: this is possibly what makes it a most peculiar capital city.

## Introduction

In 1870, after a bloody battle against the Pope's troops, Rome became the effective capital of the Kingdom of Italy, a State constituted in opposition to the temporal power of the Church. With a population of 200,000 (less than Milan, Genoa, Palermo or Naples), the city was a small, compact nucleus, surrounded by fields, pastures, gardens, and interspersed with villas, convents and churches, all contained by the Aurelian Wall. The debate over the City's future began immediately. The intertwining of powers and responsibilities between the central government and the local administration produced procrastination about important decisions on the urban strategies to be adopted (Caracciolo, 1974; Bartocchini, 1985). While the Roman citizens, the aristocracy and the clergy banded together in a hostile stance against the new masters, the city was populated by public servants and employees of the new government, immigrants from the countryside in search of labour, professionals and entrepreneurs attracted by the prospect of a new development. During Mayor Pianciani's mandate, the first regulatory plan [*piano regolatore* or official plan] of the capital was designed by the Chief Engineer Alessandro Viviani. It was presented to Council in 1873. However, it was the central government that managed the city, dealing directly with the private sector on the location of the new seat of government, buildings and offices, while the municipal council remained divided on the fate of the city and its political economy. At that time everyone – aristocrats, merchants, and dignitaries from the Roman Church – was engaged in land speculation. Even the Mayor lamented the fact that buy-and-sell activities were more widespread than building activities, exacerbating the housing shortage (Italo Insolera, 1962).

The 1873 plan limited itself to the ratification of ongoing real estate operations, (Italo Insolera, 1962) such as the new Via National, (Tafari, 1959) linking the railway station to the city centre, Piazza Indipendenza and Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. The plan appeared to follow the ideas of Quintino Sella, a proponent of new expansion in the eastern sector. Several ministries settled in this area following the lead of the Ministry of Finance. A sector in the south was devoted to warehouses and industries, which were already being settled during the last years of the pontifical reign. The text accompanying the plan mostly dwells upon the street network and public hygiene, to justify the expected interventions in the historic centre. During the debate at city council, opposition to significant industrial development and working class neighbourhoods became clear, for fear of recreating the social conflicts already experienced in other European capitals (Caracciolo, 1974). The plan, foreseen to last 25 years, was never officially adopted.

At the beginning of the 1880's, the national government considered contributing a long-term loan to build the public works infrastructure necessary for a functioning capital city, should there be an approved regulatory plan (Cuccia, 1991). For this reason, in 1883, the so-called second Viviani plan was finally adopted. It was not very different from the first, but it did provide for a system of important public facilities and thoroughfares to connect the centre of the historic town to the new urban expansions (Italo Insolera, 1962; Sanfilippo, 1992). [see Illustration 1]. Suddenly the construction of the capital appeared as a grand enterprise, money and businesses from northern Italy and Europe (France, Germany, England) poured into the city in a quantity that the small Roman developers would not otherwise have been capable of producing. During this time, the Government built seven bridges, the Polyclinic, the Central Court and the grand monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, the first king of Italy. However, the municipality was always on the verge of financial disaster for it was not capable of collecting tax on buildable land (with which the plan was to be financed) and was therefore forced to sign « *convenzioni* » [covenants] with the private sector for the necessary developments.



Illustration 1: 1883 Master Plan

The 1880s, thanks to the intervention of the central Government, will be remembered as the years of “building fever” Construction happened everywhere, both within and outside the plan; the grand patrician villas disappeared, hastily converted into rental housing by the nobility. The fever did not last long, but was quite violent. In 1886-7, 12,000 rooms were built, in 1888-9 only 800 (Italo Insolera, 1962). With no substantial economic and demographic growth, apartments remained vacant, investors were discouraged, projects started on the basis of bad loans were abandoned, numerous banks closed their doors, and tens of thousands of construction workers returned to their region of origin.

### **Modern city management: the Nathan administration**

In the complex context of the first decades after Unification (1870), Rome’s urban development was a result of conflicting forces from all origins, and often acting at different levels. The idea that the regulatory plan should synthesise collective needs and objectives seemed fainter than ever. There was a dearth of good ideas, yet there was no agreement on the functions to be assumed by the city – other than the representative role of a capital. The city also suffered from being subject to a double administration, the municipality and the national government, autonomously pursuing their own objectives. This resulted in short-sighted politics, where decisions were commonly inconsistent and disjointed. For instance, the national government had begun the construction of a new Rome, separate from the old, in the East, with the creation of an “axis of the ministries”(the old “Strada Pia” renamed Via XX Settembre), while

*extra muros* expansion gained approval. Grand villas were destroyed in the inner city. An annular (ring) road network was called for, but only radial roads were created. Land was reserved for low density but higher densities sprung up as soon as building permits were issued.

The recovery came only at the start of the 20th century, in a different political context. The Prime Minister was Giovanni Giolitti, who until the start of the war led the transformation of Italy from a conservative, agricultural country to an industrial society, through a social pact between the working class and the urban middle class. It was in this climate that the *Blocco popolare* was formed, uniting radicals, republicans and socialists, and which in 1907 gained control of the municipality. The new mayor was Ernesto Nathan, a Jewish, Mazzinist freemason – the only remarkable figure in the history of modern Roman administration. He stayed in power for seven years. Nathan tackled the topics of elementary education, public hygiene, democratisation and the fight against land speculation. He municipalized the transit service and the power grid. He assigned Milan’s Chief Civil Engineer, Edmondo Sanjust di Teulada, the task of developing a new regulatory plan. In 1909, Rome finally had an accurate regulatory plan, based on updated cartographic information [see Illustration 2]. Sanjust presented his plan as an urbanistic instrument resting on a set of legal and financial provisions. The plan also defined a building typology – multi-storey buildings, houses, ‘gardens’, in an order of decreasing density – which provoked the landowners of the two latter categories, who joined the ranks opposing the « *blocco Nathan* » In 1914, allied to the new nationalist right, the old aristocracy regained power in the municipality. During Nathan’s administration and after, the Roman Institute for Public Housing (IACP: Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari) flourished and kept growing. In 1930, its achievements came to represent more than 10% of the total housing stock in the city. Thanks to the work of excellent architects, the Institute remained a loci of Roman architecture for a long time. The IACP strove to create buildings that blended social housing into the existing urban fabric: it was also by its initiative that two garden cities, Garbatella and Aniene, were created in the 1920s (Piccinato, 1987; Cocchioni, and De Grassi, 1984; Fraticelli, 1982).

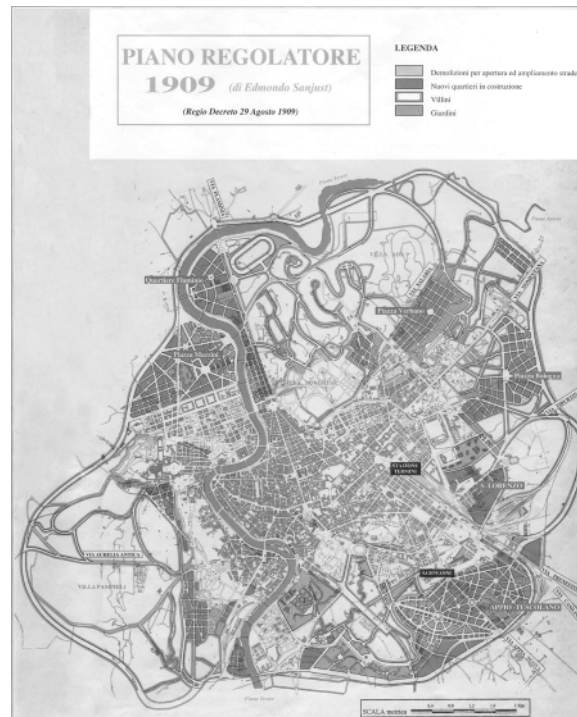


Illustration 2: Sanjust 1909 Plan

The history of Roman urbanism is not just that of its official plans. It is also that of spatial transformations brought about by important events, and of ideas which arose independently from the plans. The 1911 Great National Exhibition is a good example. Organized to celebrate fifty years of Italian unity, the exhibition was an opportunity to affirm the role of Rome as capital of a great nation: a place where scientific congresses and art exhibitions take place, where the idiosyncrasies of the regions marry and where visitors from all parts of the country meet. Sumptuous pavilions and model dwellings were built over a vast area adjacent to the Villa Borghese (recently acquired by the municipality to be made into a public park) and crossing the Tiber on a new iron bridge. Buildings, the bridge and the new National Gallery of Modern Art, remain after the exhibition ends. The area surrounding the Gallery was destined for the Foreign Academies, while the other side of the Tiber would host a new neighbourhood with projects by E. Sanjust and J. Stübben, among others (Piantoni, 1980).

Meanwhile, a grand project was under way, across all the official regulatory plans: the archaeological research in the area extending south from the Campidoglio. That area was little urbanized in the mediaeval and papal times, and was systematically excavated after Unification: the Republican Forum, the Palatine Hill, the Circus Maximus, the Imperial Forums, the Basilica of Massenzio, the Temple of Venus, the Markets of Trajan, the Baths of Caracalla. The project continued during the Fascist era, in the shape of a green wedge, a triangle with Piazza Venezia opening along the Via Appia toward the Colli Albani. In the 1970s, the Via Appia Antica National Park was created, extending from Saint Sebastian Gate to the external ring road. The result is an archaeological precinct that traverses the entire southern quadrant of the city to end up at what is still considered the historic centre.

### **Reviving the imperial city: fascist Rome 1922-1943**

Two themes characterize Fascist planning: rural policy and the construction of Rome. The Mussolinian decades were not a period of major economic growth; nevertheless, the country was largely spared the dramatic 1929 fiscal crisis. Italy reinforced its industrial structure thanks to significant public interventions in several basic economic sectors, and instituted a system of social services. Cities continued to grow, worsening the problems of local administrations and encouraging ways of life little appreciated by the regime. The Fascist campaign against urbanization started in 1928 with an article signed by Mussolini himself entitled "Evacuating Cities". The campaign reached its peak in 1939 with a law forbidding people to migrate to towns of 25,000 or more, under the threat of losing their work permit.

Rome was the sole exception to this law. In Rome growth was accepted, encouraged and promoted. The City's grandeur had to reflect the "greatness" of Fascism. This did not only refer to architectural splendour, but also to the size of the population, which had to be comparable to other European capitals. 'Romanity' and 'Latinity', already a part of Italian rhetoric, became the myth around which all the Fascist propaganda developed. In this respect, reorganizing urban spaces and building a new grandiose capital became the dream that only Fascism was capable of creating: the "return" of Rome, with visible continuity between the past and the modern city. As well, the architects attempted to harmonize the new with the ancient, and looked to the stylistic paradigms of ancient Rome. Archaeologists, for the first time in Roman history, became advisers, designers and executors of urban programs (Cederna, 1979; Manacorda and Tamassia, 1985). Even the most extreme options – fortunately realized only in part – of demolition and remodelling were put into practice, wherever one could "liberate" or emphasise the signs of Roman tradition. The work of archaeologists was so appreciated by the regime that a new grand avenue was constructed in the Forum area, linking the Colosseum to

Piazza Venezia. The inhabitants of the demolished central quarters were displaced to new towns outside the city, ironically designed along Modernist principles (Rossi, 2000).

Rome changed rapidly during Fascism (1922-1943). The influence of Rome on the country strengthened, with a strongly hierarchical and centralized government, and with an increased interest on the economy and on social services. Industries also grew: construction, mechanics, chemicals, and telecommunications. The population doubled in 20 years. In an attempt to solve traditional conflicts between the local authority and the central government, the position of Governor, nominated by the head of the national government and reporting directly to him, was created. Several organizations for social housing and co-operatives joined the IACP in building the city for both public servants and rulers. Bridges, hospitals and ministries were built, parks were opened to the public, and the banks of the Tiber were developed. Everything happened without an effective plan, but still within a coherent political design. In this respect, architecture and urbanism played an important role. The search for a Fascist “style” saw a permanent squabble between the innovators – following the European avant-garde - and the traditionalists, who were commonly inspired by classicist eclecticism. An already established architect, Marcello Piacentini, (Lupano, 1991) emerged as one of the most faithful agents of the new ideology. In those years at least three outstanding projects were realised: Mussolini’s forum, a great sport complex, notable for its landscaping and architecture in the northern sector, the new university campus and the E42 world exhibition district.

The new 1931 plan [see Illustration 3] was not particularly innovative: the historic centre was subject to demolition largely already under way, while the expansion zones were characterized by high building densities, thus abandoning the garden-city experiments of the twenties. Obviously the “new Rome” would be built over the old, demolishing, isolating and slashing into the fabric and the monuments (Governatorato di Roma, 1931). For the first time however, the plan dealt with the whole of the vast municipal territory, and proposed an innovative mode of execution, so much so that it served as a model, ten years later, for the drafting of the new planning legislation.



Illustration 3: Piacentini Master Plan

The 1931 plan was negated a few years later, when the old idea of expanding the city towards the sea resurfaced during discussions on the location of the upcoming Esposizione Universale 1942 (or E42, and later EUR). An area of 436 hectares was expropriated a few kilometres south of the Aurelian Wall for the exhibition. It was intended that the site would house a true permanent town and would be a focus of the capital's future growth. Every new public facility was commissioned under competition, thus obtaining projects of great interest after the exhibition ended. The new quarter was designed according to a system of orthogonal axes, dotted with marble public buildings arranged symmetrically. The precisely drawn streets were to be wide and treed, villas and gardens developed around the nucleus [see Illustration 4], while an artificial lake would increase its attractiveness. The start of World War Two interrupted the works leaving many buildings incomplete. Ten years passed before development of the area would continue (Quilici, 1996; Ciucci, 1989).

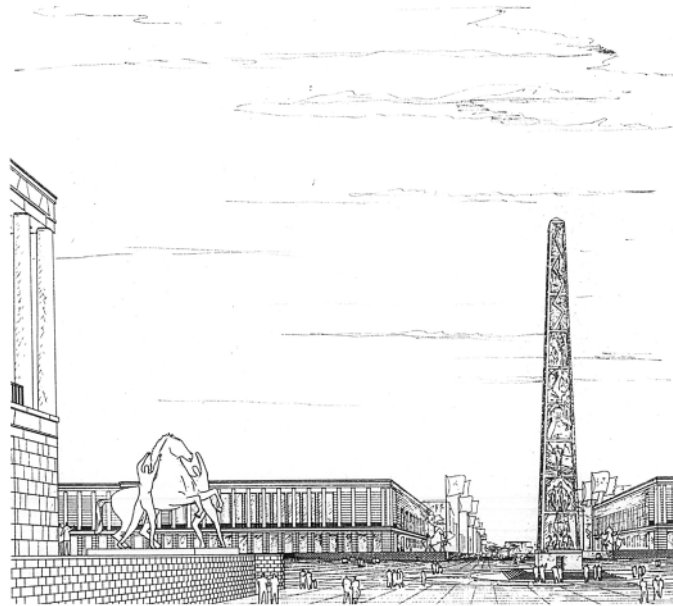


Illustration 4: An original sketch of the main piazza of E. 42

### **Growth and land speculation 1945-1962**

In 1945, Rome had one and a half million inhabitants. A large number of refugees came to the city from war-ravaged areas all over the country. Rome became the focus of various migrations affecting Italy: south to north, countryside to city, and from small towns to bigger ones. Each year added 50,000 to 60,000 immigrants, who required lodging, and were forced to adapt to cohabitation, sometimes to barracks, caves, or public monuments. The housing problem was dire – and stayed so for at least 20 years. The lack of services such as schools, hospital beds and transit was also a problem. The largely uncontrolled expansion in all sectors, sustained by constant demand, brought buildable land to exceptionally high price levels, unseen in any other European country (Sanfilippo, 1992). The city administration – having lost the position of Governorate – recognised the need to bring services to where they were most needed, but

was rendered impotent by a growing budgetary deficit and did not succeed in managing the urban expansion. The building boom of the first 20 years was strictly conditioned by land speculation: plans of private subdivisions became practically the only development control tool used. Expelled from the most lucrative locations by public and private office developments, inhabitants of central areas moved to more recently developed subdivisions. The housing problem, the inadequate transportation facilities and the scarcity of public services explained why urban planning stayed one of the most debated topics at City Council and in the press. Once again, speculators and builders were accused of favouring an inefficient and easily corruptible municipal administration (Cederna, 1956; Della Seta and Ruggero, 1988). But, above all, two opposing political strategies became apparent: the Right against the plan and the Left in favour of it.

The usefulness of the 1931 plan ran its course, and by 1950 the necessity of a new urban planning tool was generally accepted. This started a long process that finally concluded more than a decade later with the adoption of a new regulatory plan. A first sketch was presented in 1955 by a Technical Drafting Committee (CET: Comitato di Elaborazione Tecnica). The plan's fundamental idea was the displacement of the central functions to the eastern quadrant of the city, along a main road axis, later called the Eastern Directional System (SDO: Sistema Direzionale Orientale) where new public and private office buildings were supposed to locate. It also directly connected to the highway linking northern Italy to the south. By directing growth to the East, the centre would be relieved from through-traffic and, at the same time, there would have been an alternative to the concentric growth of land values. This provoked opposition on the part of those who had an interest in the parallel development of the other side.

In the meantime the 1960 Olympic Games affected the city's development. Thanks to important national investment, a series of crucial infrastructure works were completed: the international airport (which is in the adjacent municipality of Fiumicino), the Olympic Avenue which feeds the city in the west, connecting the old and the new sport facilities of the Foro Italico (the former Foro Mussolini) to the EUR (Esposizione Universale di Roma, formerly E42), which got a new Palace of the Sports, a velodrome, a swimming pool, athletics facilities, and the passages along the Lungotevere and the Muro Torto. This gave a boost to the development of the western sector, totally contradicting what was suggested in the municipal planning offices, and triggering vehement controversies in the press. After a decade of debate, a revised plan was eventually adopted by City Council in 1962. At that time the city had 2.2 million inhabitants and the plan foresaw a population of 4.5 million to be located in self-sufficient neighbourhoods (Vidotto, 1962).

### **Planning paradoxes: illegal developments, legal failures and new hopes**

The year the plan was adopted, 1962, saw a record number of new homes built. Unfortunately, that was exactly when the economic cycle saw a downturn; many new dwellings remained unsold due to high prices needed to cover the cost of land. The plan was accused of causing the crisis because of the numerous environmental and functional limitations it imposed. In reality, the market was not able to respond to the demand for lower income housing. This caused informal settlements, initially without streets or services, on lands designated for agriculture or plainly off limits for environmental reasons, to develop. Cheap land –outside the plan – was the first to be developed by «self-construction»; an informal building industry emerged, as well as an underground real estate market.

In 1976, after 30 years of uninterrupted centre-right government, the left gained power in the municipality, and kept it until 1985. It was estimated that, at that time, the population of

such settlements reached 800,000, which was one third of the total population. The legalization of these irregular neighbourhoods – official registration, provision of infrastructure and social services – was a major task of successive left-wing administrations from 1976 to 1985 (Clementi and Perego, 1983; Piazzo, 1982). In the meantime measures were taken to safeguard historic parks – Villa Doria Pamphili, Villa Ada, Castelfusano and Castelporziano, Veio and the entire Via Appia Antica area. In 1974, a General Amendment established the ways and phases of future development. Work continued around one of the main features of the plan, the new eastern business centre, but the project was regularly scaled back. The relocation of ministries that was supposed to make the centre take off was constantly postponed. The conversion of the historical centre and 19th century buildings into offices, and the space in the well-managed EUR was enough to satisfy the growing demand for office space.

The EUR, an example of planning outside the plan, was one of the few success stories of Roman post-war urban planning. Its status as an independent agency and landlord allowed its head official, Virgilio Testa, to set up a development policy for offices and high-end residences, which proved timely and economically viable. Until recently, when it became part of the City of Rome, the EUR provided independent police services, maintenance of public spaces and, above all, it kept strict control over the quality of projected buildings. This environment attracted several ministries (Finance, Postal Services, Merchant Marine), and the headquarters of some big corporations (Esso, Telecom, Alitalia), which affirmed itself as the only appropriate location for executive activities. Two other factors contributed to the EUR's success: the opening of the first subway line, linking it directly to the Termini Station, and the construction of remarkable sports facilities for the 1960 Olympics.

The city had profoundly changed in 1993, when the Left returned to power. The old plan proved useless: the city, which was forecast to reach 4.5 million inhabitants, never passed 2.8 million, and kept losing population to adjacent municipalities. Only one of four subway lines had been completed, and private car use exploded turning urban traffic into a daily nightmare. Once again, the preparation of a new plan was slow. In 1997, a scheme was adopted, with the intent of excluding the non-urban areas from development. It was the first step towards a future plan.

The Holy Year of 2000 was dreaded by many for the huge influx of tourists it would entail – a phenomenon less and less accepted by the Romans. Even though the new plan emphasised rail transit, part of the national funding went to the rehabilitation of automotive infrastructure, and part of it was used to restore and maintain historic buildings of varying value. On December 2001 the new plan, designed for the mid-term (15 years) with a stabilized population of approximately 2.5 million, was presented to the mayor, and was eventually adopted by the City Council in March 2003.

In the absence of a strategic plan setting social and economic objectives, the new 2003 regulatory plan explicitly limits itself to defining a functional organization of the city adapted to its various urban fabrics [see Illustration 5], and looks for public-private partnerships. Great emphasis is placed on rail transport (regional and metropolitan) which would ensure that 50% of the inhabitants would be within a 500-metre radius of a station - modest objectives, if one compares them to other European capitals, but very innovative by Roman standards. The already substantial stock of parks, public gardens and natural and agricultural areas is somewhat increased, bringing the rate of open space to 21 m<sup>2</sup> per inhabitant and making Rome one of the greenest European cities. On the whole, the plan is intended to serve as a flexible instrument of policies that must be managed lucidly and efficiently in the years to come.

## Final observations

Let's try to draw some conclusions. Rome is obviously an exception insofar as it was the capital city of a long standing Roman Empire and subsequently of the Vatican, itself for long time a powerful state and a world cultural centre. Unlike in other countries, Rome's role as a capital city was never under discussion. A city that always had a municipal government - even, in various forms, under the Pope's rule - had to compete, at the beginning, with the national government on decisions such as the location and the typology of basic capital facilities. Since the break with the Italian government - that resulted in excommunicating its members - the Church had a very little say on the development of the new capital city. The new government found no shortage of prestigious buildings to house its high officials. The King took one of the Pope's main residences - Palazzo del Quirinale - (a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture); the Parliament finally adopted a baroque building - Palazzo di Montecitorio - with an interesting addition at the beginning of the 20th century. Some ministries - Finance, War, Agriculture - were built anew along Via XX Settembre, east of the historic core, where, according to some, the new capital city should have gone (but did not), according to the idea of differentiating from an inglorious clerical past. However, no Haussmann ever came to substitute the old core with new developments. Here and there some demolitions took place, but that never developed into a coherent new grand design. This was attempted only during the twenty fascist years: recovering the archaeological core right into the central city, developing some grandiose new complexes, imposing some kind of architectural style.

The democratic republic born after World War II behaved the opposite way. In fact the municipality - left alone in controlling the city's growth - found itself, in the first decades, at a loss when confronted with the overwhelming forces of land speculators. And, when growth stopped, it had to rehabilitate large portions of the municipal territory where large illegal developments had taken place. Only one attempt was made to redesign the city's structure in the plan prepared between 1955 and 1962 - the Eastern Directional System; an interesting idea in 1955, it was already obsolete in the 1960's, due to great changes in the context and trends of development.

On the whole, the city's planners (or, better, the planning machine) always had difficulties in adjusting to social and economic change. Nowadays Rome is a rather well-off metropolis whose income mostly comes from the tourist and service sector (with a relevant share of high tech firms). Its influence covers a large metropolitan area where urban population and jobs tend to move. Mobility is possibly its main problem, which calls for more efficient public transport, as current plans indicate. Plans always took a lot of time to be adopted. In the meantime things were changing devaluating plans' forecasts. With one exception in 1883, special financial provisions to support the capital city's structures were independent from the official plan. Changes and new developments were introduced through "great events" (such as the 1911 National Exhibition, 1942 World Exhibition, 1960 Olympic Games, 1990 World Cup, 2000 Holy Year) rather than through regular planning, but this is often true elsewhere. The extraordinary amount of public art, heritage buildings and archaeological sites make it difficult for Rome to function as any other modern city. The care that is devoted to the heritage, however, seems appreciated by its citizens, considering the amount of passionate debate arising whenever some major artefact is introduced.

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