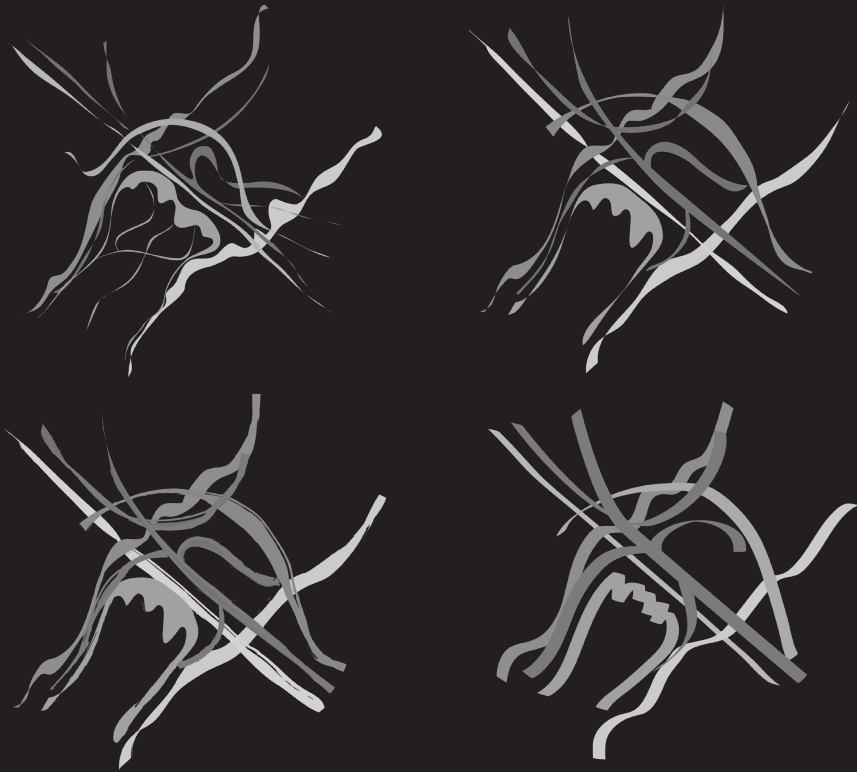


Pier Carlo Palermo

Roots and Frontiers. Figures and Cultures in Contemporary Urban Planning



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To my favourites: Nina, Tito, and... Susanna

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Premise

1. The Home of Urban Planners

1.1 ‘Are we there yet?’

Jean Hillier chose this title — which evokes infantile or elderly voices (perhaps the two subjects most sensitive to the idea of *going home*) — for an editorial published in *Urban Policy and Research* in 2013, in which she considers the most recent developments in the disciplinary culture. Her approach was both comforting and consoling, as often occurs in institutional and professional circles in urban planning: ‘We’re here. And we should be proud to be so’ (ibid, p. 2)¹. In reality, the path of experience does not seem to indicate a clear sequence of progress or shared successes. Long-standing and notable ambitions and responsibilities have still apparently not achieved the desired interpretations and realizations. The most common evidence tells tiresome stories of mediation and adaptation, understood with a pragmatic, reformist spirit in the best cases, or as a sign of opportunism or subordination to influential interests. However, the literature and events in the area tend to reflect an image that is positive in general. The discipline claims to exist. It continues to boast a set of values, traditions, functions, and skills that would be able to cross time. Roles and assumptions are generally not disputed. The end results obtained in the field remain partial or precarious, but self-representation of the discipline is usually hagiographic. If a certain historical project remains patently unfinished, the main responsibility should always fall on some contextual factor. The culture of urban planning seems to react to objective difficulties with continuous expansion of the sphere of interest. There is no lack of suggestions because cities and their governance evidently raise an infinite number of issues and questions. In the short term, new emerging demands for investigation and design can be easily justified. Problems arise over

¹ Quote taken from Palermo, 2023a, p. 110.

time, however, because the new threads are difficult to consolidate and must coexist in a multifaceted, confused framework where eclectic topics and paradigms rule. This disordered variety ought to put identity at risk; instead, it is generally welcomed as a sign of cultural and professional vitality. Even if the mother house risks becoming a myth or illusion.

I do not know how well these ideas are shared, but I have a different opinion. I believe we still have not returned to the promised home. Historical goals — from the so-called *modern project* in the early 20th century to the *reformist programme* a hundred years later — have not been achieved. Other perspectives do not seem to be clear or shared today. In many cases, we do not even really understand what the goal should be or what we would like it to be. As a whole, the small world of urban planners (divided among many circles) seems to wander without any new recognized, justified objectives. This may mark the pace, with the acceptance of a complementary bureaucratic, procedural role with respect to urban and social processes. Perhaps we really find ourselves in a *post-planning* world which in theory does not disregard the discipline as an institution or profession, but assigns it a substantially formal function of accompanying the bureaucracy of social and urban processes that are essentially applied elsewhere due to the temporary composition of partisan interests and strategies. This trend is not only seen in Italy, but it occurs there with unsettling obviousness, also due to certain limits in civic culture and good administration. If we ask what the effective role of the discipline has been recently in the most important urban transformations in our cities, the conclusions may not be very comforting (thinking of the embarrassing case of Milan as one example). How did we reach this point? What are the prospects? Have inertia and resignation now become somewhat obligatory? Or is there still possible room for innovation and responsibility? These questions risk remaining rhetorical, but they cannot be conceived if the image of a solid, nearby, welcoming home prevails.

1.2 A Framework to Integrate

I addressed these issues just two years ago in a book (Palermo, 2022) focusing on the long-term evolution of topics of interest and disciplinary paradigms. The goal was to recount and discuss large trends in the field, documented by a dense array of facts, figures, and events, none of which was the object of detailed attention. The result was neither a historical reconstruction nor a new manual of disciplinary doctrines or tools. Rather, it

was a *histoire à thèse* inspired by critical judgements, subjected to empirical tests (many and multifaceted) to orient opinions, rethink identity, and try to rediscover (choose, share) some perspective for action. It is probably still early to make a balance, but in the short time that has elapsed, two lines of investigation have drawn my attention. One is the idea of roots. To better understand the genesis and development of some positions, it may be useful to speak with some influential figures. The idea is not to reintroduce a concept of urban planning as an authorial view and design, which never has and never will be sustainable; but because the path enlivened by some leading player (as an original blend of suggestions, uncertainties, deviations, plans, and experiments) may help to better understand the essence of the problems and challenges being discussed. For this reason, the first part of the book covers the profiles of some figures that have stood out in Italian urban planning in the late 20th century. This is certainly not exhaustive; rather, it reflects familial similarity in the sense that I wanted to talk with just a few people with whom I shared some experiences between Venice and Milan. In my opinion, this limit does not prevent the background from being significant, instead highlighting a series of substantial difficulties or dilemmas in planning culture and practice in the latter half of the century. My hypothesis is that the five people — Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Bernardo Secchi, Gigi Mazza, Pier Luigi Crosta, and the ‘young’ Alberto Clementi — will be understood one day in the not-so-distant future as new classics (albeit not the only ones) in the discipline, that is, as ‘contemporaries of the future’, to use Giuseppe Pontiggia’s enlightening expression (1998).

From another point of view, the second topic of interest regards trends on the frontiers. The most robust research chronically lags behind (although this is limited in the most interesting cases). The technical times of development involve an inevitable time-lag. To understand the emerging trends, we should look at the latest events or journal publications, which generally have more limited, often contingent goals. This thread is decisive in many branches of science (where books tend to act as third-person compilations). I confess that I have always held some prejudice towards planning or design periodicals, which often seem to be a surrogate for, if not a parody of scientific journals. However, it is true that recognition of the sector may be useful for identifying the salient lines of renewal in the agenda and disciplinary reflections in a timely manner. Therefore, the second part of the book looks at my recent analysis² on some of the most authoritative frontiers in

² Chapters 10 and 11 are a revisited version of Palermo, 2022b and 2023c.

this field, compared with the author's perspectives in the first part, to integrate the framework outlined by *Il futuro dell'urbanistica post-riformista*. I follow two threads — urban planning, urban design — that have struggled in the long term to coexist among pushes for autonomy, concurrent interests, and weak calls for cooperation. As a framework of reference, I have chosen two prestigious historical journals from the field of urban planning (the British *Town Planning Review* and the *Journal of the American Planning Association*), together with two emerging editorial projects created at the turn of the century in British town planning to explore the controversial relationships between theory and practice (*Planning Theory* and *Planning Theory and Practice*). With respect to urban design, I wanted to study the most authoritative references systematically: the *Journal of Urban Design* (since 1996); *Urban Design International* (the same year); and the *Journal of Urbanism* (since 2008), three journals published in Great Britain (but the third is more sensitive to North American ideas). We usually use journals selectively. We look for a certain contribution based on specific questions and content, without dedicating too much attention to the overall editorial context. My intent is different: considering the body of journals within a given time horizon as a single meta-text that provides relevant indications on the evolution of agendas, orientations, and effective contributions to the discipline over time. The risk relates to dispersion among too partial and contingent interests. My hypothesis is that some essential trends can be highlighted with greater strength, clarity, and timeliness than simply consulting successful books.

The two parts of this book may seem independent of each other or even unrelated. I recognize the risk, which is somewhat embarrassing. If this were so, however, it would be a symptom — or proof — of some endemic limits in the disciplinary culture: divided between distant, noncommunicating worlds with not only historical/geographical roots (such as the long-term differences between *urbanistica* and planning), but expressing diversity or emerging divides within each cultural field (because the profiles of the five Italian authors diverge, as do trends in planning or design in England/America). Can we coexist with this impressive variety — with indifference or opportunism — as if it were an irreducible or irrelevant fact? An indistinct, confused plurality cannot be seen as a strength. I believe there is a need — as in any disciplinary area — to trace an overall framework that can be understood and evaluated as a useful starting point for assuming responsibility for a choice, because not all positions can claim the same value or legitimacy. Therefore, comparing different representations of the

discipline may be a strategically important move. In the introduction to the second part (Chapters 8 and 9) and the conclusion (Chapter 14), I point to the main deductions that I believe can be drawn from the unusual confrontation between Italian authors and international journals. However, I would like to dedicate these last introductory notes to anticipating three questions that I consider fundamental for the idea of this book.

1.3 Authors, After the ‘Death of the Author’

When I began to enter the field of urban planning towards the mid-1970s, the idea of referring to individual people as great figures in the area was not very popular. The most common ideological orientation tended to favour systems and structures over subjects and actions. These were times when Roland Barthes (1984) proclaimed the ‘death of the author’, i.e. the independence of texts with respect to any subjective intention. By analogy, representations of urban planning could not be understood as purely ‘authors’ projects’, following a summary extension of the rhetoric of *starchitecture* that was very successful in the media in the late 1900s. This always meant creating complex devices thanks to the intertwining of multiple factors, interests, and plans; that are not destined for mechanical application, but a sequence of interpretations and experiments, as a (partial) component of a broader coevolution over time. I recall the relief I felt in the early 1980s when I read Michel Crozier as an alternative to the more rigid systemic views popular at the time. His perspective is based on the ‘return of the actor’ and the interplay of interactions created in the context between systemic conditions and subjective willingness (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977; Palermo, 1983, Chapter 1). Extreme positions are quickly shown to be unproductive. In this field, one should not exalt either the author’s intentions or the (presumed) determinism of systems. Planning culture gradually learned to deal with its leading figures.

A few, now-classic contributions matter³. In 1981, Gordon Cherry published *Pioneers in British Planning*, eight biographies of noble fathers of British town planning (Geddes, Unwin, Abercrombie, and others) written specifically by different authors based on a shared editorial project. In 1983, Donald Krueckeberg published a similar American version: 16 contributions on eminent figures in national planning (Nolen, Marsh, Bassett, Tugwell, Lewis Mumford, and the leading figures of the Regional Planning Association; the second edition (1994) also contains a profile of

³ The passage that follows revisits the arguments in the Introduction of Palermo, 2022a.

Kevin Lynch). However, this was not an original, systematic study, but a collection of a variety of extemporaneous traces independent in both origin and intent (a limit that aroused some criticism; planning culture has always been more eclectic and pragmatic in North America). In 1988, Peter Hall published *Cities of Tomorrow*, a monograph that represented the main disciplinary trends through the evolution of ideas of the city that great figures had contributed to generating in various times and contexts. In 1992, Di Biagi and Gabellini published *Urbanisti italiani*, a well-organized editorial project that allowed the rather traditional world of Italian urban planning to discover the biographical method (still influential now: Renders et al., 2017). With intellectual effort and analytical rigour, the work (seven biographies of authors built with a common method, together with the similar study on Bernardo Secchi published by Gabellini in 1993) seems closer to Cherry's approach than to Krueckeberg's (which Di Biagi instead followed in a publication on the 'classics of modern urban planning', 2002). In the afterword to *Urbanisti italiani*, Bernardo Secchi understood the project as the mark of an opportune turning point: the *return of the author*, compared to Barthes' structuralism (after not even a decade!). This judgement should not be misunderstood: Secchi certainly did not ignore the direct or indirect systemic effects that generally affect the views and actions of individual actors in a given context; rather, following Michel Foucault, he had no doubt that practices were what determined the formation of the subject in certain areas. He therefore did not suggest a return to naive individualism, such as certain simplifying or mystifying visions of *starchitecture* (Ponzini and Nastasi, 2011). Rather, he invited the reader to not underestimate individual capacity — of some key figures at least — to produce 'new discursive forms' capable of affecting current visions and practices in the long term (as Peter Hall masterfully documented in 1988). According to Foucault (1969), this is the distinctive contribution of each authentic *author*: a capacity to renew the usual way of seeing and thinking, in order to open new possibilities for action. The perspective is certainly interesting as an echo of the dynamic, interactive relationships between actors and system (in Michel Crozier's sense, for example). It should not become an alibi to restore the ideology (or nostalgia) of urban planning as the 'author's project', which an authentic reformist planner such as Giovanni Astengo always rejected (1966).

The relationship with the 'classics' nevertheless introduces problems for the discipline. Perhaps it is not enough to imagine climbing on the 'shoulders of giants' to see better and farther; the most common metaphor, as Palazzo

(1997) reminds us, developed in the Medieval and was taken up again in the Modern era. Leonie Sandercock (1998) warned of the risk of a mythical or heroic reading of the great forerunners, as the integral representation of a thesis or a seemingly unitary project assumed as the basis for new scholasticism (I discuss this in relation to Gigi Mazza with some classics or forerunners in Chapter 5). Michel Foucault (1969) explained how the relationship with a great author should not necessarily take the form of devoted memory or immobile respect. An attempt to ‘make thought screech’ may be rather more worthy (more fertile): subjecting thought to critical discussion and testing, exploring its limits and flexibility to rethink, renewing the problems of the present. It is not necessary to harden the legacy of a ‘great’ into a doctrine or model. In general, it is more interesting to reflect on the experimental and evolutionary nature of the project of life: loaded with intentions, conditioning, turning points, serendipitous effects, and unresolved yet generative ambiguities. As Krueckeberg intuited (1983), this entails dedicating the necessary attention to relationships/interactions among subjective intentionality and cultural context. In fact, Krueckeberg addressed the individual ‘giants of American planning’ without ever overlooking the nexuses ‘between self and culture’ as an influential matrix of ideas and experiences. I took the same point of view when I participated in the INU’s recent reflection on authors’ biographies (dealing with Campos Venuti and Secchi: Palermo, 2022a). My idea was the following: ‘investigating and reflecting on actual evolutionary processes, on developing ideas and actions, hopes, expectations, and failures, on what remains unsaid and the subjects’ reconsiderations, on divergences and discontinuities that arise between privileged testimonies, may produce more fertile results in terms of learning and a capacity for action’ (Palermo, *ibid.*). This is the strategic view that has certainly inspired Gabellini and Di Biagi’s research since 1992 (see the Introduction of *Urbanistica e urbanisti*).

1.4 At the Frontier: Rethinking and Innovation

The margins have become a common place; innovation develops here. It assumes a capacity to question the traditional views of problems and opens new, unexplored side roads. We could assume that these general indications are also valid in urban planning, although some peculiar difficulties arise. The field, in fact, is historically poorly organized. It has never shown a clear, undisputed centre or well-defined edges; rather, it is configured as a swarm of flows that sometimes proceed in parallel and sometimes intersect, without a clear hierarchy or evolutionary thread. The observation

is valid for interpreting the disciplinary functions: as physical planning, land use and mobility planning, spatial governance, or new urban policies. Whatever the chosen path, there is a notable variety of approaches that have been conceived and tested in various times and contexts. Urban design may be understood as an independent practice, even an alternative to urban planning. Or as a specific means of interpreting planning, which reflects its origins and has given rise to more than one rebirth. Land use planning oscillates between the primary interests of zoning and the generally elusive aspiration for a vision and capacity for ultimately ‘comprehensive’ action. Spatial governance may signal the recognition of essential *political* aspects of urban planning or it may only allude in practice to legislative requirements and managerial functions of the current administration. The newest urban policies (smart, resilient, sustainable, innovative) should represent an opening of horizons in post-modern society; they can become a distraction from historically unresolved planning problems or simply a media strategy to accompany the strengths and processes of the neo-liberal city (Hackworth, 2007; Pinson, Morel Journal, 2017).

Variety is also the salient character of the authors’ profiles that are discussed in this book. While Campos Venuti may become the highest example of the commitments and responsibilities of Italian reformist planning — as a wise, insightful, and courageous interpreter of an evolutionary line that passes through Piccinato and Astengo — the other figures show the coexistence in a small space of individual identities that reveal substantial differences. Gigi Mazza and Pier Luigi Crosta are two architects (by training), with prevalent planning interests, who have made the main contributions in Italy to deconstructing the disciplinary orthodoxy (which in effect represented a vision/aspiration more than effective practice). Crosta revealed himself to be a refined policy analyst (a rare figure in Italy, as the experience of Bruno Dente showed). His work, however, tends to affirm the end of traditional city planning and the (inevitable?) metamorphosis towards a variety of urban policies to also be understood in unorthodox ways. Gigi Mazza, known as a planning practitioner, drew on his experience and felt the need to question the most influential concepts of the field. In contrast to Crosta, he never gave up hope of giving life to a new idea of urban planning, but the results remained uncertain and very partial. Bernardo Secchi’s path seems to move in the opposite direction. Trained as a civil engineer and a refined economic/territorial analyst, in the 1980s he felt the need to directly measure himself against the practice of planning. Not only that, he chose a design-oriented approach to the topic, which was eccentric

with respect to the prevailing orientations of the discipline in Italy (as well as his background as an analyst) and recalled the return of urban design to the international stage (Chapter 11). The results may be considered controversial; the temptation to once again propose an idea of urban planning as the ‘author’s project’ may be criticized. However, there are no doubts as to the importance of experimentation, which offers notable points for reflection and learning. The conclusion is that the tag ‘planner’ seems truly generic or sometimes meaningless; one can allude to profiles as diverse as Campos and Secchi or Mazza and Crosta. On the other hand, this is not surprising. Even the authors investigated in *Urbanisti italiani* represented a ‘disordered’ variety of profiles and visions. A rigorous account cannot help but shed light on nonmarginal differences; it should perhaps admit that today none of those profiles may be considered up to date or strategically influential (Chapter 3). In this framework, a figure of the following generation such as Alberto Clementi represents, in my opinion, an attempt to reconnect some divergent issues of analysis, strategy, and urban design. In fact, his orientation was not shared by most of the discipline; the results, as often happens, were partial and a bit fragile (Chapters 7 and 13).

What are we speaking of, then, when we talk about urban planning (Tosi, 2006)? In reality, it consists of multiple references that find it hard to co-exist in the same institutional space. The surprising fact is that this ambiguity does not seem to constitute a problem for the main figures. In fact, as I think I demonstrated in my book from 2022 (the issue will also be addressed in various chapters here), if we consider the paradigms that the discipline aimed to develop and test over time, the most critical node is the extreme, impudent eclecticism that even Secchi and Mazza reported on various occasions. The planning culture seems to have felt the influence of the most diverse inspirations (rationalist, critical, communicative, pragmatic, post-structuralist, insurgent), without having the courage to distinguish and choose. No dominant position emerges. Even the reformist view, which might seem to be an orientation destined to prevail, assumes a variety of interpretations, which are perhaps knowingly ambiguous or instrumental. It also seems difficult to recognize an evolutionary line between development and recourse, nostalgia, recovery, and persistence. The most common fact seems to be the accumulation of differences: without a critical framework, a choice of direction, or even a clear rejection of models that have not given good results. Amid this backdrop, it is objectively difficult to determine where innovation lies. The risk lies in assigning a function of renewal to simple expansion in the field of interest, which may

play an elusive role compared to traditional responsibilities. Therefore, it does not seem sufficient to survey news, issues, or approaches that may emerge from the most recent literature (journals even before books). In my opinion, it is necessary to reconstruct an essential hierarchy of planning paradigms and the primary evolutionary trends in the long-term. It is necessary to think critically about the structure and dynamics of the area to identify the actual frontiers of innovation.

1.5 Not Just Criticism

The problems of planning are so complicated that making a critique always seems current and justified. Entire academic sectors have been built around this function: ‘What is critical urban theory?’ (Brenner, 2009); ‘What is urban about critical urban theory?’ (Roy, 2015). In some cases, the ideological orientation is radical, in others reformist; the common point is that the configuration and ordinary interpretation of the planning system are deemed to be inadequate. Pier Luigi Crosta’s contribution represents a worthy Italian counterpoint to a vast international movement, which perhaps today pertains to the world of policy analysis rather than to urban planning in the strict sense (Chapter 6). However, criticism is not enough to interpret planners’ responsibilities. The specialized literature does not offer any comforting indications. Planning theory remains largely self-referential, according to an idea of consolatory, unproductive academia that becomes an alibi or an escape from responsibility (Chapter 10). Urban design seems to have progressively rejected its original civic and social responsibility, limiting itself to contingent operations — however legitimate and in many cases necessary — that affect everyday practice; the result may be concrete professionalism, but it is always less and less problem-based or reflective (Chapter 11). The other authors discussed in this book have instead shown the importance of connections between criticism and proposal. Campos Venuti had the lucidity and strength to denounce the academic concept of urban planning and the perverse effects of oversizing plans from the late 1960s, laying the road for reformist renewal (Chapter 3). Bernardo Secchi distanced himself from the bureaucratic urban planning that had prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s, testing a *design-oriented* interpretation that was largely beyond the culture of the time (Chapter 4). More than any other, Gigi Mazza addressed international scenarios, expressing reasoned and timely criticism for the many trends that were successful from time to time: the idea of comprehensive planning, the ‘systems view’; the limits of technical knowledge and justification for regulatory choices; the ab-

straction of many trends (no matter how authoritative) of planning theory, which implied a procedural, managerial concept of disciplinary responsibilities. Instead, he suggested a radical renewal of the idea of urban planning, which served as rules for the existing urban fabric, strategic visions for the future, and urban projects to submit to independent assessment in the areas undergoing transformation (Chapter 5).

After 20 years or more, however, it cannot be ignored that the balance statement has different critical points. While the distinction between structural plan and local operations was one of the keys of the reform attempted at the turn of the century, the revision has not led to the expected results. In fact, in 2017 the Emilia-Romagna Region had the courage to make a radical change, even if this lacked true public reflection on the reasons for the change of course. While the master plan for Rome in the early 2000s can be considered an emblem of the reformist programme, we should be aware that the results did not meet expectations due to the lack of a true *planning policy*. Bernardo Secchi's design-oriented approach to urban planning was an audacious operation, and a surprising one in certain respects due to the contextual conditions and the author's background. However, that thread ended quickly. This is not only true of Italy, where Vittorio Gregotti, another key player, decided early on to abandon the field despite some important experiences. The sort of master plans prescribing form-based codes in the 1990s in different parts of the world were similar (Chapter 11). Gigi Mazza's intellectual proposals were not followed up on (the master plan of Milan from 2001 is not a good model, since it was heavily conditioned by contextual factors). In fact, they were summarily liquidated even by the reform-oriented part of the discipline, although 20 years later, some of those suggestions would be considered again in Emilia-Romagna (Palermo, 2019, 2023b). In the meantime, Alberto Clementi had little success in attempting to restore a design-oriented approach to urban planning and a spatial framework to any urban project, according to an interpretation of the newly socio-spatial, political, and design-driven discipline (Chapter 7). These difficulties should make us pause and reflect. The road gets harder when one tries to go beyond the criticism (Waugh and Botha, 2021). The hypotheses mostly wind up being unsustainable, sometimes due to intrinsic limits, at other times due to a lack of consensus in politics, society, or the profession itself. The result is that today, we perceive a vacuum of initiatives and proposals. In Italy, the late, simple rediscovery of a strategic approach (20 years following the likewise late acceptance of a structural vision) is not a solution. Similar problems arise in every country, however.

In the best cases, a tradition of good administration, where it exists, continues to matter; otherwise the scenario I have called *post-planning* becomes plausible.

Of course personally, I am not able to indicate a more reassuring perspective. I can only express some convictions that have developed over time. There can be no turning point if an interpretation or critical judgement of the long history of experience are missing; this includes the responsibility of the discipline itself. In ordinary practice, it would be wise not to forget Campos' teachings: the use of available tools should, as far as possible, always be *reform-oriented* (Chapter 3). However, there cannot be substantial innovation without a clear discontinuity in the most traditional models which first influences the idea of master plan, which is no longer the main tool or matrix of all actions, as Crosta and Mazza long suggested. Developing ideas that I already anticipated a few years ago, I maintain here (Chapter 5, dedicated to Mazza and some precursors; Chapters 13 and 14, Conclusion) that two requirements may be decisive: 1) Recovering the *political* dimension of urban planning, that is, the civic responsibility and socio-spatial implications that were originally fundamental and in some cases crucial in the history of the 1900s; and 2) Giving the *design* a physical form (not just regulation and vision) is the urban planner's specific and essential task, as seemed normal for town planners in the early part of the 20th century. I am not certain that these hypotheses are pertinent or sustainable. The first may seem out of date; the second raises somewhat significant difficulties that are both technical (because it is easier to limit oneself to evoking a vision) and professional (due to competition between multiple roles and tasks). The way in which the two objectives may be refined and interwoven largely remains an unknown. However, it seems reasonable to affirm that the two dimensions are essential for interpreting the discipline and that they have been overlooked for too long. In the pages that follow, I try, as well as I can, to present (at least) some arguments supporting this perspective.

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Part I

2. New Classics, 'Contemporaries of the Future'

'Classics' is not a category used in all cultural and disciplinary areas. In many situations, Italian planning prefers to speak of forerunners or fathers of modern town planning (Paola Di Biagi, 2002 is an exception). The notions are sometimes confused, as if they were equivalent. An author may have anticipated some topics and roles, or given life to some memorable interpretations of the questions in play (Buras, 2019), but this does not mean that he or she is able to make an important contribution to the problems that have arisen in some periods of the present or largely undefined future. Yet this is an essential requirement. Historically, in the Roman world, it was based on the power of an elite class that was so dominant it could imagine itself at the vertex of society forever (Pontiggia, 1998). Our vision must necessarily be different. Following Salvatore Settis, we must ask why and for what purpose contributions by some authors become considered 'classics' for a discipline, that is, capable of crossing time and interacting with emerging questions, even when the conditions have changed extensively. In this sense, the 'classics have a future' (Settis, 2004). Like an author (a work) that 'has never finished saying what it has to say' (Calvino, 1991). Provided that confrontation and dialogue do not stop when faced with the veil that the most scholarly and faithful interpretations tend to associate with some eminent figures (Pizzorno, 2007, 2023). This view was confirmed by the very idea of 'contemporary' formulated by Giorgio Agamben (2006), which requires that a subject be capable of interpreting not only the time, but also the past containing the historical traces in question. Therefore, being contemporary also means knowing how to cross time (being 'untimely', as Nietzsche said).

If we ask who the classics of North-American or British urban planning might be, some suggestions may be plausible and commonly shared. In North America, for example, John Nolen represents a true point of refer-

ence that is still undisputed (Stephenson, 2015). He has drawn attention since the late 1800s as an ‘urban reformer’. Subsequently, his technical capacities as a landscape architect and city planner emerged, acting as a bridge — as a pragmatic visionary — between European planning culture and nascent urban planning in North America. In the 1930s, Nolen was generally recognized as ‘the dean of American city planning’; a half century later, new urbanism adopted him as the leading figure of the movement (Stephenson, 2002). Similar considerations may be made in Great Britain for Patrick Abercrombie, younger than Nolen by about 10 years. Authoritative confirmation is found in the ‘centenary note’ that the journal *Town Planning Review* dedicated to him in 1979 (Chapter 5). What happens, however, in Italy? The great figures of the early 1900s (as I argue briefly in Chapter 3) no longer constitute a current reference for various reasons. Many decades ago, reference to Luigi Piccinato would have been taken for granted. Recognition of his role is still not lacking in some institutional contexts (Fini, 2022), but maintaining the founding role of that vision of town planning today seems risky. Giancarlo De Carlo’s work is always fascinating and admirable. It represents a benchmark that was probably unachievable for the design-oriented experiences of the plan in the 1990s; his work pertains to another world compared to the weak forms currently adopted by urban planning in Italy. Samonà and Quaroni have left doubts and suggestions worthy of attention, although they do not meet the most current needs. I believe it is inevitable to shift the attention to figures that are less distant (at least the generation of the 1930s), those that played an important role in the late 1900s and early 2000s.

I have chosen four people — Campos Venuti, Secchi, Mazza, and Crosa — with whom I share a ‘family feeling’, that is, a set of ideas and life experiences. This is the first reason; I do not try to hide it. Other references could be legitimately presented in relation to other traditions, other contexts. At any rate, I am bewildered by and amazed at the variety and importance of the contributions that emerged from these authors; they were capable of grasping crucial points in planning practices (which are still very current today) and suggested profoundly different perspectives that lead us to reflect on the difficulty of the problems and the responsibility for choosing one orientation from among many possible ones. Perhaps these are the figures that should become a part of our ideal pantheon, although I have the impression that younger generations hesitate to take a position regarding the legacy that was left to us. Nor do they seem ready to look for some sort of synthesis (I have chosen a single witness — Alberto Clementi

— that seemed sensitive to these issues, but he found himself faced with notable difficulties). The first part of the book therefore encompasses five monographs, each dedicated to one of these authors. The idea is that this material may offer an important basis for reflection and orientation for the urban planners of today and tomorrow.

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3. Along the Road to a Reformist Programme: Among Ruins, Hopes, and Possibilities (Giuseppe Campos Venuti)

3.1 Three Images

I have chosen three images to illustrate the figure of Giuseppe Campos Venuti, who in my opinion was an influential guide (perhaps still the most important) in a cultural and professional field that has too long shown itself to be fragile, confused, and ineffective. The first (Section 3.2) regards his original and active position in an evidently difficult disciplinary framework. Campos never loved ‘penitent self-critical’ exercises, favouring a reform-oriented commitment even in the most difficult contexts. Other intellectual and operational projects, no matter how authoritative and sometimes fascinating, have been substantially buried over time. His experience, however, allows us to maintain hope and continue to explore some possibilities. His figure, vision, and practices indicate a perspective that still seems, in different respects, worthwhile and up to date.

The second image (Section 3.3) regards Campos’ position with respect to attempts at the end of the century to renew the sense and strengthen the role of the discipline, to try to overcome a state of crisis. This is a controversial issue because old and sterile ideologies exist in the field together with mere exhortations or unjustified illusions. In the new century, Campos worked hard to distance himself from some convictions that were still widespread, to strongly indicate and complete transformations that were probably necessary with respect to more traditional ideas of the plan, regulation, and governance. We should recognize not only a tenacious and courageous commitment to reforms that have long been unfinished in Italy, but also the partiality and limits of the results after more than 20 years of experimentation. A critical reflection on these difficulties is essential for supporting and better orienting the efforts of the reformist programme.

The third image (Section 3.4) is more dated. It covers some partial, but highly innovative experiments that date to the 1960s–1980s. In my opinion, this relates to fundamental contributions that Campos made in that period to both the disciplinary thought and practice, showing a local possibility for successful reform-oriented actions, despite the evident limits in laws, structures, and resources. It is clear that the innovation was not only technical, but radically political and cultural. Joining wise principles of realism and pragmatism (rare talents in planning circles) with a critical spirit and reform-oriented commitment, Campos knew how to conceive

and realize truly innovative forms and means to act in a difficult field. As dated as it is, I believe the lesson is relevant and worthy of attention. The idea is that in this period, it was still possible to identify fertile traces to revamp reform-oriented applications — which would be indispensable in Italy, both in urban planning and beyond.

The three images are therefore not aligned chronologically in time. In the 1990s a critical call was raised to form a possible family pantheon of Italian urban planning, in which Campos emerges strongly as a solid reference, perhaps even the only one still possible. The impasse in the best disciplinary hopes for reform and effective action is a fact that has repeated over time, but it has been more serious and worrying in the last two decades. Is the current drift perhaps irreversible? My hypothesis is that Campos' reform-oriented experiences between the 1960s and 1980s may still represent an influential matrix for renewing the principles, techniques, and tools that seem necessary now more than ever. It would be appropriate to reconsider that phase, drawing from it some useful elements of learning and direction. The path of reflection may seem tortuous, but when the questions are complicated, it is difficult to imagine merely linear lines of development. Some steps backwards may be crucial for building a new future.

3.2 A Landscape Scattered with Ruins

The crisis in urban planning is certainly not an original issue, and not just in Italy. I would like to take up the question according to a little-explored perspective. I refer to the text presented in 1992 by Patrizia Gabellini and Paola Di Biagi (*Urbanisti Italiani*), a very interesting work that has now become a classic in the disciplinary literature. The question I pose is simple. Among the biographical and critical profiles selected for the book — creating a sort of family pantheon — which seem to have held up the best over time? It seems to me that the balance is, in many respects, disquieting. Plinio Marconi is worth mentioning for having introduced the principle and method of sizing master plans. This innovation, however, meant Marconi himself predicted urban growth for Bologna in the 1950s of up to a million residents: unacceptable. Giuseppe Samonà was an unparalleled promoter of the disciplinary culture. However, with his experiences in the field, we have trouble recognizing evidence for a unitary, solid, functional paradigm. The main key to *architecture/planning unity* remains vague or exhortative, and extraneous to the culture and practices of most local plan-

ning operators. De Carlo and Quaroni? The profile of Giancarlo De Carlo is exceptionally interesting (consensus in this respect is widespread and justified; Palermo, 2007), while contributions by Ludovico Quaroni — the Italian architect most interested in experimenting with new ideas and practices, as Tafuri wrote in 1964 — were problematic and innovative. But this is precisely what they are: architects. Can we forget that right at that time both had intentionally chosen to abandon planning?

The profiles of some committed city planners remain, however. Giovanni Astengo tried to develop an ideal model of urban planning, with a ‘Calvinist stubbornness’, as Campos said with affectionate irony. However, that model did not work in most real processes and it never actually worked in reality. For a long time, Luigi Piccinato was the indisputable guide of Italian urban planning, capable of drawing the attention of the powers at the moment (even when the ideological and political orientation had radically changed, i.e. under Fascism and beyond) and multiplying planning experiences in a variety of contexts and in rather short times (with the risk of sometimes working a bit schematically, repetitively, and even superficially). Nevertheless, his idea of planning practices seems tainted by notable limits. Although brilliant, his urban forms and norms lack proper attention to the specific causes of problems that arise in a given context and the resulting implementation. His vision remains authoritarian and prescriptive, indifferent to the political nature of real processes; it still pertains to the modernist tradition of ‘planning without politics’ that is entirely outdated. The disciplinary orientation remains imitative, eclectic, and hasty (as evinced by his manual from 1947, which Astengo wanted to reissue in 1988 without any new elements of critical reflection). At the risk of sounding ungenerous and disrespectful, I believe that Piccinato’s position not only cannot hold value as a model; it was even one of the primary causes of some delays and limits in the Italian planning culture. Certainly more problematic and innovative was the figure of Bernardo Secchi, who probably had the most ingenuity in approaching the field of planning in the second half of the 1900s from other fronts. Secchi had the courage and strength to test himself as a *city designer*, after working as a civil engineer and territorial economist (Chapter 4). He was the leading figure in audacious experiments, which he always tried to turn into possible visions for a renewed discipline. The results, however, were controversial and remained confined to restricted circles. In my opinion, the main limit was his tendency to conceive and represent the tools and experiences of urban planning based on a very personal creative vein: imagining the development of increasingly

audacious, conscious, and deep disciplinary knowledge, and design efforts capable of leaving a mark on the future. In reality, these two hypotheses encountered modest corroboration. In fact, sophisticated experiments had little and improbable follow-up, such as the design of mandatory form-based codes in the planning experiences of the 1990s, or the complicated ‘strategic scenarios’ for global cities as drafted in the early 2000s.

If the considerations above have a basis, the disciplinary landscape marked out is scattered with ruins. The pantheon collects evidence that is sometimes sublime, having left few solid or positive traces in ordinary planning. This shows that those ideal roots have been largely cut off, with a resulting dilemma. Was the importance of those intellectual figures overestimated due to the effective evolution of the discipline? Or is city planning essentially an administrative function that must respond to regulatory and managerial reasoning above architectural, environmental, and social demands that are often very complicated? The growing institutional and social weakness of the discipline probably depends, to a certain degree, on the state of uncertainty and confusion. And yet amid this background, Campos is an emerging exception (Gabellini, 1992). He appears in sober forms, less suggestive or ambitious than others, but he winds up being more solid and incisive compared to the four issues that seem decisive to me (Palermo, 2023a). His vision rightly inspires us with the principles of *critical realism*. The mission of urban planning is not just to design urban forms, but to make a solid contribution to lifestyles and more equitable, efficient, and sustainable development. These goals demand an understanding of interests and real processes that may hinder good intentions (such as some market strategies used by land owners and urban developers). The capacity to control the potentially negative effects of those forces is therefore essential, with an awareness of the real economic and social impact of planning policies. The vision is undoubtedly denser and more problematic than Piccinato’s simplifications. In this respect, the purpose of planning is not only to design urban forms and norms — that is, it is not limited to establishing some *assumptions* about future living and urban transformations — but becomes *political action* (Campos, 1967, 2012). It cannot overlook the effective content of the action (rules and plans are not enough; just count the ways in which they are effectively implemented). Every important action instead requires the necessary collective consensus to be built *politically* — an aspect lying outside the modernist tradition (Campos, 1987). Perhaps only Giancarlo De Carlo (1966, 1994, 2005) truly shared this conviction (albeit in relation to problems that were sometimes more circumscribed to

the scale of the urban project). Astengo certainly did not ignore the issue (1966), but he tried to solve it with a methodological and rationalist approach that was ambitious, but lacking in credibility. Secchi made great conceptual contributions to expanding on the political dimension of planning (Chapter 4), but he had a hard time translating such knowledge into truly shared practices. This was a limit of several planning experiences in Italy throughout the 1990s.

The ability to conclude processes was instead a strength of most of Campos' experiences. They had a positive effect due to a concept of principles, laws, and tools that was not ideological, but suitably *pragmatic* (i.e. flexible and creative in relating to the context). Over time, the importance of the master plan was never questioned, but the conviction did not become dogma and therefore indisputable a priori (as occurs with disciplinary orthodoxy); it had to be interpreted in the particular place and phase. Campos' planning culture was not based on model-solutions; his vision did not assume utopian or palingenetic forms that were more familiar to modernist or academic traditions. In my opinion (as I have argued: Palermo, 2023a), careful observation of the experiences shows a *possibilist* orientation, perhaps unexpected in a disciplinary field that seems to favour certainty and control. A successful reform-oriented strategy needs to verify principles and creatively interpret laws and tools in relation to the contextual conditions and changes therein, following democratic processes of learning and collective consensus-building. *Critical realism, pragmatism, possibilism* become the cornerstones of an innovative paradigm with respect to tradition (or even the 'rationalist' paradigm, if the approach is methodical and rigid, as with the one adopted by Astengo). A little-explored yet interesting bridge is built with the great possibilist figures of policy design, from Patrick Geddes to Albert Hirschman and others (Palermo, 2022, Section 9.3).

The objection does not escape me (this is the fourth and last point): planning-in-action always needs certainties. Its practices are exposed to risk, subject to the pressure of contrasting desires. Possibilism may open a path to influential factionalism, despite all good intentions. A commonplace, dangerous elegy for the contingency could follow. Does everything proceed well as long as the process is completed? What sort of mediation is acceptable? Which choices risk being opportunistic? It would be hypocritical to deny these problems, but the answer — according to a truly reform-oriented vision — may be entrusted only to the ethical and political responsibility of those who govern or serve as technicians. An *ethics of*

responsibility that is not based just on preconceived, stated convictions, but on the willingness to account publicly for the effective consequences of the actions taken (instead of hiding behind pre-existing conditions and norms, as legal formalism teaches us). Campos never lacked this sense of responsibility, in contrast to others (Campos, 1978). This is an important reason that — together with the three just illustrated — can explain his singular topicality, while other references, despite being authoritative and ambitious, seem destined to remain in the shadows (or memory).

3.3 Unfulfilled Hopes

Whether the disciplinary situation is critical is nevertheless a widespread feeling, based on current experiences and compared to past expectations (Campos and Oliva, 1993). Planning practice is an indelible part of the daily administrative life of cities and territories. Its reputation, however, has long been in decline. While its bureaucratic function remains untouchable (to be withstood with patience or resignation), its visionary strength and place-shaping seem to be enormously weakened compared to the initial periods, and the capacity for public and collective fascination is now practically zero. Despite all of this, the response of the discipline continues to be monotone and weak. There are two common tracks. One component seems still to shelter under orthodox positions. The main responsibilities may not be endogenous, but rather attributed to the context. Planning culture has long had good solutions; the problem is that they are not respected or applied rigorously. The hope is a substantial return to the best directive models of modern town planning (which in Italy would still be represented by the National Law of 1942). It would therefore be necessary to reactivate and strengthen the functions of general and mandatory planning and the public role of control to restore clear powers and undisputed certainties to a field of practice that is always ambiguous and controversial due to the pressure of factionalism and the inevitable insurgence of conflicts of interest. This vision is unfortunately simplistic and out of date, as is Luigi Piccinato's legacy. It underestimates the fragility of the public sector, which in this field was not able to conquer the levels of awareness, capability, and efficiency invoked by Giovanni Astengo. On the contrary, the productivity of the sector was modest for long periods, as was the strategic capacity and willingness to assume specific and direct responsibilities (due to prudence and convenience, it is better to play more anonymous and conformist bureaucratic roles). Founded doubts affect the planning content itself. What is needed are certain general and possibly binding norms, which should

be valid in the medium to long term. However, if a master plan is dated (that is, conceived 10–15 years ago or more), if, as generally occurs, it was activated through area projects that are often fragmentary, without a clear or consistent programming logic, can we really rely on the sense and therefore the substantial legitimacy of residual norms that have still not been applied? A positive answer is not taken for granted and this temporal *décalage* is one of the great causes of the miserable fate of planning codes in a variety of situations. Regulation has a merely bureaucratic function (such as current standards which therefore require compliance, but are largely stripped of their original sense); or the function may be instrumental, like pure simulacra, which could be subject to easy, perhaps opportunistic revision, according to momentary conveniences. This harsh reality has nothing to do with the ambitions and claims of dogmatic planners (to adopt Campos' stinging language).

A more reasonable alternative has always been the perspective of reform in the sector, which in effect has motivated the most active components of the discipline since the Second World War, that is, even before the new general law (issued in 1942) was effectively tested. The initiatives have been repeated over time in different phases with enormous difficulty and substantially inconclusive results, save for some partial innovations. In the mid-1990s, Campos — as a figure emerging from the family album mentioned above — guided the disciplinary culture towards the last attempt at reform (Campos, 1995). This led to significant developments, at least up the first decade of the 2000s. It is difficult not to share the inspiring principles (which, however, did not convince dogmatic planners, though it does not seem necessary to pause on these issues once again). Campos is recognized with the merit of having undertaken and tenaciously pursued the path of reform, which in Italy always encounters demanding obstacles, today more than ever (the success of populist and sovereignty ideologies tends to negate the possibilities of good reform-oriented governance at the roots). On balance, however, it is inadequate (the author himself was aware of some limits: Campos, 2010). A legislative framework that is too fragmented, redundant, and confused, destined for routine applications to be performed due to inertia (lacking any alternative) rather than through conviction; a matrix that is still essentially synoptic or systemic (increasingly ritualistic and out of date); the dispersed multiplication of planning levels (still too numerous and even partly irrelevant); a concept of structure plans that is still comprehensive and compilatory rather than being truly strategic (and therefore selective) and design-oriented; and the scarce integration

or coordination defects among the various tools around which traditional master plans are restructured (the different stages among processes relating to each tool and the consequent multiplication of decision-making arenas are two limits that should not be underestimated). Campos could not avoid these traps. Perhaps he did not perceive all the dangers; more likely he had to accept various types of influential mediation to conclude the reform processes (at least on the regional scale). We should not forget that in that stage, a large part of the discipline felt closer to tradition (hence to dogmatic views) rather than to any hypothesis for radical change. This would, however, have required — and would require — the technician's role to be more responsible and discretionary, which continues to frighten many players in the field. The conclusion might be that this was the possible mediation. Unfortunately, after the last 15 or 20 years, the spirit of reform seems to have died out. Planning practices risk diminishing to fulfil formal functions in the sector, necessarily carried out by law, without much care for the implications for and impact on the context. There is no shortage of good reasons to attempt to change the rules of the game, but every idea for further reform seems to be politically and socially complicated or generates serious opposition such as demonstrated by the recent case of Emilia-Romagna (Palermo, 2019). It is an embarrassing situation.

3.4 The Reform-Oriented Culture of Possibility

One can live with embarrassment due to resignation or diversion. Many disciplinary actors have preferred to avoid these problems, dedicating themselves — not always in critical or reflective ways — to a variety of fashionable topics: starchitecture, place-making, smart cities, greenwashing, etc. Or one could ask: does it make sense? Is a *reformist programme* possible (even) *without reforms*, i.e. despite the current evident difficulties in carrying out effective reforms? A truly *possibilist* culture should push in this direction. Once again, Campos and his experience could provide support, if we reconsider some events from the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, it was necessary to be aware of the failure of the first, important attempt to reform the National Planning Act (Campos and Oliva, 1993). Disappointment did not prevent Campos from undertaking some experiments that I would consider exceptionally interesting. The first step was the energetic launch of a substantially original topic for the disciplinary culture in Italy: city planning as an administrative process (1967). This not only related to highlighting the decisive function of implementing planning choices (a topic that was too marginal for Luigi Piccinato), but also overcame a

merely methodological concept of the problem (the risk relating to Astengo's rationalist approach, generally rooted in the most common managerial culture). I have already reiterated that for Campos, however, implementation was a *political action* requiring collective consensus building and therefore cooperation between politics, technical skills, and society. This change tended to favour the concrete effects of choices with respect to pure visions and assumptions.

The second step was the creative use of a variety of pre-existing tools, albeit partial and formally destined for other functions, to realize important reform-oriented objectives in specific contexts and short times. The 'economic and social housing plan' became a device that — while awaiting a new master plan — allowed a strategy for equitable and sustainable urban development to be anticipated in crucial areas; the planning standard was understood as a key variable in public programmes to protect and regenerate urban conditions; zoning became a guarantee for nonsegregated, multipurpose transformations consistent with the urban morphological features; onerous planning authorizations anticipated innovative mechanisms for equalization; master plan variants were an agile tool that accelerated the virtuous review of current planning norms, when these become out of date or even damaging. The result is a vast, intelligent repertoire of substantial innovations capable of transforming the quality and efficacy of *planning-in-action* (Campos, 2010, 2011, 2012). As I have already noted at other times (Palermo, 2023a), these steps held not only local value. Such experiences show a forward-looking anticipation of innovative perspectives of 'public policy' (Dente, 1990; Crosta, 1990, 1995), which were then confirmed internationally, as in the implementation studies of the early 1970s (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Hill and Hupe, 2002) and the 'policy tools' approach that emerged in the 1980s (Hood, 1983), with ample developments in the new century (Salamon, 2002; Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004; Howlett and Mukherjee, 2017; Howlett, 2023).

Those contributions were insightful nearly 50 years ago. Why are they still worthy of attention today? Let's be frank. The possibility of reform, albeit indispensable, has long seemed rather weak in Italy, due to structural factors (lack of productivity and education, widespread illegality), the pervasive influence of some ideologies (welfarism, populism, sovereigntism), the lack of political leadership capable of guiding change. City planning is certainly not the sector for which particular and immediate change can be imagined. This does not mean passively accepting the current trend.

As Campos showed, there is a responsibility to act in a reform-oriented sense, within the possible limitations. This means measuring oneself against the capacity for effective action, not just through statements and good intentions (a serious limit of politics in our time). We need to re-establish truthful discourse — it would be best to rethink the *parrhesia* of the classical world (Foucault, 1996, 2009) — on truly complicated problems that are the object of deceptive representations as well as hypocrisies or falsifications in discourse on architecture and urban development. We need to overcome the vicious cycles of discourse in planning: abandoning old ideological diatribes to concentrate pragmatically on the functionality of current tools, which can probably not be understood as the key framework of each urban policy, but as a partial contribution that should converge in a broader framework of policy tools used with a reform-oriented spirit. Therefore, we need to recognize that the responsibilities of urban planners can no longer be limited to drafting and managing master plans, but must be extended to a set of urban policies and area projects which today represent the key of urban transformations (as some precursors already anticipated; see Chapter 5). We need to be aware that *possibilism* is the only paradigm that can reasonably guide planning action and that this vision avoids opportunistic trends only if it is accompanied by authentic *ethics of responsibility* (Palermo, 2022, Section 9.3). These are the indications I draw from Campos' research and experience. It seems to me that the message is clear, current, significant.

3.5 An Exemplary Path, but a Far-Off Goal

Revisited following the order of the times, Campos' path marks three crucial phases, each of which expresses strongly critical content and a targeted search for innovation. The first is the turning point in the 1960s: 'city planning as an administrative process'. This faced serious issues such as oversized plans (a practice that was common then) and insufficient attention to the problems of implementation. It therefore represented a substantial break with respect to the influential positions of the master Piccinato and a more convincing alternative to the rationalist and methodical vision of the master and his friend Giovanni Astengo. In that phase, the contribution appeared to the avant-garde even on the international scene (little does it matter that it long remained little known or recognized) because it assumed an influential view of planning as 'political action', while the disciplinary culture hesitated to choose between a plurality of emerging visions (as documented by Taylor, 1998 and Allmendinger, 2001), or it still lingered

on technocratic and rationalist ideologies (Faludi, 1973, is an exemplary reference). On the other hand, it is interesting to note the convergence with British pragmatism/reformism from Patrick Abercrombie to Peter Hall (Hall et al., 1973; Hall, 1988).

The second phase, between the 1970s and early 1990s, was a period of invention and consolidation of the ‘planning reformist programme’, destined to become the guiding paradigm of Italian city planning. This was due to a series of important experiences in the field (Imola, Cervia, Rimini, Modena, Reggio Emilia, Ancona, Pavia, Bologna), accompanied by fertile reflection and theoretical framing, in which Campos (1987, 1991) adopted a language and style that were always essential, without conceding anything to intellectual ostentation. As mentioned above, the two most interesting innovations may be seen in the creative but responsible use of the available policy tools and the pragmatic/possibilist (not technocratic) reinterpretation of the guiding idea of *planning as a continuous process* based on the principle of ‘learning by doing’ (Campos, 2001). Those choices wound up being in line (even if the fact had no evidence) with some contemporary orientations in the international culture. I am referring to some specific tendencies in a disciplinary framework that is still varied, divisive, and always in a precarious balance (Palermo, 2022): Ernst Alexander’s ‘revisited (contingent) rationalism’, Donald Schön’s ‘reflective planning’ (1983; 1994 with Rein), and John Forester (1993) or Charles Hoch’s (1994) ‘critical pragmatism’. There is no relationship, however, with the innumerable ideological temptations that have crossed the area: technocratic (Faludi, 1973), radical (Friedmann, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2018), or collaborative/communicative (Healey, 1997; Innes, 2008) visions.

The third period comprised the ‘attempts at reform’ in the mid 1990s as an attempt to give an institutional look to the widespread, developed reform-oriented experiences at a time that might seem politically and culturally favourable (Campos, 1995; Oliva, 2006, 2008). That assessment proved to be unfounded: a country historically incapable of sharing and enacting substantial reforms knew only how to produce a certain number of new regional laws which were also unequal and still partly influenced by tradition. In addition, the reformist programme supported by the INU (save opposition from the most dogmatic component) presented some elements of ambiguity or risk. Restructuring the *master plan* into three components (regulatory, structural, operational) generated complications and delays in the country related to legal formalism and administrative inefficiency (Leonardo Benevolo never shared that option). Some worthy choices

seemed questionable. Campos probably had in mind the innovative experiences observed in Spain at the time when he imagined the ‘structure plan’ (in fact, he declared that the Vila Olimpica project, conceived in Barcelona in the early 1990s, could be considered a good model). In practice, however, the prevailing idea of the tool in Italy was not design-oriented, but more attuned to the British ‘structure plan’ as a general descriptive framework already tested and overcome long before in other contexts. The third period therefore appears less innovative and promising compared to the previous ones. Our planning institutions — the INU first of all — shared a widespread unease and need for change in the world (as shown by the legislative revisions instituted at the same time in other countries: the Netherlands, Great Britain, France). Nevertheless, the vision and technical hypotheses for reform marked an objective delay in Italy: as an unoriginal (even late) and perhaps not sufficiently thoughtful recovery of models already tested elsewhere without convincing results. A couple of decades later, it is difficult to claim that the result has been positive overall. Rome (Campos, 2001) may hold value as exemplary evidence of the deviation between intention and result. Rightfully, Emilia-Romagna changed its Planning Act. The new scenario still need to be tested (the first pilot experiences are not enough: Gabellini et al., 2023; Palermo, 2023b); however, a weak idea of urban planning that raises well-known problems is formed (which I discuss extensively in Chapter 5, dedicated to Gigi Mazza). It would be an illusion to imagine that the new strategic approach is a great innovation and, especially, that it represents the solution to every problem (because the limits have been clear for some time: Healey et al., 1999; Albrechts et al., 2003). In other regional contexts, however, inertia prevails. Planning Acts are not renewed, although the credibility of the current tools is noticeably compromised. As a result, their use tends to be bureaucratic and procedural according to the *post-planning* drift that I mentioned above. The edifying aspirations of the reformist programme have therefore not been fulfilled. It is a pity that we cannot rely on Campos’ contribution in such a delicate period. We still need his capacity to invent and practice reform-oriented actions, despite the delay in institutional reforms.

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4. The Urbanist that Did not Evade City Design Responsibility (Bernardo Secchi)

4.1 The Turning Point

The most interesting individual paths are usually not monotonous, but the change that Bernardo Secchi introduced in the 1980s was truly impressive. I remember (I was in Venice then) that when we found out that Secchi intended to deal directly with plan-making, various friends and colleagues were incredulous. It is true that Secchi could boast of his training in civil engineering (with Muzio), but the distance between *Squilibri regionali e sviluppo economico* (1974) and *Un progetto per l'urbanistica* (1989) seems very large. He was probably influenced by the sense of institutional responsibility after becoming chair of Urbanistica (1975), moving to Milan, and becoming Dean of the School of Architecture. In a period of great disciplinary uncertainty, in which discourse on crisis events in the discipline in Italy multiplied while experimentation with the National Planning Law of 1942 was still incomplete, Secchi took on the responsibility of proposing and testing an interpretation of the topic, grappling directly with the production of master plans. In 1990, he opened a professional architecture and planning studio with Paola Viganò, perhaps on the trail of youthful aspirations of becoming an architect. These two moves were demanding, courageous, and based on objective reasoning; on paper, however, institutional rules would have allowed him to limit discontinuity, opting for a role as 'analyst and spatial planner' that seemed more consistent with his previous profile. As a result, Secchi's work amounted to an intellectual/professional experiment as unusual as it was radical: the unpredictable step from the figure of an *urbanist* that was then more familiar in North America to that of the *town planners* (or better yet, *city designers*), which tested themselves concretely against the problems of physical planning.

Many renowned figures in international urbanism did not even consider this possibility. David Harvey or Saskia Sassen only ever acted as refined analysts of social and spatial processes (Harvey, perhaps, with greater ideological emphasis on a possible 'rebellious' future). As Alessandro Pizzorno has reiterated (in his debate with Secchi and Crosta, 2013), sociologists were not asked to design urban projects. Richard Sennett is a frontier figure, capable of reconciling an interpretative and critical sensitivity to social and urban aspects, formulating opinions and suggestions concerning the ideation and urban quality of places (Sennett, 2018; Sendra and Sennett, 2020). However, he did not want to face the responsibility of plan-making.

At the same time, the world of urbanism, tending to work on relationships between physical forms and ways of life — despite the commitment of influential schools (for example, MIT, under the guidance of Lloyd Rodwin in the 1980s) — was not able to create a developed, unitary alternative to the most widespread tendencies in urban planning, giving life to a variety of incomparable experiments, from the professional models of *new urbanism* (Talen, 2019) to tactical, remedial, short-term orientation of *everyday urbanism* (Stevens and Dovey, 2023).

Secchi maintained a long-term vision and a commitment to providing a basis that was not merely subjective and justifications that were not merely contingent on physical planning, showing that those choices are not simply entrusted to pure individual poetics (the somewhat superficial accusation made by Mazza, Chapter 4), or reducible to the pure reiteration of a professional style. His original path was marked by interaction with eminent figures in Italian architecture and architecture-urban planning, where the role of Vittorio Gregotti was very important. The option was not taken for granted in the disciplinary framework of the time because Gregotti's profile, as authoritative as it was, wound up being eccentric compared to the normal Italian planning domain. Perhaps relations were favoured by the guiding role of the two authors in the *Casabella* and *Urbanistica* editorial projects at the time (dense, productive interaction developed between the two journals). Perhaps Bernardo Secchi was influenced by youthful aspirations, attracted as he was by the world of architecture. At any rate, not only did the analyst become a city designer, he chose an interpretation of the role that seemed unusual and demanding. This meant turning the attention once again to radical, substantially unsolved questions. Is it reasonable to claim (still) the cultural and disciplinary independence of urban planning, or is the decisive framework of reference always architecture, provided that dialogue is guaranteed (as Denise Scott Brown, 2009, hoped for) with the critical and interpretative capacities of an active patrol of 'socio-spatial analysts' as experts of *urbanism*? Can the centrality of topics relating to the physical city be refined according to the most traditional principles and tools of town planning, or is nonmarginal renewal necessary, bringing into play visions, rules, and projects? How can we reconsider the relationships between master plan and urban project if the goal is fertile integration rather than the alternative? Secchi used these issues to build and test a paradigm hypothesis, or better yet, a sequence of hypotheses over time. These became the measure of opinion towards a singular and bold experiment.

4.2 Plurality or Indeterminacy

Prima lezione di urbanistica (Secchi, 2000) is not the pedagogical text that a reader might expect. It does not present a simplified definition of the subject and its practice, nor does it negate the multiple positions in play, which are ‘irreducible, albeit, at least provisionally, equally legitimate’ (ibid., p. x). However, it does not elude the responsibility of expressing an idea of city planning: ‘the topics, means of actions, and fundamental roots; the challenges of the present; the knowledge and techniques that are perhaps confirmed over time’ (ibid., p. xi). In rare cases it deals with a single project that tends to anticipate a possible state of the future; in many cases, an emerging effect prevails, relating to a plurality of choices and individual actions, although conditioned by a set of shared norms and rules. Its standing, however, is high: the discipline ‘deals with territorial transformations, the ways in which they occur and have occurred, the subjects promoting them, their intentions, the techniques they use, the results they expect, the subsequent results, and the problems that arise from time to time, inducing new transformations’. The field is incredibly vast and complicated, including not only the realm of material transformations, but also traditions, beliefs, and images that inspire the visions and subjective behaviour; culture, nature, and history; the technique and justification for action; partisan intentions and emerging effects; and understanding of the context and process, as well as attempts to orient the future. Not only that, it is difficult to separate the individual topics, or disregard their relationships. What follows is ‘enormous dilation of the field that requires observation and study’ (ibid., p. 6).

Inexperienced readers may feel uneasy. The core questions that are outlined are clearly intricate and seem very diverse: they bring into play a variety of interests, questions, and skills that are difficult to coalesce into a whole. In fact, ordinary planners tend to play specialized roles, favouring just a few of the multiple functions. Secchi himself, as I argue below, chose just a few particular interpretations of the role over time, sidelining other topics and responsibilities that had even been influential in the early phase of his experience. The risk is that the original complexity is entrusted just to the illusory figure of the ‘generalist’ planner, a shooting star in the North-American disciplinary culture in the mid-1900s (Burns and Friedmann, 1985). The consequences would be negative: the radical plurality of challenges would echo very weakly in the substantial indeterminacy of the role and contribution. Reflective planners — or worse, planning theorists — risk acting as eternal amateurs who, in some inconclusive and often

arbitrary way, converse vaguely on complicated questions rather than occupying themselves with specifying and legitimizing the institutional role and technical expertise. It will not be that figure, rhetorical and evasive, that 'saves the world', as Bernardo Secchi reiterates in a debate with Gigi Mazza that took place in the *Giornale dell'architettura* (no. 29 and 30, 2005). Will our hero be capable of living up to the plurality of topics without falling into the trap of indeterminacy? I still have some doubts, even about the route indicated by Bernardo Secchi.

4.3 Cycles: Town Planning/Urbanism/City Design

When Secchi began his work as an assistant in the *Urbanistica* programme with Muzio as chair at the Politecnico di Milano, interpretation of the role was substantially consistent with the tradition of town planning in the early 1900s. A range of technical problems were assumed to be given. For each problem there seemed to be a well-tested treatment strategy and a tool for solving it, to be used rigorously and efficiently in the field without the need to discuss assumptions and the implications of the intervention in every circumstance, in perfect consistency with the widespread ideology of the engineer as a practical technician. The representation of the discipline and its knowledge in the form of a manual was a natural corollary of that vision. The fact that Secchi the engineer-planner aimed to study and then teach 'regional economy' with Fuà in Ancona and then in Venice for the new undergraduate course in Town and Country Planning founded by Giovanni Astengo in the early 1970s, is an unexpected event that must be explained. I suppose that the move was inspired by emerging discourses in Lombardy in the 1960s on issues of large-scale regional planning, at the ILSES, and due to pilot experiences such as the 'Piano Intercomunale Milanese' (Milan Intermunicipal Plan) according to Giancarlo De Carlo's original interpretation. This was a very innovative context due to desire, hope of joining issues in spatial form with the understanding and direction of economic and social processes. Nevertheless, it was the first radical change in Bernardo Secchi's path. I am surprised that the issue was ignored by current representations (such as the dedicated issue of *Urbanistica*, 153, 2014) that favoured a unitary vision according to what happened afterwards.

Instead, I maintain that those years saw the completion of the first act in a radical change (that would have had a second interval): from the traditional figure of the *town planner* to the profile of the *urbanist*, which was then al-

most entirely original in Italy. For more than a decade, from editing *Analisi delle strutture territoriali*, 1965, to the production of *Squilibri regionali e sviluppo economico*, 1974, Secchi was a great interpreter of relationships between economics, society, and territory. It was a time in which a distinguished School of Architecture, such as IUA Venice, agreed to institute a department of ‘Analisi economica e sociale del territorio’ [Economic and Social Analysis of the Territory], anticipating the vision that I mentioned above by Denise Scott-Brown. It became the site of investigation and experiments in the world of architecture that were unusual, but influential in overcoming limits of planning culture over time, which vacillated among technique, art, and pure management. One line of study questioned the statute of planning and the complexity of urban governance (Ceccarelli, Indovina, Folini et al., 1974; Ceccarelli, 1975 and 1978; Allione, 1976). Other contributions explored the economic and social mechanisms of the production of space with reference to the construction sector (Indovina, 1972), public works (Folini, 1978), and economic-territorial development (Secchi himself, 1974; Garofoli, 1978). It would be difficult to claim that some research changed the way of doing planning; in certain respects, it would seem to negate the possibility of disciplinary action. There are no doubts, however, as to the ability to reveal and partly explain the real background of planning practices, with a clear contribution to the awareness of players operating in that difficult field.

At any rate, towards the mid-1970s, Secchi’s interests changed again. This was not simply a return to his origins according to the most traditional forms of town planning. Secchi took a different route, which for simplicity I could call ‘city design’. This vision was reiterated multiple times with unequivocal clarity in the early 2000s. The problems of the contemporary city had changed profoundly with respect to the period of urban and industrial modernity. The crucial issue was no longer expansion, but ‘construction of the city within the city’ (the *renovatio urbis*, to adopt Manfredo Tafuri’s rich imagery). The transformations occurred by means of area projects; city planning and design had to protect their legitimacy and consistency, ensuring not only essential core rules, but especially a vision with an adequate horizon worthy of being a guide and measuring effective operations (Secchi, 2005). The result was a design-oriented idea of planning action and a profile that recalled the figure of the architect-planner. A substantial change thus occurred: the analyst-interpreter bravely measured himself against the design responsibilities (Secchi, 1989; 1998 with Viganò). What seemed to be confirmed was the scenario prefigured some years prior by

Gigi Mazza, who, in a debate promoted by Alessandro Tutino (1985), refused to group Secchi with traditional urban planners, recognizing his role as an interpreter (urbanist) or, eventually, as an architect that intended to deal with the city (ibid., p. 119). Secchi's course of experience was entirely original and reached unusual levels of complexity. The question is how fertile that unique path wound up being; up to which point the results lived up to challenges and ambitions that were certainly very important.

4.4 If Urban Planning Is a Design Practice

Un progetto per l'urbanistica (1989) is a book, although it was technically configured as a collection of editorials written in *Casabella* and *Urbanistica* between 1982 and 1988. This means that it is a consistent and robust line of thought through a sequence of contingent contributions, giving rise to a coherent argument that progressively focused on the need, forms, and techniques of a renewed 'architecture of the plan' (p. 3). While the discipline at the time seemed uncertain or confused amid a variety of questions, suggestions, and perspectives that were often incompatible due to the profiles implied by roles and expertise ('disorder of the discourse', p.7), Secchi felt the need to delineate and develop a new 'form of planning discourse' (pp. 44 and 75) over time. The salient characteristic is the centrality of the issues of the *physical city* ('singular places and emerging issues', p. 22) and new means of *designing planning tools* (pp. 137 and 265), which implied rules for consolidated fabrics, but also guidance or executive projects for areas of transformation ('special criteria and ordinary rules', p. 79). According to Secchi, city planning rediscovered its design-oriented vocation because: it had to deal with the need to redesign strategic urban areas requiring targeted forms of modification and reuse (pp. 92–102); it assumed the responsibility of a unitary project of open spaces no longer intended as residual areas or those of secondary interest ('progetto di suolo', or 'designing open space', p. 129); the master plan became a material tool for 'rebuilding the city within the city' (p. 120); and a design-driven urban vision became essential for imagining (and therefore discussing, choosing, justifying) the future of the city (pp. 211–218). This means that there are many — all relevant — reasons why urban planning must be conceived as a design practice, even if this conclusion is still not widely shared by part of the discipline. Secchi had no doubts, however, and outlined a fascinating proposal that was exemplary in principle, also because it was accompanied by convincing analysis regarding the new forms of social demand ('a general and substantial change occurred', pp. 48 and 194) and the declared

commitment to addressing, together, the *physical* and *social* aspects of the problems (pp. 87 and 332). This was a shocking perspective compared to the timeworn practices of bureaucratic planning at that stage, but also uncertainties in the disciplinary debate, which for some time had declared a state of crisis (the positions of Gabrielli, Romano, and Tutino come to mind), but did not seem to have the strength or desire to indicate a new road. Secchi's change in subject — from urbanist to city designer — could become an opportunity for change in the Italian planning culture.

4.5 Discursive Formations

Un progetto per l'urbanistica represents a temporary landing point on a path that had lasted at least ten years, and which had found a fundamental intermediate step in the book *Il racconto urbanistico* (1984). The engineer-planner, who had become a socio-spatial analyst, approached the world of town planning again, beginning to reflect on the discursive formations used in disciplinary narratives. This perspective was certainly original for the planning culture, from its origins up to that phase, but inspired by some trends that were then influential in French structuralism (from Roland Barthes to Michel Foucault). In his book from 1984, Secchi understood discourse analysis created by the discipline as an intermediate step — perhaps an indispensable opportunity — between the worlds of social practice and spatial transformation. Before competing with the material effects of urban operations, another two large issues had to be faced: public policies and planning styles that come together in the course of events, according to goals and forms that had changed over time. The construction of the organic city immediately after the Second World War led into the concept of the plan as a democratic process of collective choices in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by the demand for a just society, but also growing pressure to rediscover the physical city (Secchi, 1984, p. 48). *Il racconto urbanistico* is therefore a work of transition. I do not believe that recourse to discourse analysis, albeit original, should be considered a decisive innovation (the hypothesis formulated by some observers). Unfortunately, texts on urban planning are often commonplace: generic, repetitive, exhortative. The analysis cannot help but highlight these features, as shown in the common narratives of the crisis in effect before the urban planner's redeeming intervention. The most interesting point is recognizing, in the field, the establishment of particular 'discursive formations' over time. This is a weaker notion than a theory or paradigm (Secchi, 1984, p. 17), but it is nevertheless influential in the course of practice. As Foucault

brilliantly argued (1969, 1971), the discursive formations valid in certain phases and contexts affect what may be said and the spread of meanings. These devices are not determined by the intentions of individual players, but rather take shape as emerging effects. Investigating and questioning language is one way to better understand and try to orient practices. However, it would be wrong to focus attention on formal features of the texts (following Foucault's message to the letter, 1971) because in this field, the interpretation of content is always the main task: urban planning and building policies have always assumed 'the borders of a great allegory: speaking of them, one meant to speak of something else', of the history of the city and territory, social history, economic processes, etc. (Secchi, 1984, p. xvi-ii). Therefore, it is always a set of relationships that should be explored and interpreted. This is the exercise Secchi performed successfully, even if it only pertained to a preliminary step. The main contribution of the book still regards socio-spatial analysis and some related policies (even including a digression on the failed programme of 'regional science'; *ibid.*, p. 171). It was easy to note (Palermo, 1985) that the road to a new concept of spatial transformations was still long and largely imprecise. Secchi (1985, p. 201) correctly accepted the objection, reiterating the commitment to following the road (p. 206), which was undoubtedly partially achieved a few years later. Today, attention to discursive formations may be considered not as the opening of new scholastics (then longed for by Croset and Calabrese: Palermo 1992, p. 298), but as a provisional tool useful for orienting and accelerating the pace.

Secchi himself (1991) reconstructed the essential steps and motivation for his path in a less-familiar contribution which may nevertheless be considered exemplary. Between 1990 and 1992, I organized three national initiatives in Milan for self-reflection in the discipline, which surprisingly (I had no particular titles or any resources) had a large attendance and involved the dedicated contribution of many outstanding figures (the materials can be found in Palermo, 1991, 1993, 1994). On one of those occasions, Secchi published his essay *Teoria del piano urbanistico e ricerca sociale: un programma di ricerca* (1991), in which he once again clarified the reasons for his change. There was no lack of interest in social practices and public policies, but the author realized that it was possible to talk about those topics only 'through their material and visible depository' (*ibid.*, p. 45). He thus developed the need to directly observe (in the field) the territory as an archive — its documents, their forms, the means of organizing the forms — with the goal of returning 'memory and design' to social practices, two

aspects that are often overlooked and nevertheless remain latent (ibid., p. 47). The point of view, however, was not as a pure observer, but as a player in the game with a design-oriented intentionality; in Secchi's case, this was an actor that proposed a particular idea of city design due to some original aspects in the disciplinary framework. By observing the actual territory and analysing the forms of the space and discourse, attention is focused on creating a master plan that did not aim to be a drawing, a blueprint, but a 'text that participates in a process and social practice', open to comparison with others' arguments (ibid., p. 62).

4.6 A New Form of Master Plan

As documented by Patrizia Gabellini (Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, pp.71-81), from his first plan-making experience in Jesi (1983–1987), Bernardo Secchi had no doubts about the need to noticeably renew the tools and modes of disciplinary action. There may have been multiple reasons. Italian planning culture, even through its main institution, the INU and its publications, had reported a state of crisis for some time, although it still did not seem to find convincing outlets. The international reflection in a variety of contexts (France, Spain, Great Britain; even in the United States due to the ambiguous movement of new urbanism) highlighted the strategic importance of two large issues that had long been overlooked: rediscovery of the *physical city*, and the function of urban projects *in (of) the plan*. With partly different positions, such issues were addressed by Punter and Carmona in Great Britain; Huet, Devillers, Panerai, and Mangin in France; Bohigas, Busquets, and de Solà Morales in Spain; and Portas in Portugal. A similar orientation in Italy could be justified on the basis of great traditions, which had long remained at the margins of the planning world, such as the original thread of typo-morphological analysis of the physical town (Muratori, Caniggia, Aldo Rossi, Aymonino, Quaroni) and the development of relationships between master plan and urban project, brilliantly framed by Samonà and Quaroni, but masterfully tested by Giancarlo De Carlo. That set of sources and influences affected the plan-making experiences carried out by Vittorio Gregotti in the 1990s (Cagnardi, 1995), which testified to the possibility of a series of important innovations, despite the limits of the existing legislative and institutional framework. Three references seem particularly significant. On the side of analysis preliminary to forming the plan, the *abductive* approach it seems worth noting (Magnani, 2009). The ritual logic of 'survey before plan' is abandoned and it is necessary to anticipate an interpretation and future view of the physical and social town;

the territorial investigation is selective, with the primary goal of testing the outlined hypotheses. With regard to the technical form of the master plan, the clearest innovation was the distinction between two types of charts: those with strictly regulatory content, which represented the rules set for consolidated urban fabrics (generally relating to multipurpose zoning) and the so-called ‘structure frameworks’, lacking in binding value but useful for conveying an idea of the guiding criteria and overall proposals relating to certain strategic areas of urban transformation (the adopted language perhaps tacitly recovered some coeval models tested by the American *new urbanism*). Finally, the decisive innovation was the recovery of a crucial role for some *urban projects within the master plan*. Exemplary in this sense is Turin, where the ‘central backbone’ created by moving an old railway line underground, should have become the fundamental axis of the new urban structure, while another two large projects — one along the Po River and one along a well-equipped road axis accompanied by parks — aimed to reconfigure the edges of the city, put in crisis by a long process of urban sprawl. A limited number of urban projects with clear morphogenetic and functional value therefore came to be binding within the planning tool. The applicable law was still the obsolete one from 1942, with specifications induced by regional regulations. The reformist programme that would have recognized the distinction between structural frameworks and local operations still had not assumed a completed form (it was in a nascent state). However, Gregotti’s experience shows how important innovations were possible in practice within the planning regulations in force. The effective results were interesting in general, although we should be aware of the fact that after a few years of experimentation, Gregotti himself abandoned that line of planning practice.

Secchi naturally knew all the references (his dialogue with Vittorio Gregotti was special and direct). He did not consider them with the spirit of a scholar, but rather with the ironic and creative attitude of the *bricoleur* (Viganò, in Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, p. 112), ready to question the decisive vocabulary of any eminent author (as Rorty hoped, 1989), to explore the possibilities of reinterpreting and recombining some partial contributions into a new vision (as the wisdom of the good savage rather than the logic of the engineer might suggest, as Lévi-Strauss observed, 1962). Curiously, his choices were more radical than others’ (those of Gregotti, first and foremost). The most complete formulation is probably found in the master plan for Siena, illustrated in issue 99 of *Urbanistica* (Gabellini, 1990). Some options might be shared; others are the source of some perplexity. From his

first experiments, ‘imagining the future town’ (Secchi, 1989, pp. 211–225) was a decisive theme, which would later be enhanced by the *visioning* work conducted in very complex metropolitan settings (Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, pp. 211–259). The idea is that an essential view of the whole, based on an interpretation of the physical/environmental structure of the city and its evolutionary possibilities, represents a fertile framework of orientation and assessment for any planning choice. That is, naturally, provided that it is not understood as a finished model to be applied academically, or — at the opposite end — as a mere rhetorical suggestion (the *ville poreuse*, the *fractal city*, and other similar images may hang in the balance between the two extremes). The point is the capacity to check the outlined image through questions, tests, and well-justified integrations, as a matrix of possibilities that help to understand problems, ideate urban projects, and implement effective actions. This abductive use of spatial images is certainly promising. Another undisputed topic of interest is the attention Secchi dedicated to the question of ‘designing open space’ (1989, p. 129; 2015, p. 93). This was not an original perspective in the Nordic countries (as documented by the work of Jan Gehl, 1987, 2010), but was rather overlooked in the Mediterranean. Care for open spaces is a strategy with great ethical and civil importance, which may even be sustainable from an administrative point of view (thus compatible with the most current tendencies towards *tactical urbanism*). The fact that this primary need is seriously underestimated by many recent urban operations (e.g. some area projects in Milan) is surprising and embarrassing. Secchi should be recognized with the merit of having addressed the problem radically, achieving meaningful results in various situations.

Other key themes in the ‘new form of master plan’ seem less convincing, however. Working on some historical Italian cities, Secchi assigned a methodological primacy to the detailed survey of urban forms and building types that I find questionable. It is true that the specifics of the context could offer arguments supporting the hypothesis, refined in the experiences in Jesi, Siena, and Prato. However, the idea of organizing the work into some typical phases — surveying, listening, technical investigation, design refiguration — evokes an empiristic logic that I find incompatible with the abductive spirit that Secchi had always shown (like Quaroni and Gregotti). It is true that the author (in Siena as in Prato) invited us not to understand those operations as a methodical, rigid, and preconfigured sequence (there may be multilateral and recursive relationships); the fact remains, however, that the descriptive investigation aims to be systematic

(like Foucault's 'archaeological' description) and serves to play a constituent function (Secchi, 1994). What I find even more surprising is his idea of replicating the same approach, albeit only through sample surveys, in a complex setting such as Paris (Fabian, in Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, pp. 238–241). Perhaps the hypothesis underlies a latent overestimation of the physical dimension of the problems, as if morphological and environmental analysis were the decisive matrix of the urban imagination, while it should be an influential trace, integrated according to other important dimensions. In this sense, I continue to claim that Gregotti's abductive approach is more appropriate. A second topic of dissent is the multiplication of *progetti-norma* [urban projects involving prescriptive norms] in Italian master plans of the 1990s. Perhaps this was Secchi's reinterpretation of Giovanni Astengo's willingness to affect the architectural and urban profile of the future city using planning codes (Bergamo in 1970 is exemplary in this sense). However, Astengo's perspective wound up being unsustainable; the fate of too many *progetti-norma* with (theoretically) binding effects could not be otherwise. The most obvious result was the need for a formal variant to the planning tool (the analysis in Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, acknowledges the problem, but does not discuss it critically). The hypothesis may be valid for a rigorous selection of a few large urban projects of indisputable strategic morphogenetic value, as in the positive work by Vittorio Gregotti. As any policy analyst would suspect, it is a serious risk if the number of *progetti-norma* increases and their architectural and planning justifications grow weaker (De Carlo's opinion was severe; with Samonà et al., 1994, p. 21). Secchi naturally had all the necessary elements to assess these risks, but he seems not to have considered them. The practice risks being arbitrary and easily discredited by the course of events (based on legal objections in the case of Brescia; Tosi, in Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, pp. 156–163).

The balance of Italian planning experience in the 1990s did not even seem satisfactory to the authors themselves, deciding as they did to interrupt the tread to work in other European contexts. Does the responsibility for this result fall on the administration in Italy? I take a more cautious opinion. The 'new form of the plan' undoubtedly represented a courageous experiment that intercepted a few unanswered questions and presented original and ambitious solutions, though perhaps it evoked an idea of producing master plans as a great event in city history which has seemed out of date and unsustainable for some time (in fact, Campos' reformist view of urban planning chose simpler, more operational paths). Perhaps the perspective maintained by Secchi underestimated the emerging change in public and

social demand for the master plan. Just observe the most recent forms taken by these planning tools following the reform-oriented programme at the end of the century, but also according to the post-reformist tendencies in recent years, which increasingly shape the master plan as a vague strategic scenario. Perhaps the most current challenge is to give important, meaningful content to planning tools that are increasingly weak and risk becoming mere simulacra, accompanying or covering the primacy of conspicuous partisan interests. The vision suggested by Secchi instead still seems to evoke the *dreams of modern town planning*, which in effect the author addresses with clear respect, rather than critical impatience (2005, Chapter 3). Perhaps there is some foundation underlying the observation formulated by Gigi Mazza regarding *Il racconto urbanistico*: the conceptual framework is very sophisticated compared to the actual nature of the problems (Mazza, in Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, p. 52).

4.7 Returning to the Urban Question

In 2014, Andy Merrifield, a Marxist-inspired geographer from Cambridge, published *The New Urban Question* (dedicated to Marshall Berman, who died in 2013). The reflection drew on popular movements emerging in various parts of the world in previous years (the multiple urban ‘springs’), which according to the author were a symptom of the crisis of real democracy, which was then also affecting societies with more advanced democratic traditions. From this course of events, Merrifield drew a warning for urban studies: leave academia; abandon the dominant orientation towards *city development* (which in the author’s eyes seemed ‘Hausmannian’); and address widespread problems of inequality and injustice, which in urban areas had reached explosive levels and forms. Was this really a ‘new’ question? The terms in question were naturally the essay by Manuel Castells, *La question urbaine*, 1972, in which the city was the decisive spatial unit for social reproduction and the state was tasked with guaranteeing fundamental public goods and supporting collective consumption. That vision seemed archaic to Merrifield because the stakes and arena of conflict had changed profoundly and the direct role of capital agents and social movements were decisive. The conflict opened between a ‘ruling-class, global strategy’, supported by dominant interests and the ‘local people’s’ capacity for resistance or insurgency (Merrifield, 2014, p. xiii). There was a certain trust or hope that some possibility for positive transformation would grow out of such social practices. In this framework, one could also conceive of relaunching disciplinary studies, which Merrifield would nevertheless

not have entrusted just to the responsibility and forward thinking of the experts, because he also viewed as important the contribution of ‘amateur urbanism’ (2015), i.e. the effects of sensitivity and growing awareness of subjects directly affected by urban experiences, which tended to question ordinary representations of the problems by professionals in the sector. In the end, ‘the citizens should be the ultimate experts’, said Merrifield (2018, p. 41), sharing Jane Jacobs’ point of view.

The ‘new urban question’ was raised by Bernardo Secchi around 2010 and touched on multiple times in the following years (Secchi, 2015, p. 151). This can be understood as reclaiming the social and political interests of the 1970s and early 1980s, which found new inspiration in studies on European cities conducted with Paola Viganò in the early 2000s. It was perhaps also a result (although Secchi did not express this opinion) of the difficulties encountered in professional experiences, especially in Italy in the 1990s. At any rate, the author felt the need to call the entire category of urban planners, and himself in particular, to assume responsibility. Despite the extensive discourse and many programmes and experiments in the discipline, the urban conditions did not change; in many cases they grew even worse. Social inequalities grow and the city is therefore the clear mirror of an unjust society (as Edward Soja announced long ago (2010); there were few effects of Susan Fainstein’s hopes at the same time in favour of a *Just City*, 2010). Environmental quality should be a new right of citizenship (Dobson, 1999, 2006; Robbins *et al.*, 2014), and yet the conditions remain serious; in fact, environmental problems often seem intractable. Not even accessibility is really a right, because the urban availability of common goods is depleting and the material obstacles to mobility among places and functions are growing. In 2013, Secchi developed reflections on the topic, dedicating special attention to the questions of social inequality (*La città dei ricchi e la città dei poveri*). The city is not the promised place of social and cultural integration, but a ‘machine of distinction and separation, marginalization and exclusion’ (ibid., p. 3). This reality emerges not only due to extreme situations (e.g. the innumerable slums around the world), but also affects the normality of urban conditions. The organization of space feels the effects of social transformations, but in some way influences their course, and spontaneous tendencies do not seem promising. Is a better world possible (ibid., p. 55)? The planning culture is called to assume its responsibility, which extends from settlement principles to models of living, to the sphere of everyday life (a topic already anticipated by Secchi, 2005, Chapter 5). Frankly, the author’s new reflections do not seem to indicate original or convincing perspectives.

It seems to me that one question may reasonably arise. Do we really have to deal with a ‘new urban question’? The terms of reference are decisive. If one looks at the industrial and urban revolution on the threshold of the 1900s, there is no doubt that the phenomenology had changed; likewise, the contemporary city is different with respect to the ideal modern city. Instead, in allusion to the emerging forms of the ‘risk society’ currently represented by Beck, Bauman, and others (Beck, 1992, 1997, 2009; Bauman, 1994, 1997, 2007), the perspective has now been clear for many decades. It was already clearly outlined in the 1990s when Secchi conducted his city planning experiences in Italy, without placing particular attention on such topics. Perhaps it does not relate to an original phenomenon, therefore, but it is the planner’s view that must change to overcome the limits of more recent experiences (which Secchi, however, as a past urbanist could not help but perceive). The resulting question is whether the author proposes new ways to address these topics. I can see two limits. First of all, exclusive reference to the role of the expert continues to matter, with a profound distance from Merrifield’s positions and naturally those of Jane Jacobs. Personally, I am wary of any populist ideology, but nor am I disposed to placing unlimited trust in expert knowledge, after a period that celebrated the primacy (if not autonomy) of physical design, the use (or abuse) of preliminary surveys, and the illusion of *progetti-norma*. It would be reasonable to wait for an uncommon change in the way in which problems are addressed (which have been real for some time). Secchi announced an epistemological turn consisting of an original interpretation of the *vision/scenario/project* triad. In the next section, I clarify why, in this respect, the perspective does not convince me. The first consideration, however, is that it does not deal with a radical change in paradigm; in fact, it seems reasonable to suspect that the innovation is essentially methodological. Reflections by Neil Brenner, another well-known geographer with a critical orientation (2014 and 2015, with Christian Schmid), come to mind. He said that it is necessary to work rigorously to deconstruct current popular ideologies (‘urban triumphalism, technoscientific urbanism, urban sustainability’ and so on). It is necessary to recognize that what is *urban* is not a settlement type, but rather a social process that takes on different, multidimensional forms; it is always a *collective project* that emerges from a critical comparison between different positions and visions. The perspective proposed by Secchi seems to still be substantially twofold: the expert that observes and judges the world, ready to listen, but as an independent subject.

4.8 *Détournement*: ‘Scenario-Planning’

The innovation probably had two roots. The planning model tested in the 1990s — which explicitly aspired to renew the disciplinary field (Gabelini, in Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, p. 72) — was questioned over the course of events and some revision would nevertheless be necessary. Such a need became unavoidable because in the early 2000s, the scale of the problems changed, now (also) including large metropolitan areas, or even global cities (e.g. Paris, Brussels, Moscow). There is still fundamental interest in area projects, but the frame of reference needs to change. It no longer relates to a ‘unitary project for the city’ (as more general concept than a mere master plan: Secchi, 2000, p. 117), but a *vision*, i.e. the image of a possible future form of the territory, or better yet, its essential traces, which result from a critical interpretation of the morphological, physical, and environmental characteristics (with some attention to the economic and social dimensions) and the reasoned selection of some evolutionary possibilities. The result was a framework valued as a guide and measure (i.e. a guideline and assessment criterion) of effective transformations. The change is justified; it remains to be clarified whether it was a natural line of development of previous work (as the authors seem to imply), or an uncommon deviation, although not accompanied by a clear critical reflection on the need for change.

Attaining an urban vision seems to be a suitable and fertile step, as a specific contribution to imagining a possible form of the territory. The emphasis on some conceptual innovations — for example, the recurring idea of the ‘porous city’ — seems less interesting. This is not a descriptive category, because there seems to be little or nothing in common between the city of Naples evoked by Benjamin (1925) and the urban conditions of Brescia, Anversa, or Paris studied by Secchi and Viganò. It is a way of seeing the city that is charged with values: as criticism of separation and occlusion, an elegy to free movement and permeability, but also necessary mending of multiple fragments which now seem to disorganize the city (Wolfrum, 2018). I believe that it would be a mistake to overestimate the physical, mechanical dimension of the problems, as happens if the imagery of a *sponge* is used literally. For Benjamin (1971, pp. 102–115), porosity was a requirement of living in Naples, a particular feature of the spirit of the place, which could not overlook the connections between material conditions and lifestyles. Instead, the risk is that permeability among urban spaces becomes an absolute objective a priori, independent of real living practices and the resulting social demands. This perhaps occurs in Secchi

and Viganò's vision for Paris, which seems to assume porosity as a general milestone without a selection of actual primary questions that policies must nevertheless consider — with some risk, otherwise, for the feasibility of the programme itself. In any case, the feasibility of the vision remains a secondary issue; the effort of imagination should be appreciated, but the operational developments do not seem to be on the agenda. Perhaps the proposal itself is situated in a threshold space that precedes action. In fact, Secchi announced the exploration of planning scenarios as an intermediate step necessary for testing the solidity and pertinence of the urban vision and the possibilities for more specific developments. This seems to me to be a controversial point.

The literature on planning and management allows a lot of room for the issues of scenario-making. It generally relates to common contributions that emphasize methodological questions (though nothing comes of them, as Michel Serres incisively affirmed, 2016). Lindgren and Bandhold (2003) offered a series of common-sense recommendations on *scenario thinking* and *strategic thinking*. Chakraborty and McMillan (2007) suggested a promising yet still overlooked approach to sector professionals. They presented a scholastic guide that specifies objectives, focuses, contexts, horizons, input factors, tools, and so on (it is pure methodology). The contributions have multiplied in recent years. Schwenker and Wulf (2013) introduced a *scenario-based* modification of strategic planning as an effective approach for facing increasingly radical conditions of uncertainty. Zapata and Kaza (2015) looked to overcome a few simplifications that have marked the use of the method in the planning domain with respect to original experimentation in the realm of company strategies. There must be multiple scenarios, and it is appropriate to recognize the variety of actors participating in decision-making. Ramirez and Wilkinson (2016) presented the 'Oxford Scenario Planning Approach', as an advanced development of the school of the same name. Finally, Chermack (2022) offered a pedagogical review: the reasons to use *scenario methods*, how to build them, and how to apply them.

The approach taken by Secchi and Viganò is obviously different. They conducted original exploratory analysis on overlooked topics: the water system, biodiversity, energy needs, environmental sustainability, accessibility, and slow mobility (Secchi and Viganò, 2011). The problem is that they are all sector-based and largely hypothetical analyses because they generally present modest robustness properties: minor changes in some

premises may lead to different conclusions. Politics and the public administration instead need contributions of a different type: as reliable as possible, but above all, *integrated*. It is not so important to provide hypotheses on the consequences of some sector options; the real need is to reconstruct an overall framework of possible partial effects. From that point of view, however, the problem is technically almost intractable. My impression is that Secchi's discourse underestimates these difficulties. It calls on the need to explore scenarios, but overlooks the obstacles that arise along the road to an integrated assessment. The perspective seems attractive, but its operability does not pay off. The risk is that innovation is reduced to announcing good principles and intentions. Between the effort of imaging a future form (necessarily and probably fertile) and the reality of effective projects, there remains a gap that is not easy to overcome (even though the experience in Anversa led to important results). It would be dangerous if poor planners placed too much trust in some methodological promise.

4.9 Learning from Life Experience

I believe Bernardo Secchi was born to be a master. Authority, human passion (generous, but also a bit possessive), the desire to matter are all worthy of a master. Once, upon receiving the Grand Prix de l'Urbanisme (2004), Secchi spoke of *his* masters; rather, he declared he had 'known masters' (2015, p. 9). The clarification is not unimportant. Over the course of his experience, Secchi had the opportunity to interact with very important people, each of whom was an eminent figure in the related field (Muzio, Fuà, Samonà, Corboz, and others). This does not mean that Secchi considered himself someone's student; he liberally drew fertile starting points from each experience, reconsidering and recombining them in original ways. His discourse (as anticipated in Section 4.5) was technically 'without a reference' (Palermo, 1992, p. 319), in line with Michel Foucault's concept of *discursive practices*, which transcend the intentions and relationships of any individual player. Consistent with this, Secchi made use of multiple fragments of thought and experience, which he reworked in an original way, contributing to feeding the inexhaustible flow of discursive practices. From Aldo Rossi, Aymonino, and Quaroni, he drew the need for morphological analysis and the idea that one must distinguish different urban fabrics within a city; based on Quaroni's teachings, he made the distinction between 'piano-idea' and 'progetto-norma' (the generative idea and basic norms of planning tools); from Astengo, he adopted a concept of prescriptive norms capable of affecting the three-dimensional profile of future

transformations; from Samonà and De Carlo he developed the relationship between design and knowledge production and the guidance function of exploratory urban projects. His interaction with Vittorio Gregotti was so intense and continuous that it is difficult to distinguish specific areas of influence (which were nevertheless bilateral). The references would multiply noticeably if we were to look at other contiguous or at least interdependent disciplines. And yet none of the sources can be considered key; no decisive references emerge. Over time, however — herein lies the paradox — Secchi's view of urban planning became authoritative, as an emerging effect of a complex evolutionary process, but also the result, perhaps partly desired, for an intentional project.

Having recognized, as is right, his uncommon ingenuity and admirable commitment, I have to admit that I do not share all his positions (although critical voices are rare in the literature: Renzoni and Tosi, 2017). I am not convinced by the hypothesis, contradictory after what was said above, to once again present an authorial view of urban planning (which, whatever the intention, alludes to the questionable model of *starchitecture*). The primacy (solitariness?) assigned to the expert's vision does not convince me. It is true that ideas are not born simply out of popular assemblies (Pizzorno, Crosta, Secchi, 2013, pp. 41–43 and 86). However, following Lindblom and Wildavsky, it would not be right to overestimate the function of professional expertise, even more so in a complicated and elusive field such as the city and territory. In fact, expert knowledge would seem to focus on the peculiar capacity to interpret a physical and spatial form, gathering and revealing the most interesting evolutionary potential for society on the local and perhaps even other levels. The issue is undoubtedly relevant; the contribution is specific, necessary, and irreplaceable. However, a certain degree of irony is always good. I can understand the anxiety expressed by the latest geographers and urbanists, but it is not necessary to burden the notion of space with an excess of meanings and aspirations. Can spatial design play a decisive role in a new biopolitical project of emancipation and progress in the difficult phase of ecological transition (Viganò, 2023)? I maintain that it can offer a contribution — partial and probably precarious — to a society that today largely prefers the short path of myopia and conservation. I don't see how the contribution can be decisive. For similar reasons, in contrast to Gigi Mazza (Chapter 5), I do not think that urban planning today can provide decisive support for people's citizenship conditions, at least until it takes the form of a strategic vision that describes only urban areas with fuzzy borders and ideograms. I see an unbridgeable gap

between the technical particulars of the planner's vision and the complexity of problems that converge on the same space. Architect-planners cannot claim (only) a technical primacy, such as descriptive capacity, technically pertinent analysis, or the effort of imagination (Secchi, 2005); they should be more amenable to open interaction with the various reasons that come into play in a specific experience, cooperating in the possible synthesis with the best reform-oriented spirit.

In 1992 (Palermo, p. 320), I allowed myself to suggest that Bernardo Secchi take a more ironic attitude. That was not the case. The story remained twofold: the expert's good reasons on the one hand, and partisan interests on the other. The vision is too schematic, just like the one among orthodox planners that accuses physical planning of relying only on the poetics of some subject (Chapter 5). Conceiving a spatial image is just one component of an enormously more complex assemblage. The paradox is that Bernardo Secchi was absolutely aware of this obvious premise, even more so after his direct experience in the field of urbanism (Section 4.3). And yet he sidestepped that principle when he undertook the role of city designer. I believe that the problem is serious on any scale, but it becomes colossal when dealing with long-term visions for a global (or at any rate complex) city. Under these conditions, suggestions for a new spatial image require verification and integration in multiple dimensions. These certainly cannot be reduced to scenario-planning exercises that Secchi had to consider after the crisis of previous experiments that aimed more strongly at regulatory content in urban design. The *vision/scenario/project* rhetoric remains too simple and accommodating in my opinion (Secchi, 2015, pp. 87 and 181), little more than a desire or exhortation.

In planning practice, the question of politics cannot be avoided. If it is not addressed in the field, the risk is that planning acts only as a witness, that it may perhaps produce effects in largely undetermined ways and times (Secchi, 2000, p. 180). The nexus Leonardo Benevolo conceived between politics and planning is probably too binding (Secchi, 2002). However, it is curious that Secchi's discursive formation in the new century leaves so little room for politics and policies, laws and administration. Some components of the discipline have made contrasting choices that I consider not very convincing: legitimizing an evasive concept of planning, which is confused with the realm of policy analysis, or assigning primacy to the legal aspect in the hopes (always in vain) of an ideal law that would solve every problem. However, ignoring the institutional and administrative aspects

of the problems is another type of excess, which Campos Venuti always carefully avoided. Even more serious is underestimation of the political dimension of urban planning as an arena in which different social rationales come together in search of a provisional yet sustainable balance. The possible design of spatial forms is just one of the reasons in play; perhaps it cannot claim primacy a priori. It surprises me that Secchi placed little importance on these arguments. His discourse, rightly so, was pioneering, but we should not overlook a few omissions. Critical reflection for the moment seems to produce only a chorus of consent (see *Urbanistica*, no. 153, 2014, with articles by Gregotti, Smets, Portas, and others; Renzoni and Tosi, 2017). The treatment of spatial forms has become an original contribution of clear interest. It represents the long-sought destination on a complicated route that, as *Il racconto urbanistico* anticipated (1984), forecast a series of intermediate stages or steps: discursive formations, planning styles, public policies, social practices, and only lastly, territorial realities. However, we should reflect on a concerning fact: the outcome has involved the forgetfulness or at least the marginality of political and social dimensions of the problems, which had performed a decisive function during the first part of his path (at the time of *Il racconto*, the opposite scenario was developed; more social practices, less spatial analysis and design; Palermo, 1985). In this sense, Secchi's work may testify to the inevitable partiality of the urban planner's role and contribution, which winds up being more limited and specific than technicians could desire according to tradition.

My conclusion is that it is not appropriate to expect or celebrate new 'authorial visions', but to ask for continuous, tenacious, relevant, effective action to support complicated processes of social interaction. Even though this step may implicate slippage in the issue, from the great ambitions of 'city project' to concrete priorities in urban policies and local transformations. Secchi, meanwhile, still seemed surprisingly tied to a demanding idea of master plan or vision, which seems less plausible in the contemporary city. In his opinion (reiterated many times), an *incremental* approach is entirely insufficient. However, the history of the discipline is rich with generous exhortations which are always destined for checkmate. In the meantime, wouldn't it be necessary to dedicate greater attention to the quality of current policies and practices here and now, with an attitude that may be partial, but responsible and capable of producing concrete effects? Even *everyday urbanism* can boast a few good reasons.

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5. Lines and Shadows. The Urban Planner that Believed in Tradition and Disciplinary Institutions, but Recognized their Weaknesses (Gigi Mazza)

5.1 A Necessary Institution, but Weak and at Risk

In 1991, Gigi Mazza published a ‘memorial note’ dedicated to Giovanni Astengo in *Town Planning Review*. The text (Mazza, 1991) expressed great respect and sharing for a cultural and institutional programme that was certainly ambitious and demanding: turning town planning into a true discipline, legitimized by exhaustive, well-developed disciplinary know-how capable of guiding and justifying related norms and actions. The goal was essential for expanding planning awareness in the country and improving the effective capacity for action in the field. In this respect, formulating new laws, conducting some exemplary experience, or evoking visions and authoritative projects was not sufficient. The problem lies in guaranteeing ordinary practice an adequate morphological design quality, technical knowledge, and attention to the social impact of physical and spatial choices (three demands to be refined together). *A reform-oriented commitment, construction of disciplinary know-how, spatial ordering*: these were the cornerstones of Astengo’s vision. As is known, he offered notable interpretations to these issues and their relationships, although the outcomes of the experiences generally did not meet expectations. I believe that the same principles were decisive for Gigi Mazza’s concept of town planning. In this respect, his affinity with Astengo seems complete. Mazza’s reflection was born and developed through experience (an interesting case of theory arising from action), from his first work in the field, especially in Piedmont, to the events in Milan at the turn of the century. Planning implications and social responsibilities, criticism and the development of technical know-how, principles and tools of spatial ordering were the key topics, suitably revisited and investigated over time. Astengo’s experience taught us, however, that guaranteeing these results was not a simple or predictable operation. The history of the discipline documents a series of insuperable difficulties that were confirmed specifically in Mazza’s analysis, as can be seen in the quick recognition of the main figures and disciplinary events the author chose to consider. The framework that emerges is clearly incomplete, dispersive, precarious, and not very reassuring.

The issue of spatial ordering evokes various urban grid models, an essential component of disciplinary know-how and a matrix of zoning policies that assign land use and transformation rights with effects on the social or-

ganization of the space. Mazza was aware of Hippodamus of Miletus's inaugural theses (to which he dedicated more than one essay: 2008b, 2009), but he did not forget Aristotle's practical wisdom, which appreciated the rigour of theory but tended to curb technicians' enthusiasm: irregular, contorted layouts may be useful (e.g. for city defence), as well as being aesthetically more pleasing. The conclusion is a reasonable warning not to trace the issue of morphological design following predetermined, general schemes that are too rigid. In an entirely other world, Mazza found the orthogonal grid in the development plan for Barcelona designed by Ildefonso Cerdà (1860) as spatial ordering aimed at ensuring new conditions of equity relating to inhabitants' urban conditions and land owners' rights. This is one of the reasons for his interest in the author, together with two other requirements: the strong reform-oriented inclination and the tenacious desire to perfect his knowledge on the city. Urban design, technical know-how, reform-oriented policies: this was the profile/model for Astengo's (and Mazza's) aspirations. We cannot forget, however, the uniqueness of Cerdà's experience, which was successful due to a few opportune contingencies, despite strong, widespread opposition in the same local context. It was later largely ignored and references in the English-language literature are still very rare today. It therefore seems difficult to take the experience as a complete, shared disciplinary model. Nearly a century later, Patrick Abercrombie presented an important refinement on these issues in his Greater London Plan (1944), joining a large-scale spatial vision (based on the hypotheses of urban containment, green belts, and new towns) with powerful cognitive effort and indisputable attention to social problems following the war. In truth, the author's profile seems to be a balance between reform-oriented demands and some technocratic inclination; biographical studies have highlighted his ideological orientation towards 'moderate conservatism' (Self, 2002; Dehaene, 2004). Perhaps we are faced with an excellent professional more than a refined theorist or committed reformer (Astengo recognized his disciplinary authority). Nevertheless, the experience did not become the founding matrix of disciplinary developments in later decades. In contrast, it represented a threshold: perhaps one of the most important models of comprehensive planning ('total', as they used to say in Great Britain at the time; Astengo, 1966), before a gradual but inexorable drift that carried planning practice everywhere towards increasingly partial and fragmentary forms of intervention (save rare exceptions, among which Astengo's projects, from Assisi to Bergamo in the 1950s and 1960s, stand out).

Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes are another two key sources in Mazza's reflections. The profile is more eccentric than the ideal delineated up to now, although both were considered fathers of modern town planning, from authoritative people such as Lewis Mumford and Abercrombie himself. The fact is that attention to issues of spatial ordering remained secondary. As is known, Geddes preferred to address general problems of city development with respect to the specific questions of design control. With respect to regulation, he always criticized the mechanical, generalized use of some spatial urban grid. His role remained marginal with respect to the institutionalization of town planning in Great Britain in the early 1900s (Hysler-Rubin, 2011). The main experiences in the field occurred in other contexts (India and the Middle East), where the author anticipated an idea of planning policy that was radically different from disciplinary orthodoxy at the time (Ferraro, 1998). Over the long term, this perhaps became the author's most interesting legacy, even more so than his untiring action as a 'practical visionary' (Lesser, 1974) and certainly more than the celebrated doctrine of 'survey before plan' that was also the object of reductive interpretations along the lines of the modernist tradition (in search of a 'larger modernism' capable of integrating developments in technique with human and spiritual values: Welter, 2002; Eisenman and Murray, 2017).

Howard's profile also seems weak on the topic of spatial ordering. The widespread, continuous attention dedicated to his garden city prototype should not be misleading. A brilliant media gesture that opened the doors to clamorous and immediate success, with a quick jump in notoriety and interest (which is not a guarantee of concrete or consistent development). Nevertheless, the author was perfectly aware of the purely indicative and preliminary value of the sketched idea, which would necessarily be adopted and developed in relation to the effective site and context (in fact, the first experimental project was largely the independent work of Unwin and Parker). The dominant theme in Howard's vision and experience was always the desire for and commitment to social reform, which unfortunately did not achieve the expected results. The most innovative content in the idea of the garden city was lost over the course of the experiences, making way for more common processes of suburban reorganization or development. That substantial deviation was not decided only by the market; from the early 1900s, the Garden City Association itself (which should have promoted Howard's vision as an institution) pragmatically decided that the treatment of urban suburbs was a legitimate and indisputable part of its mission (Beevers, 1988). The issue of urban knowledge was taken up

by Howard with a selective, almost original orientation for the time: as the analysis of the economic feasibility of new urban transformations. That work, developed ingeniously, but approximative and loaded with pitfalls, aroused some interest in the media, but it was jeopardised by experiences that saw the triumph of more solid, traditional market mechanisms (Buder, 1990). In sum, as in the case of Patrick Geddes, the most important legacy probably regards the profile of the social reformer (despite Doglio's criticism, 1953), while institutional and technical indications for town planning remain a secondary contribution. The traces left in this field are modest compared to the ideal perspective indicated by Cerdà-Abercrombie-Astengo (although Abercrombie was inspired by Howard for his concept of the satellite cities of Greater London).

The gap is even clearer if we look at Henri Lefebvre, as Mazza aimed to do in more recent years. The French philosopher and sociologist was also interested in urban planning, although without much originality and therefore lacking relevant practices (Stanek, 2011; Coleman, 2015). Basically, even in that field, he limited himself to hoping for a bottom-up and rebellious social orientation. The vision is objectively far from the institutional or technocratic reformist programme interpreted by Abercrombie and Astengo. I believe that Mazza's interest in Lefebvre was a surprising move worthy of reflection and specific explanation. I will address the issue (Section 5.4), but I feel it necessary to anticipate a plausible reason: the need to reinterpret the basic social dimension of planning action, moving from a now insufficient structural view (as a purely social division of the space) towards the means and unknowns of the assemblage of multiple emerging and interacting forces (a topic I will address in the Conclusion, Section 5.10). What is certain is that the reference to Lefebvre introduces a further split or tear in the discipline that Mazza configured (although the author provides perhaps excessive evidence of some general similarities among his sources: Mazza, 2011a).

Cerdà, Geddes, Howard, Abercrombie, Lefebvre: if this is the family album, there is some legitimate doubt as to the consistency and maturity of city planning as an institution and know-how. A space full of suggestions forms, but it is disorganized and sprinkled with ruins. However, this is an unoriginal impression when one considers the (so-called) classics of town planning. Leonie Sandercock (1998) was right: the representation of these figures cannot be mythical, heroic. It is difficult to open a canonical text (for example, the interesting collection edited in Italy by Paola Di

Biagi, 2002) without experiencing a sense of disorientation or embarrassment due to the alterity of emerging views and the inexorable gap between edifying intentions and real effects. In fact, the disciplinary reflection continued to explore the possibility of ordering and recomposing matter (as any discipline is normally required to do) with ingenious hypotheses, such as the distinction between some ideological families by Françoise Choay (according to the known classification of town planning pioneers into progressives or culturalists, 1965); or the association of classical authors with different ideas of the city influenced in various ways over time (Hall, 1988). At any rate, the delimitation and organization of the discipline remains an open problem that the figures Mazza studied do not help to solve.

In my opinion, the impression is confirmed if, instead of considering the leading authors, we focus on the planning doctrines that Mazza investigated in his texts. Even from this point of view, the cultural landscape seems to lack a clear identity and it is marked by a series of failures. Aware of the historical limits of the discipline, Mazza was always involved in the demands and programmes for innovation that emerged in a variety of phases and contexts. He did not allow himself to be influenced by the invading rethoric of systems, immediately realizing the weak points in Brian McLoughlin and others' view (Mazza, 1987, Chapter 2). Rather, throughout the 1980s, he looked with interest at the British experience with structure plans that promised a cognitive basis and more exhaustive justifications for planning choices that were better coordinated on different scales (ibid., Chapter 3). We know that the programme did not keep its promises and that a substantial correction was necessary in a relatively short time. It would still be useful to reflect on the causes of the failure, because the problems in play are still current and partly unresolved. Mazza, however, no longer addressed that specific topic. In the 1990s (Mazza, 1995c, 1996b), he expressed a positive opinion of the notion of 'planning doctrine' introduced by Andreas Faludi to reason about the situation in the Netherlands (Faludi, van der Valk, 1994). This essentially dealt with an attempt to identify and distinguish a specific paradigmatic vision in a disciplinary area that too often seems plural, but unformed and confused (the notion of *doctrine* could be associated with that of *paradigm*, according to Faludi, 1996). It is a pity that the same author demonstrated how the use of the concept can become ephemeral and unproductive, presenting a series of impatient 'paradigm shifts'. In sequence, these consisted of: a neo-positivist idea of planning science (Faludi, 1973); Popper-inspired critical rationalism (Faludi, 1986); a simplistic 'decision-centred view' (Faludi, 1987) that adopted the plan-

ning decision as the fundamental issue, underestimating the crucial role of action and regulation; the celebration of spatial planning as the favoured model of the future, without care for the plurality and ambiguity of interpretations (first in the Netherlands, then in Great Britain and throughout the European Union: Faludi, 2010); and finally, the improbable appeal in Europe for a ‘neo-medieval spatial order’, while manifestations of localism and sovereignism multiplied (Faludi, 2018). This winding, inconclusive path may epitomize the difficulties of the discipline in thinking and choosing the most pertinent paradigm. In fact, the most common alternative was to continue to be an eclectic census of the variety of theoretical positions that at some place and time urban planners thought to conceive and test, but without a frame of reference or critical assessment (exemplary documents include Friedmann, 1987; Hillier and Healey, 2008; but also Gunder et al., 2018; Beauregard, 2020).

Mazza never showed a real interest in academic or ideological disputes and therefore in the field of planning theory (unfortunately rather introverted and with little responsibility). When it seemed necessary to address some theoretical topic, his opinion was firm and clear, although always courteous (Mazza, 1993a, 1995a). He challenged John Friedmann’s ideological option for a radical concept of planning that reflected anarchic or communitarian traditions, where the technician’s role is reduced to an organic activist of some bottom-up movement, or a mediator between partisan interests, whose functions and expertise, however, remain largely undetermined. Nevertheless, Friedmann underestimates the problem of technical know-how that experts must rely on and which would justify their intervention. From John Forester, Mazza drew on the contributions of ‘critical ethnography’, i.e. the capacity to investigate communicative relationships and bring planning into play in some specific contexts; however, he did not claim that those references were sufficient for ensuring that the discipline of planning had an identity, and he denounced the lack of attention to technical expertise necessary for the disciplinary practice. He recognized Patsy Healey’s ethical commitment: the concept of a planner that played not only a technical role, but also worked for a more just city (and society). However, Mazza did not share the idea that disciplinary know-how could have (just or mainly) a procedural, managerial orientation. A common thread interweaves the critical observations (confirmed a few years later: Mazza, 2011a, 2012): there is no shared interpretation of the role of urban planner as a political player, and the specific features and indispensable progress of their technical know-how risk being underestimated (Mazza,

1993b, 2002a). His objections are well-founded, in my opinion (Chapter 10), because infinite discourse on the issues of planning theory have not clarified some crucial points, although they have been evident for some time. One set of key questions regards the most appropriate function and forms of ‘spatial planning’ dealing with a radical ambiguity. Should it be understood as an emerging form of disciplinary evolution (which objectively seems necessary with respect to canonical models of modern town planning), or become a surrogate of traditional planning that risks evading its fundamental functions and responsibilities? Another essential point is the sort of regulation, increasingly weak, for both rigorous prescriptions and the capacity to anticipate certainties for players in the urban game. Are these residues of the modernist tradition now out of context? Or can/should the issue be introduced again in renewed forms? And how can we redesign institutional and technical relationships among components — programmatic frameworks, planning regulations, and concrete actions — that are now conceived relatively independently? Rightly so, these issues are at the centre of Mazza’s most advanced reflections (2004c, 2005, 2011a), which recognize the difficulties, but does not avoid them, as occurs with ‘self-critical planner’, in reference to the memorable image adopted by Campos Venuti when alluding to those who, under the weight of criticism (albeit reasoned), wind up rejecting disciplinary responsibility. Mazza did not intend to withdraw himself from the great issues that Astengo and other forerunners (the ones investigated and cited here) had long focused attention.

I add another preliminary observation: in the development of this research programme, interaction with the Italian planning culture did not play a very important role. With respect to Astengo, I mentioned above that he had great respect and a similar vision. However, it seems to me that Mazza never discussed the quality and results of the experiences in this respect (perhaps the question created a bit of embarrassment due to the impressive deviation between proposals and facts). Mazza was generally not interested in Luigi Piccinato’s work, except for occasionally rejecting a planning idea that would have been founded solely on ‘individual poetics’, as (according to Mazza) occurs to many architects (1997, Chapters 1 and 2 – texts written in the early 1990s). Personally, I agree with the negative opinion, but maintain that the reasons for the criticism are even more extreme: Piccinato’s planning idea did not lead to good results due to their authoritarian, imposing, and technically reductive nature. It is the disciplinary paradigm that should be questioned, although the mastership that Astengo

and Campos Venuti had always recognized in Piccinato remains to be explained (perhaps it was due the great authority that the author had gained in the somewhat provincial world of Italian town planning, which Piccinato himself claimed to have founded: Belli, 1996, pp. 44-50). Mazza did not investigate these issues, contenting himself with the simplified dichotomy between a discipline that wanted to be rigorous and advanced and an idea of physical planning that would be based on mere creative intuition. The vision is a bit schematic and may be understood as ideological bias. In effect, the issue of poetics commonly recurs as a discriminating factor when the reflection focuses on some architects-planners or the design-oriented interpretations in planning. Such is the case with the biographical note dedicated to Ludovico Quaroni in *Town Planning Review* (Mazza, 1992), which shows less empathy and sharing of intentions compared to the text written for Astengo. Such is the case of the ever marginal references to Italian experimentation with 'urban projects within a master plan' in the 1990s. Mazza's arguments do not directly involve De Carlo, nor Gregotti and Secchi; they are limited to marking a (questionable) alterity of those experiences with respect to responsibility and the essential requirements of disciplinary practice (Mazza, 1997, Chapter 3). Surprisingly, connections with the main thread of Italian reformist planning are also underdeveloped. With respect to the work of Campos Venuti, Mazza (2004a, Chapter 12) soberly expressed respect and attention, with appreciation first for the care for operational capacities and wise pragmatism. However, he does not take a position regarding the practices and resulting choices: no opinion of the exemplary planning practice inspired by the Italian reformist movement, nor of the ideas for reform at the end of the century. The fact may be surprising because in those years, Mazza was working on the same issues, but his orientation may have been different. His intellectual reflection was open to public opinion (primarily the experts); it was not and probably did not aspire to be a political programme.

My conclusion is that the debate in Italy represented a background for Mazza's research without ever becoming a decisive source of impulse and interaction. Direct experiences in the field were more influential, especially during the first part of his path, as was the debate with international trends, especially in the British-American world. The curious fact about Mazza's profile is that he seemed to have been born as a practitioner, but he drew more than important elements for reflection and learning from his experiences (following the best tradition of the reflective planner). He felt the need to initiate a rigorous path of intellectual research, even alone

if necessary, to try to bring order to the wicked problems that continue to afflict a discipline that seems incapable of finding a stable structure and shared operating method. There is no lack of reasons for investigating why the situation is complicated. These introductory notes, all rigorously drawn from Mazza's work, confirm that a potential ideal, according to the suggestive traces left by Cerdà, Abercrombie, and Astengo, did not support the test of experience. The demands for spatial regulation and social reformist programme were developed in relative autonomy and the results generally did not meet expectations. Between the ambitious domain of planning that is often impracticable and inconclusive and the practice of urban design the risk is that a divisive furrow remains, aggravated by lack of understanding and mutual intolerance. This is the uneven background of Gigi Mazza's research programme.

5.2 The Tribulations of a 'Distinguished Planner'

A personal note: I do not like commemorations that generally accompany the death or retirement of a distinguished person. The risk is that emotion and respect lead to a celebratory speech that becomes a lost opportunity for interaction, reflection, and innovation. There are numerous examples in the discipline, but I would like to be guided by Gigi Mazza, who, as mentioned above, developed specific objections (justified, in my opinion) to some theses supported by famous authors such as John Friedmann, Patsy Healey, and John Forester (Mazza, 1995a). And yet, if I read the contributions dedicated to Friedmann upon his death (in the commemoration seminar at UCLA, 2017, and then on behalf of authoritative figures such as Sanyal and Kunzmann, 2018), or if I open the book published in honour of Healey (edited by Hillier and Metzger, 2015) following her retirement, I find few traces of critical reflection. The image is edifying: 'planner's planner... the greater planning scholar of the twentieth century... the Pope of planning' (Friedmann); 'historians of social science will recognize Healey's body of work as a major contribution...' (meanwhile the representation is affectionately hagiographic). And yet there is no lack of motive for discussion, which could generate more fertile effects than the pure manifestation of consensus and praise. Mazza's critical observations, which I have just mentioned, are a good trace. The two authors supported two (different) planning ideologies. In Friedmann's case (2011), this was the vision of *insurgent planning* inspired by his experiences in South America, but anti-rationalist to the rationalism of the origins (when the young Friedmann was a student of the Chicago School). In Patsy Healey's case (1997), this was the

ideology of collaborative planning conceived in the wake of the ‘third way’ proclaimed by Tony Blair (but destined for a quick sinking) and presented to the discipline as a possible model of general interest, without a time or place. They are two substantially different alternatives, but both disputable due to various reasons and criticism (Palermo, 2009, 2022). Paradoxically — perhaps the most serious limit — the subjective propensity does not seem incompatible with an eclectic representation of the disciplinary field, understood as (acritical) accumulation of the main paradigms conceived and tested by planners in various times and contexts. For Friedmann, the planning discipline could oscillate indifferently between opposing interpretations, from technocratic rationalism to social insurgence; all that is left is to choose the best approach based on the contingent condition (see his afterword to the Italian edition, 1998, of the book published in 1987). For Healey, every position is worthy of consideration (whatever the orientation: rationalist, pragmatic, communicative, radical, or other). The great variety of trends (partly immeasurable) do not constitute a problem for disciplinary identity, but rather a test of the cultural richness of the area: ‘the porosity of the field — its very openness — gives planning theory a capaciousness which helps to create sensitivity to the multiple dimensions of planning as a practiced activity’ (Hillier and Healey, 2008, vol. I, p. xiii). I consider these conclusions to be unsustainable and risky, since they feed confusion and opportunism rather than worrying about paradigmatic and technical specifics, as Mazza had always hoped for. I do not believe that further ecumenical and consoling interventions are necessary, not even for commemorations. So I will not follow these models.

If I have to indicate a frame of reference, I would think of the career award, such as the ‘distinguished educator’ award that the *Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning* gives every two years to a scholar who has made important contributions to the development of the discipline in practice and in education. The initiative is regularly documented by the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. John Forester’s contribution dedicated to Lawrence Susskind, for example (Forester, 2021), stands out for the celebratory texts that I just cited, because it introduces space for critical reflection: at the very least, the essential path of the subject is reconstructed and punctuated by phases, topics, and the main turning points. Applying the same exercise to Forester (who I would have hoped to find on the list of awardees, which includes, among others, Friedmann, Rodwin, Fainstein, Sandercock, and Sanyal), the most striking fact is the turning point that was imposed over time: from an original and interesting critical interpreta-

tion of the interactive formation of planning choices (Forester, 1989, 1993) to a sort of psychology of actions and behaviours, where the planner can be asked for (unusual) requirements of ‘kindness’ (Forester, 2020a, 2020b) and a therapeutic role of social relationships in space (Kim and Forester, 2012). It is a nontrivial shift that confirms the decline of some noble aspirations (emancipation and justice) and a ‘behaviouralist’ drift that presents other limits and problems (that should perhaps be explained and justified). This path also marked how the planner’s way could easily become winding and surprising.

And yet, I like to imagine this chapter as a written essay to confer an award like the one mentioned above, which assumes a frank dialogue, unfortunately only with the works today (but I can rely on a long history of personal interactions with the author on the same topics). In search not only of some points of consensus, but also unresolved difficulties and possible divergence, because these critical points often serve for reflection and orientation. Gigi Mazza’s path is marked by obstacles, doubts, and deviations, as occurs with all the authors mentioned up to now. In the initial phases, he was dissatisfied with the state of the discipline, made clear by the experience of reviewing the master plan of Turin in the late 1970s. To explore the possibilities for innovation, Mazza looked at international trends, especially in the British-American world (a perspective that was then rather unusual for Italian planners). Almost simultaneously, he felt the need to re-examine the cultural roots of the discipline, with excursions into the Classical world and a close study of the precursors of modern town planning. The two lines of investigation produced a variety of starting points worthy of interest, although they did not lend themselves to a simple and immediate composition. What came into play was the complex question that in the late 1900s would be called *spatial planning*, the classical issue of regulation, technically in a precarious balance between zoning and design control, but always understood as social control of the space, the willingness to investigate and strengthen technical know-how that should justify disciplinary action. The results were not always comforting on these fronts. The aspiration for more developed know-how, capable of explaining and ordering the relationships between spatial forms and social processes, remained substantially thwarted. There remains a doubt about the possibility of ensuring a unitary design for the urban form; nevertheless, an orthogonal grid is no longer perceived in many contexts as a plausible model because the urban project — as with any political project in general — assumes and generates differences. The conviction that zoning is an

unavoidable principle of social and spatial organization seems even less solid today, if even Bologna, the mother of Italian reformist planning, is marked by urban areas with fuzzy borders and ideograms. The concept of urban planning as social technology able to generate better citizenship conditions is, in certain respects, taken for granted (the hypothesis may also be valid for other public policies); however, it is not easy today to account for the strength and specifics of this connection. In addition, the reference to Lefebvre has a ground-breaking effect. It introduces an idea of society and its transformations, which put the most orthodox institutional visions in crisis, and certainly those — from Abercrombie to Astengo — most like a technocratic perspective. In contrast, I maintain that the results relating to the interpretation of spatial planning were more promising. In the 1980s, Mazza had the merit of avoiding a few fashionable (systemic, structural) suggestions to focus on substantially overlooked issues that had been ignored by the discipline for some time (in Italy, but even beyond). Issues such as social and territorial imbalances, urban politics, and planning implementation did not become a pretext to invade the field of policy analysis, but the key for a critical review of disciplinary tools and processes. In the 1990s, these assumptions inspired a reinterpretation of the planning models and practices that had the courage to address generally prohibited problems, such as the flexibility of the rules and discretion of the choices. This adoption was not welcome; not only on behalf of the dogmatic wing of Italian planning (which strongly distanced itself), but also by the main reform-oriented disciplinary sector, which liquidated that view (laboriously tested in Milan at the end of the century), as negating the values, function, and responsibility of urban planning. The hypothesis of assuming those suggestions as possible lines of reform was rejected without discussion. However, after less than twenty years, reformist planning in Emilia-Romagna itself (with the new regional act of 2017) decided to follow a road that, with Mazza's anticipation, presents important similarities. Light and shadow, therefore, as normally occurs. Ebenezer Howard, who experienced more than a few personal vicissitudes, invited us to wisdom, irony, but also perseverance: 'One should never be excessively realistic in human plans. There are always too many difficulties and only a small percentage of aims may be attained... the percentage of losses depends only on the enthusiasm, energy, and perseverance of the idealists who undertake it' (Beevers, 1988, p. 184). With the same spirit — not dogmatic, but possibilist — my intention is to discuss the most controversial aspects of these events and their common thread.

5.3 Foundational Acts: From Legend to History

In search of the roots of town planning as an institution and discipline, Mazza pushed himself to the thresholds of city foundation (Mazza, 1996b; 2006). His exploration had no lack of reasons, for those who understand legends as cultural events that solidify over time, as a tool of shared, transmitted beliefs representing a nascent form of common knowledge (rather than avoidance towards irrationality). This is now an authoritatively shared vision, as testified in contributions by Blumenberg (1979), Detienne (1981), and Vernant (2000). Therefore, Mazza's orientation requires no initial justifications. The specific point is whether the myths considered hold relevant argumentative value compared to the theses that the author intends to support; if the historical events confirmed or questions the sense and strength of the legendary vision; if, as a result, there are still reasons today to reintroduce those images as a generative metaphor, or if they should be understood as an originating matrix that time has eroded or at least obfuscated to the point that the reference has become less rich, less exhaustive. All of these points seem controversial to me, although Mazza wanted to wholly confirm the representation of the topic in more recent work (Mazza, Gaeta, and Janin Rivolin, 2013; Mazza, 2015, 2016).

The most interesting sources selected by the author regard the foundation of Rome (reference to the Chinese tradition seems less incisive in my opinion, 2015, Chapter 1). The basic message is that drawing borders is an act loaded with symbolic value and social implications. It is divisive for its consequence; it requires justifications because in controlling the division of space, it affects the conditions and relationships of collective life. If a power is instituted, conflicts and losing interests may arise, with the resulting sacrifice of some component, as the legend of Romulus and Remus reminds us (Girard, 1987 and 1980; Golsan, 2002). This becomes pregnant imagery for representing the criticalities of zoning, shifting attention (rightly) from simply drawing borders to the results in terms of social division and control of the space. With the awareness that these issues — division and control, social segregation and protecting ownership interests — were decisive for the interpretation and success of zoning in North American society from the early 1900s. Reference to this legend therefore becomes a brilliant and effective rhetorical move. There is a paradoxical fact, however: it is curious that evidence of the *dividing furrow* is given precisely in the case of the founding of Rome, given that Roman society in the classical world represented an interesting example of blending and integration among peoples and cultures in comparison with the Greek *polis* and other

regimes of the time. In effect, Eva Cantarella chose another legend (drawn from Virgil with reference to Aeneas) to evoke the origin of Rome through the foundation of Alba Longa, the mother city of Romulus and Remus, a story of migration and interweaving between different worlds (Cantarella, 2010). Mazza's citation, therefore, lends itself to effective use in the area of planning, but it may not be the most significant with respect to the context of reference. The basic question, nevertheless, is the temporal development of the issue, i.e. the transition from the legend of the origins (which in contemporary culture has lost any sacred value) to the effective history of the events in dividing and regulating the urban land. This is perhaps one of the controversial topics in Mazza's reflection.

'Chi ha paura della zonizzazione?' (Who's Afraid of Zoning?) In that essay (1995b), as on numerous other occasions, the author supported the substantial and *necessary* function (Mazza, 1993b; 2006) of zoning in constituting the discipline of planning. In this sense, history would represent development consistent with the legend. The assessment, however, is not entirely shared. A specialist in the topic such as Sonia Hirt (2021) does not hesitate to recognize the wisdom of Jane Jacobs, who was an inveterate critic of zoning. In Italy, Stefano Moroni opened a rigorous reflection on the principles and implications of alternative concepts of regulation (Moroni, 2007; 2012, with Alexander and Mazza). Objections have grown enormously in recent years, based on empirical evidence, but there is no lack of important anticipations of this in the remote past, even in the golden period in planning regulation, in the mid-1900s. Today, it just so happens that a young planner from UCLA (Gray, 2022) and a wise legal expert from Yale (Ellickson 2022) independently published two sever accusations against zoning, each with arguments suggested by their areas of expertise: 'arbitrary line' (Gray) and 'abuse of zoning' (Ellickson). Are these two impatient and perhaps instrumental judgements, i.e. motivated by market interests that would prefer a freer field? In reality, Ellickson (1973) supported the same arguments half a century ago. In addition, insidious doubts have emerged over time, even in areas more open to planning regulation. If we examine the collective volume edited by Haar and Kayden (1989), one of the cornerstones of the reflection on the topic, we cannot ignore that authoritative contributions already expressed legal perplexity about the external effects of zoning (Part II), while the economists Nelson and Wheaton (Part IV) did not hesitate to propose its replacement with alternative tools. The same strategy was already anticipated by a few economists in the years of great regulatory expansion, after the tool was legitimized by the con-

stitutional sentence in the Euclid case (1926). Over time, various families of replacement techniques were examined, such as: recourse to ‘deed restrictions, ad hoc agreements’ based on independent initiatives of residents from parts of the city; the prescription of limits, obligations, or *nuisance* penalties (to control negative externalities); the regulation of transferring development rights; and the design of ‘form-based codes’ which are more respectful of the morphological and typological qualities of urban fabrics. Each hypothesis presents specific difficulties and advantages (Gray, 2022): a panacea does not exist and many problems still seem unsolved. In the meantime, it would be reasonable to admit that the most recent arguments for zoning are objectively weak. See the collective book edited by Sclar et al. (2020). In that setting, Jerold Kayden could not find a better argument in support of the tool than to praise the ductility that permits a vast range of variations, with likewise elevated degrees of flexibility and discretion. In essence, Kayden confirms that consistency and obligation are requirements at risk due to the widespread use of *special legislation* (‘incentive zoning, planned unit developments, special districts’); such conditions, however, create uncertainty or confusion for disciplinary identity. On the other hand, the main justifications in favour of zoning rules have always been instrumental: the device is useful for protecting certain social interests (opinion confirmed by Lehavi, 2018, who traced a balance in a century of experiences), but it is also potentially effective with respect to administration to ensure a more automatic and timely decision-making process. This argument seems to re-emerge cyclically, as an attractive (albeit rarely completed) suggestion. Even in Great Britain, where the tradition and culture of discretion in public choices are deeply rooted, the hypothesis was considered multiple times: both by the Labour government, curiously, as Blairism was rising (Allmendinger, 2006), and by the Conservatives, who have now held power for more than a decade (Dembski, O’Brien, 2020). The trend should be cause for reflection: Mazza’s hopes (developing more mature technical know-how and better-justified regulatory choices) were not realized, and the primacy of instrumental reason remains clear. In terms of functionality, however, the balance seems less positive. The promise of simplifying and accelerating processes are generally refuted by a variety of adverse effects (rigidity, arbitrariness, arising conflicts and revisions, expectations, and consequent delays). Administrations are growing cautious about imposing prescriptive conditions or bounds, even before the effective choices are truly developed and shared. Does this mean that drawing borders is not valid as a founding act? Perhaps the discipline should revisit its narratives with respect to the myths of the origins. In this specific case,

the traditional ‘wisdom of the myths’ (Ferry, 2014) may seem to be up for debate today. The question is objectively on the agenda (the facts impose it); however, I have the impression that the planning culture hesitates to take a position on the issue. The practice has changed noticeably, but the recognition and assumption of responsibility for the current change still remain in the shadows like a delicate and embarrassing commitment that tends to be excluded or postponed as much as possible. Nor did Mazza offer an opinion of the topic. On the one hand, his convinced support of zoning, which dated to the latter half of the 1900s, was never questioned; on the other hand, his interaction with Lefebvre in the new century may be understood as a symptom of a latent turning point.

5.4 Founding Fathers. Or Pioneers of Innovation

Not just myths. Each discipline claims its leading figures, who are capable of playing a founding role in the field of problems and practices, knowledge and know-how. As *precursors*, they are those who open new horizons, and (or) *experts*, guardians, and interpreters of new, specific roles and professional expertise. That the ‘fathers’ are at the centre of historians’ interests is a fact that cannot be surprising. The point is whether there is a reason to still investigate these profiles to better orient theory and practice of planning, because this is the intellectual experiment that Mazza wanted to undertake, reopening dialogue with a few precursors. He was not the only one to publish the need. In planning schools in the United States, for example, a few actors recently deplored that lack — now for many decades — of studies on the theoretical and practical work of Patrick Geddes, desiring a clear change in route (Young, 2017). There is nothing to object to in the intentions, but it is important that the questions be framed well, because the precursor does not necessarily coincide with the expert in the discipline. As mentioned above, Lewis Mumford had no doubts: Patrick Geddes and Ebenezer Howard were ‘fathers of modern town planning’. His opinion is shared by other authorities in the sector, such as Patrick Abercrombie and Peter Hall. The documentation and reflections that Mazza collected on these figures (a useful summary is available in his book from 2013, written together with Gaeta and Janin Rivolin, Chapters 6–10) do not contain many original elements, but in my opinion, they open a discussion on Mumford’s claim: the interest of the profile — except for Abercrombie — does not regard the discipline of town planning per se, but the opening of new horizons respect to the way of thinking about the cities and society and their evolution (this is also the main interest of *Spazio e cittadinanza*,

published in 2015 in Italian and in 2016 in English).

Imagining the city as an ‘evolving organism’ and development as a coevolutionary process (in which planning must cooperate, without begin able to play a dominant role): this was Geddes’ great intuition, which profoundly changed common sense and questioned the statute of the nascent discipline (without its suggestions, ‘planning would have stayed simpler’, Abercrombie recognized in 1927, cited by Meller, 1990, p. 111). Frankly, I do not believe that the contribution is sufficient to consider Geddes as one of the brilliant minds of humanity or ‘the most prodigious thinker in the modern world’, the Bacon, Leonardo, Galileo of his time (as Lewis Mumford emphatically declared; see the correspondence published by Novak, 1995, p. 32). Nor do I believe that the innovation was decisive for the development of the discipline. In fact, we are faced with a variety of interpretations, not all of which are convincing, or even consistent with the author’s spirit, such as Luigi Piccinato’s mechanistic view (1988), for example, or useless rhetoric, such as the ‘systems view’ (McLoughlin, 1969) or the new ‘science of cities’ by Michael Batty and other lovers of complexity (Batty, 2013; Batty e Marshall, 2009, 2017). I also have some doubts on the usefulness of another exegesis of Geddes’ original texts, largely emphatic, enigmatic, abstract, or simply approximative (such as his embarrassing ‘thinking machines’, which even discouraged a convinced proselyte such as Lewis Mumford: Novak, 1995). The most laborious style is probably not just a subjective character or limit, but a consequence of rather eclectic suggestions that is difficult to develop in a unitary or consistent way, in an intellectual realm where science and spirituality, positivist culture and subjective creativity (Comte and Bergson, Le Play and Reclus), vision and continuity in evolutionary processes intertwine, as do a desire for innovation and design. The effective capacity of synthesis seems doubtful or even immature (Meller, 1990); creative desire takes on ‘ideological and paternalistic’ forms (Mazza, 2003). Geddes believed in the possibility of reconciling technological development, public ethics, and civil progress, and entrusted the governing classes and experts with guidance (in line with the visions of idealism and classical liberalism in Great Britain: Tyler, 2008; Mazza, 2008a, 2014), while he lacked sensitivity for the political dimension (conflict) of the processes (Meller, 1990; Welter, 2002). Instead, Geddes considered it essential that each subject could develop personal potential in the context (Meller, 1973); he indicated individual education and care for the ‘genius loci’, a perspective that was taken up again in the 1960s and 1970s by anarchic and communitarian movements, as an alternative to orthodox Marxism or conservatism (Hysler-Rubin, 2009).

Interest in aspects of urban knowledge should be one of the author's strengths and might represent a worthy response to Mazza's desire for the development of technical know-how (1993b; 2002a). However, I think it is necessary to make a distinction: the *methodological* contribution — understanding before acting — risks being trivial or misleading if intended to the letter, according to the canons (now surpassed) of the orthodox positivism. In effect, after the Second World War, a Geddes-esque revival took shape, exalting that vision itself, in a still modernist perspective in search of scientific backing, or at least the support of powerful quantitative analysis (a programme that sank after a couple of decades: Palermo, 1992). On the other hand, I believe that Geddes' most original contribution in the field did not regard the method, but the *modes of knowledge production*, according to a multifaceted perspective that recognized at once the value of the view and interaction: the general view from *Outlook Tower*, but also the participatory observation on the streets of the city. These are two indispensable contributions; the problem lies in drawing a relationship between them and building a synthesis. The *modes of acting* also become the most original and influential requirement in planning experiences, concentrated especially in the mature phase of his life and in settings beyond the Western world. Paradoxically, when Geddes works as a town planner, he does not bear witness, but turns upside down what was considered the disciplinary orthodoxy of the time. Giovanni Ferraro (1998) highlighted that perspective due to the detailed study of the 'Indian Diaries', which revealed an original and undisciplined practice compared to the canons of the institution and profession then being formed, due to the space given to actors and interactions, interests and emotions, preconceptions and learning, rules and informal processes, power and decision-making games, parties' intentionality and coevolutionary possibilities (Palermo, 1999). This is another world entirely from the edifying and well-ordered public design anticipated by Cerdà, but also from the essential and high-performance professionalism that was later interpreted by Abercrombie. In fact, his proposal for 'continuous planning' was unsuccessful at home, in the Dunfermline experience (1904; Meller, 1973; Goist, 1974). Surprisingly, Ferraro's interpretation was ignored by more recent studies on Geddes: Young (2017), Clavel and Young (2017), MacDonald (2020); Munshi (2022, in India!); Hysler-Rubin (2009) is an exception. I am not sure if the publication of the book in 1998 in Italian was the sole cause of the indifference or underestimation. The critical point is that according to Ferraro, just as Patrick Geddes should have been working as a planner, he questioned the concept of the role, in the shape and ways that a significant part of the discipline

did not seem ready to accept. Mazza himself showed, in my opinion, a certain coldness towards Ferraro's view, due to the clear distance from the disciplinary requirements he believed to be fundamental. Nevertheless, his interest in Geddes seems moderate compared to the attention he dedicated to Cerdà and (to a lesser degree) Howard.

According to Peter Hall and Colin Ward (1998), the idea of the 'garden city' was the most important innovation in town planning in the 1900s. This opinion may also seem to be beyond measure, such as Mumford's exaltation of Geddes. On the other hand, Hall (1988) celebrated Letchworth's experience, which Mazza (et al., 2013, Chapter 9) assessed as just an ordinary market project, not unlike Seaside (Florida), the flagship experience of 'new urbanism', while according to Beevers (1988), Welwyn was not radically different from a *company town*, such as the American Pullman. Howard's invention was a creative, original, and subjectively admirable synthesis, with a conspicuous variety of partly controversial or contrasting suggestions, among which it was difficult to orient oneself, choose, and — what's more — find a composition: the social and urban impact of modernization; the emerging demands of individual and social emancipation (with different, radical, or cooperative orientations); the new utopian visions (Morris' more nostalgic ones or Bellamy's more progressive ones); growing experiments in Britain and the America on decentralized settlements, in the form of *industrial villages* or *company towns* (Buder, 1969; Batchelor, 1969). In that complicated phase of transition, is it right to represent Howard as a 'heroic simpleton'? Bernard Shaw's opinion (Beevers, 1988, p. 181) seems severe, but it was not malicious (it was offered upon his death); rather, it expressed a partial, late recognition, after Shaw himself had always harshly criticized Howard's adventurous initiatives. Shaw said that Howard was an eternal amateur that nevertheless knew how to develop important objectives and programmes that may have seemed impossible to common sense. Many citizens, he concluded (ibid.), had benefited from his work. This also alluded to the fortunate investments in the initial *garden cities* projects, which Shaw himself had been assured of higher earnings than those obtained by the courageous but unfortunate creator. *Simpleton*: this epithet has remained indelibly associated with Howard (even Mazza drew on the imagery again, 2002b). This was unjust, in my opinion, because it underestimates the initiative, perseverance, and consistency with which the actor pursued civil progress and social equity throughout his life, trying to hold together spiritual values, reform-oriented drive, and the rationality of investigation, despite the objective difficulty of his material

situation. The fact that market and politics have not always allowed for the integral realization of good proposals does not excuse us from paying tribute to the courageous profile of activist and reformer, even if his faith in civic cooperation was perhaps utopian or naive. In fact, Doglio criticized the limits of Howard's concept: 'planning as social action' (1953).

At the same time, I find the celebration of his contribution to the construction of the planning discipline to be paradoxical. Did the idea of the garden city noticeably influence the development of disciplinary culture and practice? Undoubtedly, but as an open metaphor, a matrix of rather different interpretations that are not always comparable or consistent with the original assumptions (Stephen Ward, 1990 and 1992). Just look at the orientations and choices made by the *Garden City Association* over time (Buder, 1969; Hardy, 1991a; Parsons and Schyler, 2002). An opening to suburban problems and project was almost immediate, following the official adoption in 1909 of the *Garden City and Town Planning Association*, a clear change with respect to the original aspirations. In 1941, the expansion of interests was ratified by another modification to the statute: the new title — *Town and Country Planning Association*, already adopted by the Journal in 1932 — tended to go beyond the (limiting) specifics of the founding project to address the open field of problems in planning (Hardy, 1991b; Steuer, 2000). In that framework in the mid-1900s, it seemed natural to direct attention towards the satellite cities and regional organization of settlement forms (highlighted by the Greater London experience). Later, the development concentrated on questions of urban sustainability and green cities, which evoked generous demands for reform, but also concrete professional interest (such as the 'new urbanism' movement showed, presenting itself as the legacy of Howard's vision: Stephenson, 2002; Gillette, 2010). In effect, the *garden city-new town-green city* sequence was not linear or clearly consistent; there was no lack of discontinuity or ambiguity (Hardy, 1991a, 1991b; Anthony Alexander, 2009; Peiser and Forsyth, 2021). The essential point was the desire and capacity to pragmatically adapt the profession to emerging questions from time to time. Eugenie Birch (in Parsons and Schyler, 2002, Chapter 8) noted the possibility of distinguishing at least five generations of projects over time, correlated in various ways with the original matrix: not a sequence, but a range of possibilities. On the other hand, it would be difficult to invoke orthodox respect for Howard's primitive theses if it is true that they were influenced by a variety of models (perhaps including an anticipation in Nazi Germany, which remains practically unknown: Schubert, 2004) and took an

impromptu shape: as a brilliant invention, but not free of instrumentality, lending strength and popularity to reform-oriented ambitions. As Stanley Buder observed (1990), society at the time was insensitive to the emerging proposals for social reform, which were generally considered utopian and impracticable; reformulating them in the guise of the ‘garden city’ was the key to obtaining incredible (vast and unexpected) success in the short term. Following this, however, reality gained the upper hand: the project was quickly conditioned by society, the market, and politics in ways that were fully compatible with the existing order and consolidated interests (Rutherford, 2014). I believe the conclusion is that Howard’s initiative was strategic, but his goals were more social than planning-related (although Mazza, 2002b, also conceded a certain importance to this dimension). The main purpose was to draw attention and build consensus around a hypothesis for social innovation. The strategies and rhetoric of today’s branding and marketing come to mind; like a commonplace ritual, they regularly accompany the realization of urban transformation projects of a certain size. Perhaps the media’s use of the garden city idea (also) anticipated this family of practices; the difference is that today, there is no more trace of ambitions for renewal and progress. In Howard’s case, the implications for the discipline of town planning remained a secondary factor — a real paradox for a (presumed) founding father! This underlying contradiction does not seem to receive much attention from the critics (not even Mazza’s contributions bridged the gap). And yet the implications are not unimportant. We should draw the conclusion that Howard was not a town planner, or at least he acted as a political activist, closer to the heterodox tradition of urban planning rather than to civic design in the strict sense. On closer inspection, his profile would justify the objections Mazza directed to people such as Friedmann, Healey, or Forester (Section 5.1). Mazza overlooks this aspect; he limits himself to recognizing the impact of Howard’s ideas on some important urban planning experiences. Abercrombie’s Greater London Plan was the unmistakable case. Mazza recognized the possible paradigmatic value of the planning experience, while revealing the limits of the implementation policies (Mazza, 2004a, Chapter. 3; et al., 2013, Chapter 10).

Patrick Abercrombie was undoubtedly a very famous and authoritative town planner. His work in London is memorable, even more so if we think about the contextual difficulties, with a war that had still not finished and its heavy consequences. His structural framework, which easily extended to the large-scale planning domain from the original insights of Ebenezer

Howard, whose spatial frame was initially more limited, seems audacious and potentially incisive. The cognitive framework in quest is solid and exhaustive. It became a convincing interpretation of Geddes' desire for surveying, due to the capacity to enhance and form a network of the available sources (given that it would have been difficult to produce new systematic knowledge). In contrast, he only weakly addressed the problems of implementation (times, costs, and operational programmes: Self, 2002), although in principle, Abercrombie was aware of the procedural nature and the necessarily flexible and adaptive characteristics of planning (see the 'centenary note' dedicated to the author by *Town Planning Review* in 1979). The limit might be explained by the emergencies in the political, social, and environmental context at the time; perhaps a certain cultural delay was influential, because the discipline was (still) more sensitive to the design of an end state, comprehensive and consistent with virtuous objectives, rather than addressing the complicated problems and processes of implementation (which, in fact, was delayed and partial, as Self has documented). Such a complex and ambitious scenario should presume a vast and delicate repertoire of development policies and projects, without which an effective assessment of the experience becomes difficult. Today, this principle would seem to be obligatory; we should have learned (after the plan for Rome in the early 2000s) that it is not enough to conceive a great overall vision if a true 'planning policy' is missing. This awareness was not so advanced in the mid-1900s, and this remains a good reason to not celebrate 'Great London' as an exemplary model. Instead, we should consider Patrick Abercrombie to be a 'founding father' of planning. Perhaps he was not an inspired innovator (in contrast to Geddes and Howard), but he made notable contributions to strengthening the discipline in the first half of the 1900s. He did not open new perspectives; he did not produce entirely original theoretical reflections (his most important book, from 1933, is a simple collection of previous writings, partly incidental and dated); he was not the interpreter of a clear, active reform-oriented tendency (as I have mentioned, his profile highlights the nature of a moderate conservative and benevolent technocrat that, like a father, indicated the good path to his people: Dehaene, 2004). His idea of planning seems to result from an observant *bricolage*, capable of gathering and recomposing the best available concepts and experiments (including some contributions from Geddes and Howard): the main models of spatial ordering (radiocentric, orthogonal, web-shaped), the systematic use of surveying, the combination between master plan and zoning, and the spatial control of types and densities. With a pragmatic rather than ideological orientation (for example, he paid lit-

tle attention to criticism aimed at Howard as the presumed interpreter of an anti-urban culture; an opinion that would be harshly reiterated by Jane Jacobs: Akkerman, 2020), he was always attentive in the profession to the compatibility of planning action with the market and politics (Mazza et al., 2013, Chapter 10). With his experience in the field and periodic reflections in *Town Planning Review*, Abercrombie made a substantial contribution to the construction and strengthening of the discipline. Of less significance is his role in the face of criticism and the reformist programme. Perhaps between the profile of the professional and innovator (cultural and social), there is an actual gap that is rarely bridged.

One exception should be recognized: the unique figure and experience of Ildefonso Cerdà, who, not coincidentally seems to fascinate Mazza (2022) as a potential ideal of the good integration of the three fundamental requirements: spatial ordering, technical know-how, commitment to reform (Section 5.1). We should not forget, however, that the plan for Barcelona was a typical case of town planning legitimated ‘by decree from above’, as Piccinato would have said (1988). The experiment was made possible by royal will, against the preferences and choices of the local community, or at least its political and professional authorities (Calabi, 2004). It is an interesting paradox. Perhaps (as Benevolo suspected), the discipline needed a sovereign power to best exercise its function to reorder, emancipate, and progress. However, with regard to ideology and technique, Cerdà’s planning did not represent an imposition with respect to society and the market, but tended to play a reasonable role of regulation and guidance, to be shared in the name of collective interest: a pragmatic and reform-oriented approach that Mazza (2015, Chapter 6) found in German town planning in the late 1800s rather than in the imperative precepts of the CIAM. Later disinterest in Cerdà’s profile and work was partly due to the unfamiliarity of the language to the dominant British-American culture (I recall only one contribution of some importance, with a purely popularizing scope, nearly 150 years later: Soria Y Puig, 1995). But this can essentially be explained by the exceptional nature of the situation, which seemed less current and replicable over time, because there were increasingly few opportunities for the integral renewal of an urban structure and form, for profound, positive transformation of environmental and social quality, for definite and stable political guarantees on the feasibility of the intervention.

In fact, the last person called by Gigi Mazza belonged to a completely different world. On some occasions, Henri Lefebvre dealt directly with

architecture and planning, although his commitment to the field was also secondary and complementary. His contributions are not surprising, nor are they very innovative (as Lukasz Stanek, an architect from Delft, documented in 2011): summary criticism of the modern movement and functionalist culture; an emphasis on bottom-up participation; the desire (only the desire) to reconsider traditional categories of urban planning in a new perspective of social organization and emancipation, aimed at creating more evolved citizenship conditions (Mazza placed particular emphasis on this orientation: 2015, Chapter 7). In reality, the impact of that vision on ordinary practice was modest. The most concrete results were the development of public policies in favour of urban life and participation in the outskirts of French cities (Kipfer et al., 2013). These were small reform-oriented steps compared to his ambitions for large-scale topics: ‘production of space’ (Lefebvre, 1974), ‘right to the city’ (1968), or ‘urban revolution’ (1970). Taken seriously, Lefebvre’s view is demanding. Today, the temptation may be to read it in a *possibilist* perspective that focuses attention on the generous pull towards a progressive change, as a capacity to gradually implement utopian views and edifying values (Pinder, 2015). Space opens for animated reflection with lovely hopes, but not free of ambiguity. In play is the sustainability of a *reform-oriented* interpretation of the keywords of 1968 that were so dear to Lefebvre. Was ‘wanting the impossible’ a fanciful or strategic move for change? An opportunistic strategy or a necessary step towards emancipation? One relies on the possibility of turning utopian visions into effective actions — ensuring a ‘pluralist, democratic, shared’ production of space — by mobilizing players in the field (Merrifield, 2006; Coleman, 2013). What is possible is already inscribed in the situation: the capacity for criticism, resistance, and independent action of the subjects may bring to light and free the potential (Purcell, 2013), giving rise to experiences (not bureaucracy or obligation) in ‘experimental urbanism’ in the disciplinary field (Erdi-Icelandais, 2014). The fact remains that Lefebvre’s ideology had deep Marxist roots (albeit influenced by ‘situationism’ in the 1950s and 1960s: Ross, 1997) and his view was radical (*revolutionary*), positions that were closely associated with a historical phase that now seems faraway and (for many) outdated. Lefebvre’s long-term interest (1947, 1962, 1981) in the ‘practices of everyday life’ should not create confusion. His view grew out of Marxist criticism of what exists. That vision (Merrifield, 2013) has nothing to do with the ‘behavioural’ trends in the planning and design of today, such as ‘everyday urbanism’ and similar positions, which — as De Certeau would say — do not arise with the desire to change the world (Chapter 9).

The course of events has marked the strong currentness of Lefebvre's profile and though after the Second World War and up to the threshold of the 1970s. Immediately after this, there was a rapid drop in interest (even in his homeland). There was an impetuous revival after his death (1991), especially in the British-American world, with increasingly partial (yet different) interpretations (Leary-Owhin and McCarthy, 2020). David Harvey (1973) favoured the structural issues of the political economy compared to everyday practices, although Lefebvre's Marxism was not considered very rigorous according to the canons of 'structuralism' (Castells, 1972; reiterated by Ira Katznelson 20 years later, 1992). In contrast, Edward Soja (1989, 1996) and Michael Dear (2000) gave evidence of postmodern traces rather than Marxist orthodoxy. In the early 2000s, the variety of positions suggested new investigations of his profile and doctrine, with more academic studies (Elden, 2004) and more empathic and passionate contributions (Merrifield, 2006). The most interesting trend (Goonewardena et al., 2008) seems to be the suggestion of a third option, between the divergent visions of Harvey and Soja, as the reinterpretation of Marxism with libertarian inclinations, also due to interaction — although not free of tension — with Guy Debord's situationism (Simay, 2008). In more recent years, the ideological and doctrinal discussion has gradually died, but the reference to Lefebvre seems to be required when some citizen movement has arisen strongly in various contexts. Following the traces of Lefebvre's writings from the Paris Commune in 1871 (Merrifield, 2006; Abidor, 2015), the topic of *urban revolution* was evoked again at the time of some social/urban emergencies: in 1968, naturally, but also in 2005 in France and more extensively after the (multipolar) 'springs' in 2010–11 (Goonewardena et al., 2008, Chapter 15; Schwarze, 2023). After some time, it is easy to perceive some limits in this analysis due to the excessive emphasis and lack of interpretation (and forecasting capacity). The fact remains that this is Lefebvre's important profile: frankly distant from a reform-oriented vision and even more so from any technocratic perspective. For these reasons, Mazza's emerging interest in this author leaves me perplexed. I detect a substantial discontinuity with respect to the other references, which is not resolved by the similarity of a few (general) demands for social change, nor by the common aspiration for a 'new citizenship'. The roots and perspectives between Lefebvre's vision and that of Geddes or Howard are too different. In addition, his interest in the city is clearly secondary: the dominant topic is 'urban society' as the key to the desired change (Stanek et al., 2014). The author's discourse remains technically insignificant compared to Cerdà's or Abercrombie's commitment. His contribution is closer to that

of a political activist, the profile that Mazza reproached in the planning world. However, even the specialist literature notes some limits in Lefebvre's reflection: full of intuitions and suggestions, it is not always corroborated by analytical rigour or adequate empirical verifications (Lethierry, 2017; Leary-Owhin and McCarthy, 2020).

In Section 5.1, I anticipated a hypothesis, which, in Mazza's analysis, seems to express the need to reconsider the issues of social organization and control of the space. The static, photographic reading of traditional zoning maps no longer seems sufficient compared to the complex dynamics of our time. Attention must shift to current social processes, i.e. on concretely exercising rights and the multiple practices of using and modifying the city, which always presents emerging characteristics as a compound and not always predictable effect of the mutual interweaving between structures, actions, and intentions over time (Merrifield, 2013). However, this does not imply adherence to the *insurgent* ideology of change, which is supported by the radical trends of geography and planning, because there are plausible variants whose orientation shows possibilist, reformist features (Guégen e Laurent, 2022). A curious result follows: Lefebvre is taken as a reference, but the interpretation remains partial and the aspects that have been lost are perhaps the essential ones ('taking Lefebvre for developers seriously': Roche, 2024). Other sources may be used to reconsider social and urban features. Here I am thinking about Hirschman's legacy or critical pragmatism, but also the more current thread of urban assemblage (Palermo 2022, Section 4.9). At any rate, the disciplinary framework that includes Lefebvre and Abercrombie as roots, together with the other authors mentioned, remains, to my eyes, divided and at risk of fragility and incoherence. Perhaps planning should question once again not only its myths of foundation, but also its 'classics'.

5.5 Spaces of Citizenship

Mazza observes (2005, 2014) that planning choices nevertheless affect the conditions of citizenship, even if this is not always an objective declared by the institution. The argument is simple: the discipline, in regulating the space (divisions, uses, and transformations), wields some social control; the status of citizenship and its use represent an important standard in assessing the quality and effects of that function (Mazza, 2012). The perspective was still not evident in the three books published in 2004 as a summary of the work carried out in the previous 25 years. We should ask why this

became the dominant vision since 2010, and with which effects on the quality and results of the reflection.

The urban space/citizenship nexus may seem obvious, because citizenship was the main form of political community before the formation of the modern state (Costa, 2005). Not only that: there are those who claim that without a city (if the urban community falls into a crisis), citizenship itself would run risks (Bookchin, 1992). For some time, the idea of local community appeared more marginal, under the impulses of globalization and faced with the fascination of Cosmopolis (Isin, 2002 and 2014; Roy and Alsayyad, 2006; Stoker, 2011), but the orientations have changed. The idea of urban citizenship is current once again (Holston, 2008; Greeley, 2017; Prak, 2018); in fact, today we should fear the excesses of localism. The issue grows important if it is understood not only as the attribution of certain rights to subjects that possess some requirements (the idea of citizenship as status), but rather as a subject's active belonging to a local community (Zolo, 1994; Bellamy, 2008; Isin and Nielsen, 2008). Henri Lefebvre contributed to reintroducing this perspective (although without entering into the technical discussion of the concept of citizenship), focusing attention on collective orientation of individual action in urban space, and on the 'right to the city' as the possibility for the individual to participate directly in building a better collective future. A community idea of *city development* already oriented Geddes' and Howard's research and projects, but the specifics were less radical; the institutional horizon was still more orthodox in Cerdà's or Abercrombie's vision. These may be good reasons to explore the topic, but the discussion should address a few specific nodes. Which particular forms does the (plausible) nexus assume between spatial governance and citizenship standards? Likewise, the contribution is marginal in terms of civil and political rights. It might influence the ways in which these rights may be exercised in the context: the functionality and quality of the living environment may become a positive factor. What seems more important is the connection with the provision and use of social rights, because planning choices can act directly on these conditions. The judgement, however, must be articulated in relation to the historical phase. Geddes' and Howard's visions in the early 1900s hold the merit of having anticipated a few issues of 'social citizenship' (which only mid-century would acquire a mature institutional form). In this respect, Cerdà seems even more pioneering. Abercrombie's most important work was developed in parallel with the construction of the welfare state (it even anticipated a few elements; it was inspired by that nascent perspective).

The aspect of ‘planning awareness’ so dear to Astengo recalls a *republican* idea of citizenship that, beyond rights, appeals to the subject’s civic responsibility towards the local community (from Beiner, 1995, to Cohen and Gosh, 2019). More recent disciplinary orientations towards environmental and urban sustainability evoke a new dimension of citizenship: the topics of environmental justice and rights, which, according to some analyses (Dobson, 1999 and 2006; Pellow, 2018) represent the fourth pillar on which the citizen’s status is based (after civil, political, and social rights); even if caution is needed with respect to pure *greenwashing* effects (Harvey, 2014, Chapter 17).

In those phases and with these meanings, the connection between planning action and citizenship practices seem evident and certainly important. That is not always the case. When urban planning becomes a technology to accompany market interests (and nothing more), it is difficult to glimpse a positive link. If the most influential culture is neoliberal, the values of citizenship risk getting eroded (Balibar, 2012). The fragmentation of interests and values today push towards paradoxical forms of ‘partisan citizenship’ (Kamens, 2019; Wallace, 2022), which put the political community in crisis. If the most current trends in planning techniques refer any responsibility to land division and uses to the operational phase, it is difficult to anticipate any opinion on the effects of citizenship: it would be prudent to wait for the completion of effective projects. As a result, the connection becomes more vague or weak, at least for the programmatic functions of the discipline. If ‘insurgent’ planning proclaims the noble intentions of urban transformation and social emancipation, it is not right to confuse hopes with reality (Lefebvre’s experience should serve as a warning). My conclusion is that the planning/citizenship nexus cannot be taken for granted and that it assumes multiple, historically determined forms. I would therefore hesitate to adopt it as a key paradigm that is unambiguous, consistent, and always sustainable. This remains a complementary perspective, useful not as a paradigmatic framework, but to better highlight a few differences and substantial difficulties.

In fact, the topic of citizenship reminds us how urban planning depends on cultural and anthropological factors. Ultimately, the determining factor is the citizen profile: those that rely on the rights conceded by the state as a required act, without caring much for civic responsibility (Zolo, 2007). Or they identify with a community (real or imaginary), adopting its principles and stereotypes of the good life (Etzioni, 1993; Tam, 1998 and 2019), with

little independence or responsibility (this is the objection of liberal culture to communitarianism: Phillips, 1993; Ferrara, 2000). On the opposite end, there are those that worry only about individual interests, without care for external factors, according to the stereotypes of neoliberalism (Hindess, 2002; Miles 2012, Miller, 2020; Mavelli, 2022). Or they would change the world, but remain in balance between demands and the principle of reality (Mouffe, 1992; Holston, 2009; Swyngedoux, 2018). Or, going further, they interpret civic virtues (Honohan, 2002; Slaughter, 2005; Quill, 2006), but the pedagogical model is not enough; sustainable mediation needs to be found with the sphere of material interests (there is no lack of sceptical or doubtful voices: Ignatieff, on the ‘myth of citizenship’, 1987; Kymlicka and Norman, 1994; Brugger, 1999). Each profile refers to a different theory, from the formal idea of status (the first) to the problematic concept of a ‘republican liberalism’ (the last), as acceptable mediation between civic responsibility and personal interests (Dagger, 1997; Honohan, 2017). To clarify the sense of the vision, a choice must be made, given the variety of positions. Astengo’ and Mazza’s sensibility may seem oriented towards ‘republican’ values, in the rigorous sense drawn from Pettit (1997, 2012), Bobbio and Viroli (2003), and Urbinati (2011). The risk is that the perspective winds up being edifying but far from reality, or it is understood as an identifying call that underlies some nationalistic or at least community nostalgia (Aronovitch, 2000). In this field, good principles are not a guarantee of efficacy or always free of ambiguity. A discussion of principles is therefore not enough with respect to issues of citizenship. This line of reflection risks distancing Mazza from the responsibility of know how. It is necessary to pick up the thread of action guidelines, tools, and effective practices.

5.6 Theory, Theories

In 1987, Gigi Mazza published a booklet of notes that collected reflections stemming from experiences in the previous decade. The chosen title was ‘*Teoria dell’urbanistica*’. The title was rigorously in the singular, despite the multiple references, largely original or marginal with respect to common thought in the discipline at that time. The same year, John Friedmann published his powerful ‘Planning in the public domain’. The two tests were evidently incomparable with respect to horizons and ambitions, but one difference strikes me: despite a clear ideological inclination towards radical positions at a developed age, Friedmann accepted (as I anticipated in Section 5.2) an eclectic representation of the discipline. This admitted

a variety of divergent or immeasurable paradigms without a true critical framework or assuming responsibility or justifying the option considered more worthwhile than others. The same attitude is found in the collection of various theories published by Hillier and Healey in 2008, but also in more recent contributions such as the *Handbook* edited by Gunder, Madanipour and Watson (2018) or the reflections of a rigorous and wise scholar as Robert Beauregard (2020). The 2018 *Handbook* presents an updated framework that is also eclectic compared to Hillier and Healey's previous contribution. Except for some now required distance from the technocratic tradition, it lacks any orientation with respect to the multiple positions in play. Even Beauregard limits himself to surveying the state of the art, apparently taking even the most arbitrary tendencies seriously, such as the irrelevant exercises inspired by post-structuralist philosophy (Gunder, Hillier, and others). Of course he does not share the inclination towards the independence and irresponsibility of various sectors of planning theory, but nor he does seem to believe that a radical critique is necessary. Mazza, on the other hand, always believed in the value of a unified vision and the need for justification. As a result, he was concerned with distinguishing and choosing between different possible worlds.

In fact, he wanted to select above all, a variation on the theme (Mazza, 1987, Chapter 7; 2004a, Chapter 6). He did not consider it sufficient to refer to the 'technique or art of building cities' or to the broader field of 'urban studies'. *Urbanistica* was (initially) understood as 'land use planning' acting as public guidance and control of mobility and in using the land — a scarce resource — according to general interests. The action consisted in regulating the land market and real estate (incapable of operating with efficiency and quality in the absence of shared rules) and in the spatial organization of direct public investments (where the market is unwilling to provide). Technical knowledge of the discipline was, at the very least, to account for the choices in a reasoned manner. Over time, the limits and contents of the area were questioned by an irresistible expansion of the sphere of interest. The focus on planning tools was accompanied (or overlaid) by a variety of commitments to key issues in the crisis of the modern city. According to Mazza (1999, 2005), this trend was one of the main causes of objective limitations that have long afflicted the area. Also because it led many city planners to favour political action (just like Friedmann, Healey and Forester in the planning domain), without adequate care to adapt technical knowledge. If what was at stake was an overall development strategy (where land and real estate interests had to be mediated

with other social needs and aspirations), a unified vision and functional method was needed. Such ambitious and promising previews had already been anticipated by Geddes and Abercrombie early in the century; the contributions multiplied in the 1960s. Starting with the work of Stuart Chapin (1957), Mazza appreciated the willingness to rethink not only the spatial distribution of land use and mobility, but also and especially the idea of the plan as the (provisional) outcome of a dynamic system of interactions in the context. This should not be understood as an end state, but rather as a contingent point of equilibrium between the interests at stake, destined for subsequent revisions during the processes. The ‘systems view’ popularized by Brian McLoughlin (1969) also promised a dynamic and process-oriented approach. However, despite the media success of the proposal at that time, Mazza saw the limits of experience: a rhetorical formulation that reiterated important problems and guidelines without producing new concrete effects. Although it is likely that the vision helped to accelerate legislative innovation. In fact, the new British Planning Act enacted in 1968 sought to redesign the planning system, distinguishing and coordinating the large-scale programming functions technically entrusted to the ‘structure plan’ by higher levels of the public administration, compared to specific land use control under the responsibility of local authorities, which were to develop the operational tools — ‘local plans’ — where necessary. A coordinated and dynamic system of multilevel governance was therefore configured on paper. Mazza (1987, Chapter 2) viewed these new experiences with interest, as an attempt to give a more appropriate institutional and technical form to the emerging need to address the issues of socio-spatial control and development in an integrated way. The experiment did not yield the expected results, but Mazza never had any doubts about certain assumptions after the 1970s. The (justified) demands for a comprehensive and rational approach cannot rehabilitate traditional models of a general plan that foreshadows a presumed ideal state. It should be valid indefinitely, accompanied by rules and constraints intended to regulate future interventions, the operational course of which was neither foreseen nor planned. In essence, the tool should guarantee the protection of existing rights and a legal promise of future development, which would have been more easily shared if oversized.

Under the influence of heterodox contributions to the tradition of modern town planning (by authors such as Altshuler, Hirschman, Lindblom, Wildasvsky), Mazza unhesitatingly chose another perspective (supported by experience in the field since the preliminary urban plan for Turin, 1980).

Every planning tool modifies strong relationships in favour of a few interests. It therefore determines not an abstract ideal model, but new conditions of imbalance, which will need to be managed over time, first because they represent a temporary threshold of ongoing tensions and dynamics between competing urban interests. Later on, new demands and conflicts arise, and further public measures are necessary. Hence, planning is a continuous process that does not guarantee the best goal, but at least adaptability and partial progress with respect to existing conditions (Mazza, 1987, Chapter 4). It would be wise to note an apparent paradox: the most common challenge is ‘planning imbalances’ (Mazza, 2004a, Chapter 1 – text written in 1983). The quality of the results is measured against the state of affairs and the interplay of interactions, rather than any anticipation of the future. Implementation does not imply bureaucratic action carried out in accordance with rules, but joint production of emerging effects by multiple players and tools. The orientation is pragmatic; the ability to act in the actual context of pre-conditions, interests, and interactions is decisive. This view, undoubtedly more *political*, does not exempt technicians from the responsibility of cultivating disciplinary know-how. It does not support the hypothesis that the development of tools is still conceived as purely schematic procedure based on professional expertise. The interactive aspect of the problems requires a better ability to argue and justify any choice, from basic zoning (an essential operation according to Mazza, 1993b) to development strategies, which have ethical as well as material implications (1987, Chapters 5 and 6). Some concepts of urban planning (Section 5.1) have underestimated these responsibilities. Mazza’s dissent is clear on this point (1995a). Reinterpreting the function and form of planning and adapting its technical knowledge are two major themes to be combined that represent the thread of his research programme in the long term. Pier Luigi Crosta made equally incisive contributions to understanding the real nature of processes. In this case, the main difference is Mazza’s firm will to reconstitute a more suitable discipline and knowledge. The question was posed correctly by the author — in an innovative fashion compared to prevailing tradition — for nearly half a century. The results were significant (albeit controversial for a long time) with regard to the concept and formalization of disciplinary action, although more disappointing with respect to questions of ‘new knowledge’. However, it is proper to acknowledge the author’s unified, coherent, and continuous vision, a comforting exception to the unfocused or opportunistic eclecticism of most planning theory.

5.7 A Language to Renew

The turn from tradition and the rigour of the choices with respect to the variety of possibilities require fine-tuning of the disciplinary language. Indeed, Mazza led a significant renewal of discursive formations and key concepts of urban planning. Over time, this same glorious label seemed questionable because it was associated with dated, reductive interpretations (as pure physical planning) or interpretations that were too vague and confusing (due to allusions to a vast and incoherent set of possible meanings). After adopting the term ‘land use planning’ (which I have already mentioned) in the 1980s to designate the problems and functions of regulating land uses and mobility networks, Mazza (2010, 2011a) suggested distinguishing two fundamental concepts in the new century: ‘spatial governance’ to represent the set of political processes that produce and legitimize spatial transformations; and ‘spatial planning’ as the available technical knowledge about organizing and modifying space (‘models, regulations, and language’), which can be used to achieve policy objectives (a more technical and specific notion than the international use of the same category). We can see that these variations are a symptom of widespread dissatisfaction today, but they remain nominal. Other innovations in the discourse were more substantial.

One family of contributions concerns the purpose and content of planning tools and the (consequent) differences between planning styles (Mazza, 1987, Chapter 7; 2004a, Chapter 6). It is not possible to confuse a plan that merely configures a new ‘city form’ with a tool that (also) aims to control land use and values. Distinct from both of these is the type of plan that aims to reorganize the overall relationships between space, uses, functions and infrastructure. Every case brings into play different principles and techniques for justification. As city design, the planning tool can be entrusted to the expert urban designer who will express individual poetics. No justification of merit is foreseen or required, other than the verification of internal consistency; legitimization is self-referential. As I anticipated (Section 5.1), Mazza’s opinion of this disciplinary profile is severe and perhaps reductive. In the other two cases, the issue of justifying choices cannot be avoided. In the first version, the relevant interests mainly relate to land and real estate. As zoning teaches us, the sense and reason of the planning tool may reduce to a composition of the most influential interests that protect existing rights and express a conservative ideology. If, however, the plan aspires to systemic reorganization, introducing an idea of general interest, and thus an ethical justification is inevitable. A focus

on these issues in the discipline was an original contribution by Mazza in the late 1980s (later developed by Stefano Moroni, 1994 and 1997). Have the reflections faithfully taken orientations and dilemmas of *public ethics* (Graham, 2004) to evaluate urban projects based on their consequences in terms of individual and collective utility (but not taking the transition from one dimension to the other for granted)? Does it prioritize only the protection of property rights (at the risk of reducing the plan to the most basic zoning)? Or does it recognize the contractual approach to planning experience, which assumes confrontation, negotiation, and agreements between multiple interests (with the hope, according to John Rawls, that at least the result will turn in favour of the weakest)? More than 30 years ago, Mazza (1987) invited us to consider these issues. It was a justified expansion of horizons, then as it is today. However, we must recognize that the discussion has not been very fertile; it appears to have been essentially exhausted for some time. Current plans do not seem to linger on social goals, let alone the justifications that should underpin the choices: a few pages (or lines) of simplifying and repetitive rhetoric usually suffice. This is perhaps the fact that led Mazza to reintroduce themes of ethical, civic, and social interest based on the relationships between space and citizenship (which I already discussed in Section 5.5): another innovation in danger of rapid decline.

In contrast, the effects of another thread of change were more substantial and widespread. In the 1980s and then later in increasingly developed and systematic forms, Mazza (1986, 2004a, 2004b) was concerned with distinguishing and interpreting the constituent elements of planning tools, rather than assuming them as unitary, integrated objects. The hypothesis was that each model consisted of multiple elements that perform autonomous functions and were variously interpreted and recombined. The meaning and effects of the tool are strongly influenced by these factors. In 1986, Mazza began to distinguish between the *formal*, *symbolic*, and *real* components of plan policies as compared to knowledge bases ('inventories') and diagnostic work ('definitions'). The aim was to separate assumptions and courses of action, recognizing the variety of the latter, because some utterances merely formulate the problem and the vision while others have a merely rhetorical function (which can become elusive); only a specific part concretely develops actions in the field, through rules and targeted operations. The interesting point is that each component introduces different modes of justification: inventories based on substantive knowledge; the diagnosis as a political commitment; the prognosis as sharing of meaning and values; rhetoric as an instrumental or opportunistic move; and the actual actions

according to a principle of feasibility (political before technical). Each element thus assumes a different logic; the whole requires specific and contingent interweaving between technical knowledge, common sense, ideology, values, design, and politics. Moreover, there is no pre-established, uniform order among the different components. In each specific case, a particular element may become the trigger and driver of the process, with resulting effects to be investigated in context. There is an abyss between this view and the ordered, repetitive patterns of disciplinary orthodoxy (including Geddes' method in its popular versions).

Over time, the deconstruction exercise became more and more refined (Mazza, 1993c, 1996a) until it reached its most developed form in the early 2000s, as the 'redesign of a planning system' (2003), in which the reader can find an accurate and comprehensive representation of a language and vision significantly revamped compared to the most influential traditions. In addition to a rigorous definition of the fundamental categories ('system, activities, functions' of planning), the most interesting contribution is the distinction, interpretation, and articulation of three decisive aspects: *regulation*, *visioning*, *design*. Each allows for a variety of sometimes alternative concepts, such as binding or indicative rules; a structural or strategic vision; a guidance or an executive project. Each has undergone substantial changes in meaning and use over time: from general prescriptions to 'conditional certainties'; from the frame of reference as an assumption for the process to the strategic vision as a surrogate for the plan; from the plan as the final end of the planning experience, to its interpretation as a matrix for city development, with a constituent or even alternative function with respect to the traditional master plan. At times, one of these components comes to be identified with the structure of the plan itself, becoming pure regulation when it takes the exclusive form of zoning; urban design with town planning; a guidance (only) with strategic planning. Or the problem of reinterpreting-recombining the three functions must be addressed, admitting a variety of hypotheses and models. I recognize two merits in Gigi Mazza: he redefined the topic and language in a more rigorous and fertile form; and within this framework, he proposed an original, courageous view of planning.

5.8 Weak Urban Planning

Mazza always loyally recognized the limits of the discipline and the diagnosis has become more severe over time (2005, 2011a). However, it would

be wrong to draw negative, resigned conclusions. Reasoning about the weakness of urban planning does not mean just bemoaning the poverty of disciplinary statutes; even less questioning or jeopardizing the need for the institution and profession, and the positive will that should accompany any project for change. Rather, it means recognizing the (consistent, common) weaknesses that have always conditioned this family of experiences, looking for progress within the limits of what is possible. As an analogy, the debate on 'weak thinking' in the early 1980s (Vattimo and Rovatti, 1983) comes to mind. The promoters of this reflection were accused of complicity with the worst anti-rationalist tendencies, and yet the intent was to expose the weaknesses of reason in order to exercise it more respectably (and more effectively). This seems to be the most significant outcome of Mazza's research: a realistic representation of open problems, noncontingent limits, and concrete possibilities for improving the existing situation.

In the last 50 years, I have had the fortune to develop important personal relationships and interact with great personalities in Italian planning from the generation before me. What I found memorable about Campos Venuti was his positive desire to complete a great process of institution building in Italian planning, which introduced at once laws, culture, research, and good administration; that project, unfortunately, remains unfinished. As for Bernardo Secchi, I admired not only his ingenuity as an analyst and critic, but his sense of responsibility and courage that drove him to also put himself to the test as a practitioner (albeit at the risk of identifying planning with an authorial vision). I recognize Pier Luigi Crosta's relentless contribution to deconstructing knowledge and disciplinary practices, even if the results risk being destructive; it becomes difficult to conceive of a role and any possibility for action other than analysis and criticism. In my opinion, Gigi Mazza combined intellectual rigour and institutional responsibility. He drew well-founded reasons for criticism and self-criticism from his experience, but never gave up the need, the hope of building a better planning institution. This, even though his commitment at certain stages became an intellectual exercise to be made almost in solitude, in the absence of a collective, supportive, and cooperative movement.

Recognizing the weakness of planning was a fundamental step along this path. Campos did not ignore the issue, but preferred to leave it in the shadows, to deal directly on various fronts of positive action. Secchi was perfectly aware of the criticalities and limits, but perhaps he overestimated the possibility of overcoming obstacles due to his individual ingenuity. Crosta

lucidly identifies the difficulties, but his diagnosis was merciless: the hypothesis of a radical change of roles and tasks seemed the only way out (which the traditional discipline was not willing to share). Gigi Mazza's diagnosis was equally lucid, but the goal was to restore a sustainable future to city planning. Despite the commitment, it is difficult to say that the goal was reached. The contribution certainly offered a convincing representation of open problems and the avenues to explore for the necessary renewal. The essential step lay precisely in accepting the weakness of planning without renouncing its responsibilities (an almost obvious requirement for those working in the field). It was not a time for arrogant ideologies, dogmatic models, new prescriptive decrees: like the modernist narrative in general, Piccinato's idea of planning does not stand up. On the other hand, the consolatory, but all too often elusive fables that planning theory continues to devote itself to are in vain. Mazza's research questioned the ideology of planning, as it is clearly not capable of designing and realizing an end state, but should exercise reform-oriented action capable of respecting certain virtuous requirements while operating according to adaptive logic and processes of bounded rationality. In this framework, the traditional centrality and integrity of the main tool, the *master plan*, fail. The interpretation and articulation of its main components becomes decisive. How can we define urban planning rules, which are always in balance between the general need for rigour and control and emerging demands for flexibility and discretion (Booth, 1996)? How can we refine strategic visions that must guide policies and actions, but risk being reduced to mere rhetorical suggestions? How can we develop planning commitments with respect to action projects — as only addressing the assumptions (through rules and visions) or active participation with specific roles and skills in design creativity? Each topic implies dilemmas and responsibilities, but we also need to find a legitimate, functional composition of the individual elements.

In Mazza's interpretation, the primary function of prescriptive rules is to discipline protection, uses, and modifications of the existing urban fabric. With respect to future transformations, greater caution seems reasonable (well represented by the oxymoron 'conditional certainties': Mazza, 1998, 2001, 2002c). Instead of anticipating premature obligations, it may be wiser and more functional to only adopt criteria for guidelines and evaluation. The future vision becomes a frame of reference and guidelines that only have political and programmatic rather than conforming value, as a guide to forming and assessing emerging transformations. Transformation projects can be presented by various social components as well as by public

authorities; the essential requirement is that they are consistent with the declared, shared strategy. I believe Gigi Mazza can be credited with lucidly outlining this formulation of the problem, which appears weak in comparison to the modernist ideal type, but arguably more appropriate for the time. The conceptual framework was already well established by the mid-1990s (Mazza, 1997). On the threshold of the new century, the *‘Documento di inquadramento per Milano’* was an important test case, although there were considerable contextual difficulties (Mazza, 2001). Within a few years, the framework encountered its most developed formulation, even though the author had to note with sober regret that the proposal had not provoked any discussion (the loneliness of the intellectual: Mazza, 2004c, Introduction). Of course, the perspective raised a lot of political and technical questions, leading to risks. The solutions to problems do not seem simple: in some respects, they still seem immature. Difficulties contribute to increasing the widespread perception of weakness or incapacity, to manage without surrendering or mystification. Something changed, however. According to Mazza (2005), urban planning used to be a ‘weak concept’ as a field that was too open, indistinct, and vague. The obstacles, though, seemed more evident as the discipline tended to measure itself against reality, trying to specify and delimit its responsibilities at last. Perhaps Italian planning culture today is willing to accept these conditions with greater serenity and conviction than in the past; the new orientations of the Emilia-Romagna Region are a clue that deserves attention.

5.9 Intractable Problems?

Recognizing the harshness of open questions was another step towards ‘critical realism’. After an endless season of uncertainties and disappointments, it would be appropriate to ask whether some problems had been poorly formulated or was even insoluble. *Regulation*, for example. Despite the willingness and commitment of Mazza and others, attempts to strengthen technical know-how by improving knowledge and designing relationships between social processes and spatial forms were not successful (Mazza and Bianconi, 2014, acknowledge all the limitations). If there was some development, it (only) concentrated on physical morphology. This was the case with ‘form-based codes’, conceived and pioneered by a professional movement such as ‘new urbanism’. According to Emily Talen (2009, 2011, 2013), this was a major innovation, capable of profoundly affecting the quality and effectiveness of disciplinary practices. My impression is that morphological norms are an ornamental element

that holds a certain importance for the value and success of a few well-defined real-estate projects (such as various urban redevelopment projects). The idea of developing urban projects involving mandatory form-based codes within a complex master plan with a broad space-time horizon, has proved to be a failure, as the plans designed by Bernardo Secchi in the 1990s showed. The conclusion seems to be that zoning is functional in its rougher versions (perhaps the only ones possible). The widespread tendency to adopt a single building index is generally justified (also by Mazza, 2004c, Appendix) in the name of equity in planning choices, although the principle hardly seems relevant when there are significant differences between settlement models and environmental characteristics. The choice could be understood, however, as confirmation of the (insurmountable) simplicity of the planning tool, which does not lend itself to sophisticated developments, which ultimately risk being arbitrary and divisive, as critics have amply documented (see Section 5.3). On the other hand, any possible alternative raises nontrivial problems. The use of consensual agreements between private actors risks favouring conservative choices that often discriminate against third parties. The logic behind transferring development rights reproduces market mechanisms, in which it is difficult to see any care for general interest (unless the public authorities introduce specific conditions and rules geared to that end, although it is not easy to define technically or to justify). There remains an appeal to a nuisance law, which may work against negative external factors, but takes us back to the threshold of modern town planning (as if time has passed in vain). The evolutionary trend seems clear. The use of binding norms in the medium to long term is increasingly circumscribed on the basis of justifications that are as objective as possible (such as various nuisance effects). The weight of indicative or conditional rules is growing, and these should guide actors' choices and behaviour, at most exerting 'gentle pressure' (*nudging*), i.e. by noting the advantages or disadvantages relating to the different options at stake (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008; Sunstein, 2014). This class of planning rules must find meaning and reasons within a coherent framework, that is, within a strategic vision of city and territorial development. Instead, binding rules accompany the completion of specific interventions. They are therefore formulated when a transformation hypothesis is well developed and shared, instead of holding value as an a priori anticipation capable of giving certainty to processes in the long term. This means that the generation of constraints and binding obligations in transformation areas is closely related to the outcome of design activities. The consequence is that the issue of regulation loses the decisive function figured by modern

town planning theory. At any rate, the intertwining with other functions, such as *visioning* and *design*, becomes decisive. The hypothesis of a revival of modernist aspirations seems devoid of any foundation, but the hope of expanding the social implications of planning regulations (one of the salient themes of Mazza's research, substantially unresolved over time, or rather reformulated — without significant progress in the analysis — as the ability to affect citizenship rights) also risks being in vain.

The function of urban visioning (which I have just summoned) also reveals some suffering. In recent decades, a line of innovation has demanded attention. In terms of techniques, we can see certain elements of management culture transferred into the disciplinary field. Strategic planning originated in the corporate world. In the 1980s it reached the sphere of public administration and experimentation with it began in the urban domain immediately afterwards (only at the end of the century in Italy). The innovation was methodological: the design of an urban form and the related binding rules were replaced or anticipated by a process of forming strategic choices that were as rational as possible in the wake of systems thinking. The ideological orientation remained more vague, somewhere between a technocratic approach and a more participatory tendency. In the last few decades, papers on the issue have multiplied in the urban planning literature: countless, scholastic, repetitive, mostly merely exhortative (by Albrechts, Healey, and others). Yet one only has to listen to a business strategy expert such as Henri Mintzberg (1994, 2007) to doubt the importance of so many words: strategic planning and strategy-making must not be confused. The transition is not a matter of method or technique, but rather strictly political. No strategy is made unless the parties form a coalition of interests determined to share and develop a programme of action and endowed with the necessary powers: requirements that Mazza lucidly identified long ago (1994; 2000; 2004c, Chapter 4). Otherwise, it is just rhetoric and communication (Mazza, 2013). I would also highlight another requirement (Palermo, 2009; Palermo and Ponzini, 2010, 2015a). A strategic vision hinged in a given space assumes an ability to choose and share a selection of large projects that, due to their territorial-social impact, adopt a clear morphogenetic and cross-scale function (it is not enough to outline general representations, objectives, and programmes). In this sense, the vision would carry a twofold meaning: *political* and *design-driven*. In reality, these requirements are rarely respected. Common and even cursory communication prevails, as if the public administration no longer believed in the usefulness of this class of practices. It steps aside for the same pri-

vate developers, who interpret the topic according to the canons of pure marketing in forms that are now ritualized and often shamelessly emphatic, enough to evoke Slavoj Žižek's 'sublime trash' (2013). From (unfinished, improbable) political project to mere market rhetoric, the strategic vision seems confined within limits and dilemmas that are difficult to overcome. Prospects from the urban design side do not seem any more comforting. There was once criticism of the arbitrariness or abuse of certain planning rules that heavily condition the design experience through bureaucratic constraints or obligations, which are often poor in meaning and justification in context and in the specific case. Today, the production of large urban projects occurs relatively independently with respect to a planning framework. Some binding quantitative indexes may be required that risk losing meaning and quality when extrapolated from a coherent overall framework. Attention to substantive issues is often irrelevant: relationships between the urban project and its context, functional and infrastructural implications, environmental and social impacts, consequences for the landscape and the city image, or external effects (an issue that is as insidious as it is underestimated). Would anyone argue that these issues were considered in the most recent period of urban transformations in Milan? They do not belong to the sphere of interests of private operators. They seem indifferent to an urban society that is evidently not based on the 'planning awareness' or 'republican citizenship' (rationally) invoked by Astengo and Mazza, while the public administration does not seem to have the desire or strength to assume these responsibilities, which are, moreover, of public interest.

The most promising contribution of the technique — still relevant today — was the 'design review' model (Palermo, 2022, Chapter 8). Instead of defining a set of general prescriptions a priori (with the risk of perverse effects in specific evolving contexts), it is a matter of developing and applying an independent evaluation mechanism with respect to any design proposal that considers the substantive problems I mentioned earlier and can suggest the necessary corrections or at least justify the refusal to be authorized. The method seems more plausible in contexts with a solid tradition of exercising public powers in discretionary, but transparent and responsible forms; however, it arouses greater diffidence and risks where a model of planning action complying with the rules prevails (at least in principle, because then informal and negotiated practices are rampant everywhere: Mazza, 2004c, Chapter 1; 2005). Nevertheless, two types of objections are recognized. Expert assessments may be a weak screen in the face of strong

interests supporting a large project that is now complete. The idea of anticipating a review in some preliminary stage (as an evaluation in advance or during progress) is a bureaucratic response that complicates procedures, but cannot guarantee the result. In fact, preliminary judgements are often only indicative and defer the most critical issues to the final stage. In addition, the second objection — paradoxically, institutionalization of the evaluation procedure (Stockmann et al., 2020), may become not a strength but a risk: the peculiar and innovative function of the experience could be neutralized by administrative practice itself. As environmental impact assessments show, the process can be reduced to a routine exercise — unrelated to the context because it tends to apply standard methods — that rarely succeeds in producing relevant knowledge or criticism. It becomes formal completion of a merely bureaucratic practice with results that are predictable in many cases. The balance therefore seems controversial, after many decades of experience. In Great Britain, one of the most culturally favourable contexts, Matthew Carmona argues that long and now conspicuous experimentation has led to overall improvement in the average quality of urban design. In the United States, the success of the approach has been impressive in recent decades, but the initiative has been largely supported by developers themselves and entrusted to private assessment agencies, as an auxiliary contribution to the reputation and enhancement of an urban project that must compete on the market, unrelated to the complicated issue of public interest (Palermo, 2022, Chapter 8). Mazza's vision assumes a reliance on this kind of experience, but it is fair to conclude that, as in the case of regulation and visioning, it is not technique that we can turn to for easy consolation in the field. To all appearances, we are in a blind alley.

5.10 Traces

Mazza does not offer any indications on the nexuses above in his most recent work. With timely and enlightening choices, he made a decisive contribution to identifying and discussing this class of problems starting in the 1980s and 1990s. Following this, however, the attempt to refine the technical knowledge of urban planning, especially on the side of regulation, did not show significant results. With respect to the concept of visioning, recognition of the political dimension of this practice remains fundamental: there is no strategy without the support of a coalition of interests. The fact that the discipline as a whole preferred to evade the warning to rely on less demanding but irrelevant forms of discourse is certainly not Gigi Mazza's responsibility. On the other hand, he did not devote much

attention to the issues of urban design and architecture, perhaps also due to a somewhat simplistic view (the emphasis and criticism of the poetics of architects-planners). In the last decade, this set of problems has gradually left centre stage, if we follow the course of his studies. Other, more radical issues have drawn attention but they are also more general (i.e. without an immediate or clear link to the current practices in the discipline). It seemed necessary to question some fundamental social and political concepts. The category of citizenship became a key to the reflection and the chosen source was Henri Lefebvre (I did not hide some perplexity). Today the balance may give rise to apprehension. On the one hand, we must note the strength and complexity of tensions that are now endemic, and which should not be underestimated. On the other hand, limits and uncertainties of technique and practice seem intact and perhaps intractable ('making plans is an impossible or almost impossible task': Mazza, 2011a, p. 262). The step towards resigned and inert positions risks being short, without hope and without a future. This is a scenario that I have called *post-planning*, using an image that Colin Crouch adopted to describe a current trend in the idea of democracy (Palermo, 2022). In principle, city planning is an institution that a mature democracy cannot disregard, but it risks being reduced to a range of formal, bureaucratic, and procedural compliance that accompanies and legitimizes the real processes of composing strategies and interests, with an increasingly modest substantive contribution and degree of participation (a fate analogous to some current forms of representative democracy?).

If we look at the occasions and ways in which urban planning is called into question at this stage in our cities, the risk outlined here seems plausible or impending, even if the topic is not the focus of the discussion (I found a similar viewpoint and judgements in Miller, 2020). A direct contribution to urban visions and projects is now unusual or irrelevant. The impact and weight of a few often dated and out-of-context rules that accompany bureaucracy and sometimes condition the course of proceedings remain, raising justified doubts about the regulatory arbitrariness or even abuse (as Gray and Ellickson argue, Section 5.3). If this is the picture, are we only left to hope for the generation (or regeneration) of a 'republican citizenship' as a necessary prerequisite to strive for worthier civic, social, or territorial conditions? This seems to be Mazza's conclusion (2015, Chapter 8), observing as he does that spatial governance should play a significant role in this process. But using which tools and programmes today and in the future? The most recent contributions do not open new perspectives, despite

Mazza's historical attention to the problems of feasibility and technique.

I would try to suggest some traces inspired by Mazza's work, although I am not sure they would be shared. The first step lies in criticizing the existing situation due to many intolerable aspects. It is not just a question of challenging the current social and political drift which generates risks and perverse effects, but tends to conceal or underestimate responsibilities. First of all, planning culture should question some of its weaknesses. I find unacceptable the most widespread idea of urban planning in Italy today, where still-influential traces of the modern project, the failure of the reformist programme in the late 20th century, and inertia in the face of imposed change are confusedly intertwined. It is not enough to reiterate the need for a regulatory function (while substantial change is occurring in this field, with unprecedented consequences), let alone openness towards a strategic orientation, which is belated and perhaps naive (despite Mazza's important anticipations). I also find some tendencies of international urban planning unacceptable. I believe I have argued (Palermo, 2022, and Chapter 10 below) how this label does not represent either discipline or cultural area: without a centre or boundaries, without content or distinctive paradigms, if not uncertain or confused. The literature shows an eclectic and often unprofessional openness to the endless questions and suggestions that the city and its governance can raise. I find the overall picture disastrous: unrelated to the context, unjustified, vague, and inconclusive (Mazza's judgement (1995a, 2011a) is not dissimilar, but in more polite terms). In my opinion, a strong call to reinterpret the role and a sense of responsibility is needed in both *urbanistica* and urban planning.

I can see two priorities. It is not possible to elude the social and political dimensions, which take new forms with respect to the origins of disciplinary experiences. Thirty years ago (Palermo, 1992, Chapter 16), with a certain naivety, I hoped for a more fertile dialogue between Bernardo Secchi's, Arnaldo Bagnasco's, and Bruno Dente's research programmes, i.e. between city design, socio-territorial analysis, and public policy analysis. Despite the quality and willingness of these figures, the results were not impressive. Today, I do not think it is possible to address related topics only through mediation of the planning literature (which is too occasional and improvised). It is probably worthwhile to go back to the origins, suitably renewed. Who are today's heirs of Lindblom and Wildavsky (who exerted an important influence on Mazza's thinking in the 1970s), and of Dente himself (who remains an eccentric figure in the world of Italian political

science)? I maintain that it is important to find and frequent new meaningful sources. It would be naive to trust decisive contributions with respect to policy-making (by now we know the limits of methodological and managerial promises). However, we can wait and expect a better critical understanding of the real nature of the problems and the possibilities for intervention (I am thinking, for example, of contributions by Michael Howlett, Guy Peters, Frank Fischer, Mark Bevir, and Gerry Stoker, with the hope of finding new, younger figures). This may be a significant line of developing the attention Mazza devoted to Henri Lefebvre for some time. I consider this turn interesting not because of the chosen figure (other sources might have been considered more attractive), but as a symptom of a shared need: to restore an adequate space in the planning domain to the centrality (and new forms) of social and political aspects. If social and political processes must be reckoned with, we cannot be satisfied with traditional systemic or structural views. It is not enough to represent an existing state, because the city and the territory should not be understood as a completed object, but rather as multiple ongoing processes that tend to change the apparent forms (perhaps even the underlying rules and structures) based on effects emerging from the actions and interactions among the set of players active in the context. The focus shifts from the contingent state to the generative processes of urban assemblage, to use Bruno Latour's image (2005, 2017), which was adopted in the area by DeLanda, McFarlane, Farias, Dovey, and others (Palermo, 2022, Section 4.9). Today, this seems to be the most promising way to explore the links between space and society, norms and processes, planning regulations, social control, and citizenship rights (i.e. following up on the unresolved aspirations Mazza enunciated over the long term). Innovation cannot be reduced to dialogue with Lefebvre. A new period of 'economic and social analysis of the territory' would be desirable, though it has been silent for too long (the commitment and contribution did not pertain only the domain of technique; the idea of society and politics was also in question). This step seems essential to me in order to reintroduce the functions of spatial governance.

The second trace regards the issue of 'spatial planning', which I would like to take from Mazza, but in a more extensive sense. In the original version, the key issue was the quality of technical knowledge underlying planning regulation, which entails the division and delimitation of urban space and the regulatory assignment of land-use rights. There was also an (unresolved) need to delve into the relationships between spatial ordering, the social organization of space, and their effects on citizenship conditions.

For too long these have been questions that lack convincing developments. In part, these depend on changes in regulation, which took forms that were noticeably different from the modern tradition. Perhaps it is not so certain today that zoning is an essential practice, while the more traditional idea of a master plan only holds on the local scale with nonmarginal variations (Mazza, 2011b). On the other hand, we should ask whether some questions were not posed poorly. Perhaps there is not much to be discovered, because planning codes — which, we should remember, work best if they are simple or even rough — play a role today that is nondecisive with respect to social control and citizenship rights, but only complementary to other tools used in politics or by influential powers (the days of segregative zoning are gone, with few exceptions, and Lefebvre's dream has not been realized). I believe that the development of technical knowledge should not be confined to this field, but extended once again to the entire sphere of town planning or rather city design (with an extended, renewed meaning: Chapter 4). I have already said that I find Mazza's interpretation of these lines to be reductive. A rather careful investigation of the world of urban design (Chapter 11) has convinced me that some visions are out-of-date. The hypothesis of the autonomy or self-referential nature of urban design does not hold up, except as a tired communication and market strategy. Nor has the reformist perspective that in various countries (in Great Britain as in Italy: Carmona and Punter, Gregotti and Secchi) aimed at a fertile and decisive blending between master plan and urban project found convincing outlets. For some time now, urban design has had to struggle against the questions and conditions of everyday practices (a topic dear to Lefebvre, but with some ideological bias, from Marx to Debord). In this framework, interaction and comparison with new planning issues and programmes seem inevitable. Moreover, town planning cannot continue to deal only with regulation and visioning, as these functions have become much weaker and more partial than the original ambitions. I believe it would be in the interests of the category itself to once again take up the design responsibilities of the discipline (along the lines indicated by Bernardo Secchi), putting to the test all the sensitivity, foresight, and expertise that urban planners claim to possess. The demand for technical knowledge is real, but I believe it should be interpreted according to a design approach that affects the entire range of problems in search of specific, useful contributions (as was the case in the early days, testified to by Cerdà and Abercrombie, to choose two of Mazza's references). At heart, doesn't planning pretend to know how to interpret the quality of urban projects? Let it prove it through action (although Secchi's experiences have shown that the challenge is complex).

This would be the second pivot for reviving the discipline, after rediscovering the political and social aspects in the sense I advocated above: re-establishing the centrality of urban projects and the necessary dialogue between policy design and town planning. This was not Gigi Mazza's vision, but it drew inspiration and perhaps some supporting arguments from his analysis and criticism of what exists.

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6. Deconstructing Urban Planning. And Then? (Pier Luigi Crosta)

6.1 If Urban Planning is a Practice

The sense of this affirmation is not evident, and even less unambiguous. I began to discover the subject in Paris in the 1970s thanks to drafts for an academic text like *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* by Louis Althusser (written in 1976-1978 and published in complete form only in 2014), which illustrated the differences among various types of practices: scientific, ideological, political, production-based, and others. A complementary source was Althusser's publication (1974) of a series of lectures he gave in 1967 on the distinctions between expert knowledge and common sense (a topic that would become important for Pier Luigi Crosta, 1998, Chapter 5). Those readings led me to reflect on the ways in which individual action in the collective interest is conditioned by social relationships in both politics and ideology, but also to recognize the importance of citizens' 'spontaneous philosophy', which is likely socially conditioned but could become a matrix for change if certain requirements and opportunities hold. Althusser's thought gradually fell into the shadows as a form of '*marxisme anti-humaniste*' that was considered the root cause of '*misère de la théorie*' (Thompson, 2015) even though a line of studies continued to express great respect for his ideas (Rancière, 2012; Lasowski, 2016, collected twenty authoritative texts). In the growth stage, the suggestion was remarkable for a number of essential messages: theoretical work could only arise out of practice (according to the virtuous circle of practice/theory/practice); the social assumptions of ordinary convictions had to be highlighted, i.e. the (influential, if not decisive) ways in which social relations affect idea formation and the orientation of action; and a critical approach was indispensable as the matrix of an active design capability, aimed at conceiving and realizing the necessary changes with respect to the existing conditions at the time. Those principles seemed enlightening and essential in the eyes of a small group of Italian planners concerned with better understanding the social determinations of spatial transformations. In just a short time, the orientation received new impetus due to developments in Althusser's thought, such as the divergent perspectives of Henri Lefebvre (1968) and Manuel Castells (1972), which I have referred to in Chapter 5. Over time, the vision progressively lost its more radical varieties (Elliott, 2006; Roudinesco, 2008), whether in Castells' structuralist interpretation or in Lefebvre situationist/libertarian variant. However, after a long interlude, Althusser's thought now seems to arouse new interest,

as Étienne Balibar argues (with De Ipola, 2018). In the meantime, some urban planning circles more open to intellectual suggestions, turned their attention towards the fascinating thought of Michel Foucault, who offered impressive representations of the influence of several social and institutional practices on the identification of certain figures, demonstrating the impossibility of conceiving of the individual outside a set of practices in space and time. Bernardo Secchi was the Italian planner most sensitive to this vision (Chapter 4). What is more, he dedicated the same attention to contributions on ‘discursive formations’ that were the salient theme of Foucault’s initial work (see the passionate reconstruction of the author’s path by Paul Veyne, 2008). Some planners there found another possible way to think about the effects of social aspects on the urban environment. A few years later, Crosta himself adopted Foucault’s message (via Veyne, 1971): ‘il n’y a que des pratiques’ (2010, p. 154).

Overall, however, the most widespread and influential traces of ‘planning practices’ were inspired by pragmatic culture (Verma, 1995) in forms that are sometimes critical, often ordinary, and generally more open and intuitive than the sources I have just cited. Many stimuli arose through the direct experience of professionals, as documented by Richard Bolan (1967, 1980) and reiterated, in a way that has become exemplary, by Donald Schön (1983, 1987). Schön’s invention of the ‘reflective planner’ had important implications for the concept of interactive knowledge and the connection between knowledge and action as reflective learning. In this way, Schön introduced an idea, a question of *practical reasoning*, that was not reduced to the more traditional canons of scientific knowledge, called into question by the discipline which aimed to conquer the scientific statute (from Faludi to Astengo). The consequences were important. An ‘interpretative, critical, design-oriented’ view of the discipline gained strength (Lanzani, 1996) as a radical alternative to the ‘positivist, rationalist, technocratic’ approach that mandatory planning intended to advance as the ‘paradigm of modernity’ (Harvey, 1989). More than 30 years ago (Palermo, 1992), I dedicated a book to that fundamental dichotomy, aligning myself unhesitatingly with the post-modernist perspective. Social interaction, reflexivity, practical knowledge: Crosta placed great emphasis on these aspects, but radically compared the most accredited disciplinary trends. The aim was not to design a more sophisticated version of the ‘paradigm of intentionality’ (along the line from Herbert Simon to Donald Schön), but to question the very principle that planning choices and transformations could be understood as the intentional effect of a certain subject’s strategies. According to Crosta,

it was instead the outcome — or by-product— of complex social interactions: a thesis already developed in *La produzione sociale del piano* (1984, ed.), but reiterated more radically in *Pratiche* (2010).

Unfortunately, the issue long remained at the margins of disciplinary debate. It was probably underestimated, while scientific suggestions continue to find some illusory support in *smart* concepts of urbanism (Batty, 2005, 2013), which I criticized more than 30 years ago (Palermo, 1994, 1996). Today, Batty himself (2024) must even note some insuperable limits of that supposed ‘new science’. Nor is there a shortage of eclectic attempts to join scientific theories of planning and paradigms of practical action, but they are simply the juxtaposition of independent visions (Levin-Keitel, Behrend, 2023). For Schön as for Crosta, this is not a questionable point. Scientific procedure is not a decisive requirement in this field; nevertheless, the appeal to science would not be self-sufficient. An idea of *practical reasoning* is imposed, even though the topic did not play a central role in Crosta’s agenda, given his nonintentional orientation. The concept does not disregard a principle of rationality, but rather adopts a more demanding notion (Ober, 2022; Nida-Rümelin, 2023) than in the positivist and methodical tradition, which tended to be technocratic and peaked in the mid-20th century, between the 1940s and 1960s in the English-speaking world (as shown by William Thomas’s exhaustive review, 2015). Some significant traces were still evident in the early 1980s (Carley, 1980; Lewin and Vedung, 1980); the decline afterwards seemed objective. The rationality of practical reasoning reintroduces an Aristotelian view (Wiland, 2002; Kontos, 2021; De Caro and Vaccarezza, 2021) that imposes three demanding requirements: explaining the action according to good reasoning (the epistemological question); advancing reasons as justification for action (the question of norms); and recognizing reasonable motives that induce the actor to actually perform the action (the question of praxis). A discussion of the three requirements can be found, for example, in Robert Audi (2004, 2006). These indications do not take the form of a precept or a general method to be applied mechanically. They are configured as possibilities to interpret in the specific time and context (Velleman, 2000, Chapter 8: *The Possibility of Practical Reason*). The perspective is therefore ‘possibilist’, searching for connections that are not only functional, but rooted and responsible towards the context, between field and society, norms and actions (Bourdieu, 1998). These are edifying principles, but a conspicuous part of the area (not Crosta) still seems hesitant to represent itself as *action* (Meagher et al., 2020; Pani, 2022) and accept the dilemmas

and responsibilities that practical reasoning cannot avoid (Chang and Sylvan, 2021). There is still a widespread feeling that it is more convenient for operational planners to fall back on a traditional vision that is more anonymous or conformist.

Indeed, pragmatism was the most influential reference culture for planning in action, even though — paradoxically — the matrix was poorly understood by planning scholars (see the weak review by Healey, 2009) or it did not seem worthy of official recognition, while theory has wandered into more suggestive, but partly arbitrary fields (even in the most interesting references: Allmendinger, 2002, 3rd edition, 2017; Beauregard, 2020). I have already tried to rebuild the main trends (Palermo, 2022, Section 9.2). In the second half of the 1900s, pragmatic concepts of planning did not elude a critical orientation that was well interpreted by Charles Hoch (1984, 1992, 1994), ‘a pesky pragmatist’ according to Vidyarthi (2019); developed by John Forester as a new paradigm (1980, 1985, 1989; 1993); and later expanded upon by Bent Flyvbjerg (1998, 2001). With unusual care in the world of planning, Forester investigated the relationships between the power, conflicts, and methods of spatial planning, finding a suggestive framework of inspirations (then original for the discipline) in the ‘critical theory’ of the Frankfurt School. Flyvbjerg highlighted the decisive connections between power structures/relationships and emerging forms of planning rationality; but also (2004; 2008; et al., 2012) the questions and practice of practical reasoning (*phronesis*), which cannot be avoided in the specific context. Over time, however, the ‘critical’ thread did not develop significantly. Hoch leaned back on virtuous and cooperative neo-pragmatism inspired by Richard Rorty (Hoch, 2006, 2016). Even clearer was Forester’s turn towards the role of *planner* as a negotiator, mediator, or even therapist of social relations (2006, 2009, 2013); while Flyvbjerg mainly dealt with the functions, justifications, and means of producing ‘major transformation projects’ (et al., 2003; 2007; et al., 2008). More current trends in *everyday urbanism* (Chase, Crawford and Kaliski, 1999) seem to reintroduce a noncritical concept of pragmatism, which grants less prominence to dissent, conflict, and ‘grand visions’, focusing on current operations with increasingly informal, tactical, or transitory features (Stevens and Dovey, 2023). I address this topic in the second part (Chapter 9) because it is beginning to dominate the more recent literature on planning (Chapter 10) or design (Chapter 11). The curious fact is that these topics have also aroused the interest of disciplinary authorities such as John Friedmann (*The City of Everyday Life*, 1999), who was already

balanced between rationalist roots and ‘insurgent’ tensions (2011). Friedmann ignored the contribution of Chase et al., but agreed with the strategic relevance of everyday problems, of which there are many and may even be circumscribed, but influence the quality of urban conditions. On the other hand, the technical culture of planning does not seem able to offer adequate representations and solutions, and civil society struggles to make its voice heard. A call remains to civic practices not only for resistance, but capable of questioning the established order, with some doubt as to the strength and timeliness of the movement. The result may (only) be more visible, concrete public action, although incapable of leading to important innovations. In effect, Crosta emphasizes the *everyday-maker* in planning processes, alongside or in addition to the profile of the expert, but he does not demand any militant commitment from that type of actor (Crosta, 2010, Chapter 8). The variety of positions, contingency of the effects, seem to confirm that pragmatism, as a movement of thought and action, is configured as an open — in some respects obvious — matrix; in other respects it is undetermined, if not ambiguous. The interpretation of the principles in the given context — as the classics of the pragmatic tradition have always taught — is decisive. We should not forget that ‘nothing grows out of the method’ (Serres, 2016). And exhortations are not enough.

On the Italian side, Pier Luigi Crosta was a committed actor and important player in a long-term parallel path as one of the first figures in planning to address such issues as the centre of his experiences and reflections. He did, however, mark some important differences with respect to the positions I have alluded to here (not only Althusser or Foucault, but also the latest sources of pragmatic orientation), with an undoubtedly original, I might say singular, contribution. Crosta’s vision was never ‘rebellious’. It appears more akin to John Dewey’s benevolent and reassuring pragmatism, barely tempered by the demystifying irony of Albert Hirschman, who ensures some comfort or shrewdness against the vicissitudes of everyday life. In Dewey’s reformist spirit, Crosta does not see the expert guide capable of technically directing the virtuous and positive evolution of society in a vision that could become technocratic, as happened to several inclinations in American policy-making, which were even inspired by the culture of pragmatism (Hird, 2018). The influence of a heterodox figure such as Albert Hirschman was useful for avoiding that trend. Dewey’s inquiry is not understood as a potentially effective problem-solving method, but rather as a *social experiment*, a collective product of the multiple interactions that may arise between people participating in the decision-making game

in question. This is the sense in which Crosta (1984, ed.) conceived the ‘social production of the master plan’. Any specific tool of spatial governance should not be understood as the effect of public wilfulness implemented under expert skill, but rather as the result of *social interaction*, where the visions, interests, and actions of multiple players intertwine and evolve contextually. In that perspective, the notion of *practice* is important in urban representations, not only to mark systemic conditioning of individual ideas and behaviour, as both Althusser and Michel Foucault suggested (Foucault in more flexible ways). Above all, the reference to practices tends to acknowledge processes of *social production* that always underlie administrative disciplinary acts (Crosta, 2006). This perspective was secondary in Campos’ interpretation, focusing as he did on the reformist mission of planning with public guidance; however, it also remained in the background of Secchi’s design-oriented research, having been an important topic in his work as an economic-territorial analyst. The distance was also clear with respect to the distinguished planners such as Schön, Hoch, Forester, or Flyvbjerg, whom I have mentioned, because a decisive importance is always attached to the professional role of the expert. From this point of view, Crosta’s singular position is seen clearly. Public (or any party’s) wilfulness is not enough, nor is expert skill. The author’s reflection connects the essential mechanisms of multiple interaction and emerging effects, which generally remain in the shadows of official representations. The author shows an ability — ‘paralogical’, as Lyotard (1983) would say — to reformulate the game in less sweetened or mystifying ways than usual. With an effective contribution on ‘critical realism’ and perhaps some ‘displacement’ effect (in Lyotard’s sense) vis-à-vis disciplinary orthodoxy. As with any mechanism, the framework that emerges can be compatible with different values and intentions. What options did Crosta aim to indicate?

6.2 The Reform-Oriented Horizon

The *reformist* orientation of an author inspired by Dewey and Hirschman may seem to be a consistent, evident fact. In reality, the point is not up for discussion at this time. Some distinction and clarification would have been necessary, however, at the beginning of this history in the 1970s when *reformism* and *possibilism* were not considered convincing keywords in some intellectual circles. There were other aspirations: a *radical* transformation in the model of economic-social organization and reproduction. According to that perspective, a programme of partial reforms was only

intended as a preliminary and insufficient step. Indeed, for the shrewdest observers, a reform-oriented policy could become the skilful strategy with which the ‘system’ could regenerate and extend its capacity for social control (Donolo, 1977). This was an ideological presumption, rather than an objectively verified hypothesis. At that stage, however, it had a widespread influence on investigations and reflections by certain components of the discipline. If the urban space is at once a presupposition and a relevant outcome of the overall process of capital reproduction, it seemed reasonable to concentrate on the *social* functions of planning, as a tool for the ‘reformist programme of bringing all of society back under the hegemony of capital’ (Crosta, 1975, p. 7). It was interesting to investigate the spatial effects of structural transformations in the economy and society, but also the impact of ongoing trends in urbanization and urban policies on general economic restructuring and social control. A line of inquiry and interpretation opened (Crosta, 1973, 1975) and gradually moved away from the usual sphere of technical and operational planning. In hindsight, it is easy to point to the limits of that ideological vision, which delayed the affirmation of a reformist, pragmatic, and responsible spirit in Italy that is still weak and rare today. What remains from those experiences is the exploration of certain roles and particular functions held by planners (as ambitious as they were probably unrealistic) that generally proved to be untenable. An awareness of those failures should give new impetus to the questions of reformist culture in the sector and the country.

In the 1970s, Crosta played an important role in cultural mediation by spreading across Italy the most important positions and trends in planning that had been affirmed in the English-speaking world in the early 1900s (with a special focus on North American experiences, which were then little known in Italy). The main topic of interest was not the specific innovations tested at the time in that context (Crosta, 1975): the interpretations of zoning, which differed from the German model in terms of the priority given to protecting real estate property and existing housing conditions; the experiences of company towns (Garner, 1992), which agreed only vaguely with the European principle of the ‘garden city’; housing policies, with significant openness to the active role of private entrepreneurship; and pilot projects in regional and environmental planning, such as the exemplary case of the Tennessee Valley Authority (Sachs, 2023). Each of those topics was potentially relevant to the developing debate in Italy, but a wide gap remained with respect to the political/administrative possibilities for effective experimentation in the short term. The most immediate interest,

not without some ideological bias, was, as I have mentioned, in the planner's social role: to protect and support the truly dominant powers due to a certain distrust of the instrumental aims of reformist policies. At the same time, empathy for an ideal profile — 'heroic', in some lines of thought — of a critical city planner shone through, capable of unveiling the strategies of power and showing society and the territory the way to emancipation. This perspective was always supported by the insurgent trend (from Lefebvre to Harvey or Swyngedouw), but it was still worthy of note even for less socially engaged, i.e. more academic, observers (such as Camilla Perrone, 2022). This orientation somewhat limits the interest in Crosta's contributions from the time, if not as documentation for an ideological period that has now passed. There is still a lack of adequate reflection on the reasons and factors that make it complicated to 'pass reforms', a topic that was acutely placed on the agenda by Albert Hirschman (1963). The problem in Italy is serious and cannot be addressed only through political/administrative measures. Substantial difficulties have *social* and *cultural* roots, as Carlo Donolo (1992, 2011), who had become a privileged spokesman for Pier Luigi Crosta, showed with great rigour and civic passion. The reformist culture of the 1970s was therefore a horizon for our author to explore. Only later did it become a distinctive characteristic capable of leading to new themes and modes of research. The conviction, however, remained intact: reform-oriented policies cannot be assimilated only as a public function of governance and policy-making.

6.3 Advocacy Planners and other New Roles

Along the way, it is necessary to reconsider the effective roles of planners. They cannot be understood merely as interpreters and guarantors — based on their technical expertise — of an idea of public interest, which would find a tangible, long-term expression in the plan of the future city. Experience teaches us that there may be multiple partial roles: in support of some party (as testified by the figure of the *advocacy planner*; Crosta, 1973); or as a facilitator of the entire process — an expert capable of encouraging mediation, negotiation, or the arrival at a shared resolution, despite the multiple interests at stake (Crosta 1984, 1985). Neither of the two perspectives seems unique and unambiguous. The 'advocacy planner' may express a rebellious tension that would question the institutional and social framework, giving a voice to and finding legitimacy in bottom-up movements (Peattie, 1968, 1994; Heskin, 1980). Or this type of planner may represent a perfectly institutional figure who, following a logic of *equity*

planning (Krumholz and Clavel, 1994; Krumholz and Wertheim Hexter, 2018; King, 2024), ensures technical assistance for some parts of society, bridging any gaps between expertise and opportunities. This profile was already outlined in Davidoff's inaugural vision in 1965 and was confirmed in the retrospective discussion curated 30 years later by Barry Checkoway (1994), with contributions by Krumholz, Forester, Clavel, and Marris, among others. The original desire to give minorities a voice seemed to give way to the pragmatic need for institutional interaction between organized interests (as Crosta had anticipated in 1973). The figure of the mediator may coincide with the profile of an expert that does not claim neutrality, but is concerned with technically guaranteeing a positive outcome to multi-party interaction (the professional interpretation adopted by Lawrence Susskind: with Bacow and Wheeler, 1983; with Cruikshank, 1987). Or it alludes to the ideology of a subject beyond partisan lines, 'everyone's friend' according to John Forester (see Crosta, 1995, pp. 241–242), who would have the maieutic capacity to reveal good reasons and the possibility for mutual agreements to each party: a truly ambitious concept of the role, even if it remains unclear (as Mazza, 1995a, observed) which competences and requirements could be used for such a claim. A paradox follows (Palermo, 1992, Chapter 12): while the public and social function of planning is increasingly weak and uncertain in current practice, the technician is assumed to play a decisive role in guaranteeing synthesis, at least provisionally, in the process. To this end, the technician seems willing to rely on any possible strategy or tool (as Martin Rein suggested in *Social Planning: The Search for Legitimacy*, 1969, published in Crosta, 1973, Chapter 11). In this way, the planning culture began to legitimize an eclectic orientation, which in my opinion is one of the most serious limitations in the discipline.

Crosta was not very sensitive to ideological celebrations. He preferred to concentrate on concrete practices, which, even in Italy, effectively revealed the growing importance of partisan interests and as a result, a strong demand for cooperation. He therefore carefully analysed the empirical evolution of the issue, especially in Milan (Crosta, 1984; 1995, Part I). However, in contrast to Forester, he did not try to transform the contingent trend into a paradigm of general worth. Rather, the reflection took a notably different turn with respect to the predictions or intentions of international academia. The hypothesis that planning could lead to some impetus to radically transform the existing order immediately seemed impractical, despite the fascination of 'insurgent' ideologies. At the same time, it was clear that in practice, the institutional and legislative system dedicated to regulating

and controlling the territory did not work according to declared functional and prescriptive models. The case of Lombardy (long studied by Crosta) became an excellent test bench. Concrete experiences revealed the domination of dispensation mechanisms with respect to the official paradigm (Palermo, 2004, Chapter 9) due to: informal recourse to the *'rito ambrosiano'* as instrumental legalization of the exception to the rule; the adaptive/remedial practices of the *'urbanista condotto'*, a pragmatic variant of the proud medical metaphor evoked by modern town planning; and the unrestrained multiplication of area projects and special agreements as ad hoc forms of regulation for areas of strategic interest. The prevailing logic related to *negotiation*, while the international culture still longed for forms of 'communicative' or 'collaborative' interaction. The negotiation in question concerned the parties' material interests, but could be extended to the realm of political consensus; pure bargaining could thus take the form of the 'exchange between consensus and goods that confer authority', as Gian Enrico Rusconi showed (1984). In that framework, the main players — the public administration, political parties, land and real estate operators, technicians, social segments, urban movements — assumed not only the roles envisaged by the more traditional functional model (Secchi, 1984). The play among parties became multifaceted, opaque, even surprising in many cases; it required careful reconstruction in the field, without prejudice. The *contractual* orientation of the processes was the most common trend. In general, urban planners interpreted the role eccentrically with respect to the canonical model, in a twofold sense: because it was more marginal than expected and it marked a substantial departure from orthodox assumptions. One conclusion could be drawn: the system and process of spatial governance had to be radically rethought. Starting in the early 1990s, this was the key interest in Pier Luigi Crosta's research.

6.4 Urban Planning, Politics, and Policy

The planner chose the title *La politica del piano* for an important collection of essays published in 1990, followed by an extensively updated edition in 1995. The expression normally refers to two families of meaning according to different traditions in politics or policy. In one case, institutional structures, power relations, and governance procedures regulating land uses and transformations are called into question. In short, this was a question of developing political aspects in planning practice, an issue that was often avoided or delegated to some critical branch of the social sciences (as demonstrated in contributions by Harvey, Castells, Soja and

other renowned geographers or sociologists). The alternative took the form of planning policy, a branch of the discipline that recognized the focus on issues related to managing and implementing the city plan. Design and regulation are not enough; it is necessary to verify the concrete effects on the space, which are displayed in implementation processes. These are not only bureaucratic and procedural, but hold political significance due to: the continuous confrontation between competing interests; screening feasibility requirements, which are not only technical; managing contingencies; and discovering and taking responsibility for possible outcomes. The attention to these topics represented an important innovation with respect to tradition, which understood the plan as the detailed project for a final state. The turning point was documented in original studies, such as by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) in the United States and Barrett and Fudge (1981) in the UK; it has since been widely developed. In his book, Crosta did not choose any of the two paths, which (in different ways) still reference the ‘paradigm of intentional action’. In previous years, however, he had researched the power structures that ‘determine urban transformations’ (Crosta and Graziosi, 1977; Crosta, 1979), and the issues of planning policy might seem akin to his more recent interests. The adopted perspective is still one of ‘social production of the plan’, which I already noted in Section 6.1 (Crosta, 1984, ed.).

The decisive steps introduced an interpretation of the *intention/action* relationship and, as a corollary, refinement of the connection between *knowledge and action*. The ‘rationalist and methodical’ tradition continues to represent the most comforting frame of reference for many schools of planning (in fact, the literature continues to bring up that ideal vision, which has remained unchanged in the long run: Brooks, 2017; Levy, 2017, 11th edition; Rouse and Piro, 2022). We all have an idea of the rationality of individual action: assumptions, requirements, strategies. The hypothesis of transferring this model to a supposed ‘collective actor’ is not obvious, yet it is still influential. This should be represented by the public authority producing the master plan, or would even — with a bold, imprudent shift that has been endorsed by authoritative scholars — come to coincide with the city itself, capable of promoting and guiding the most recent experiences in strategic planning in a unified way (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000; Le Galès, 2002; Oosterlynks et al., 2019). It is presumed that a set of actors — those involved in some important urban transformation process — will be able to find a shared synthesis and representation, despite plausible contrasts between the parties’ interests. The vision involves multiple actors, but

each one should play a role and have well-defined functions that seem to admit a sustainable composition. The functionality of the emerging system of actors, roles, and relationships that would be able to express shared intentionality, destined to becoming a legitimate decision and then effective action is not being questioned. Crosta was not willing to accept this model. This was true not only of its pure forms (which are evidently abstract and far-fetched), but also in the more reasonable varieties of ‘bounded rationality’ (in the sense of Herbert Simon and the school of ‘behavioural analysis’) with reference in North American planning to positions that seemed strongly innovative in the second half of the 20th century: the idea that the ‘planning method’ was the core of a new disciplinary vision (Melvin Webber, 1963); the idea of the ‘practitioner as a theorist’ (Richard Bolan, 1967, 1980); and Donald Schön’s figure of the ‘reflective planner’ (1983), which Crosta may consider for circumscribed experiences of area planning, but not as a general paradigm of city planning. In a series of essays published in the 1980s (the most important were collected in the two editions of *La politica del piano*), Pier Luigi Crosta explained the untenability of that idea of a system, a collective actor, intention as a prerequisite for action, and planning as a problem-solving device. This meant distancing himself from the disciplinary component that might seem closer to his interests. In fact, the dialogue was more in line with the emerging thread of urban planning than with the tradition of city design. And yet Crosta did not hesitate to distinguish his view from the authoritative visions of Webber, Bolan, Schön, and other influential authors without fearing solitude. One fact is memorable: at the same time Crosta was inexorably deconstructing the concept of planning as a ‘method of decision-making’, Andreas Faludi (1987) discovered — incorrectly once again — the paradigm of the ‘decision-centred view’ (Palermo, 2022, Section 3.1). Indeed, Crosta’s privileged references were from outside the discipline: unorthodox exponents of organizational studies (Crozier, Weick, Lanzara); economists with a trace of heresy (such as Albert Hirschman) or radically dissenting from the official logic of planning (such as Charles Lindblom); a sensitive and active sociologist such as Carlo Donolo; and trespassing between sociology and philosophy, which at the turn of the century evoked ‘the practice turn in contemporary theory’ (Schatzi et al., 2001), as an alternative to an ‘argumentative turn’ that appeared to be in decline (Fischer and Forester, 1993). Crosta paid some attention to the ‘practice turn’ in 2010, but developments along those lines were not very significant; there were only a few paradigmatic and methodical contributions (Erman and Möller, 2018).

Should we conclude that Crosta chose a heretical position that placed him beyond or at the margins of the discipline? I believe that the hypothesis is plausible in the most traditional areas of Italian planning, but this is not the author's conviction (1995, pp. 173–174). Rejecting the representation of the problem as a well-ordered play, in which each actor recites a predetermined part and the result is predictable; recognizing that planning is a device to generate and legitimize problem rather than a solution to inherited criticalities; questioning the intention/action chain, which is not linear, determined, or decisive; instead pointing out the relevant but overlooked influence of unintended or undesired effects, which in the system create important, structural, and generative links: according to the author, these moves did not intend to reject the discipline or plan as the main tool, but to set the conditions for a planning concept and practice that was more realistic, shareable, and effective (Crosta, *ibid.*). This meant questioning the most common assumptions. Planning is not only a 'government function' to be performed in the public interest by sectors delegated by the administration. Not only does it involve multiple actors, but the interpretation of roles cannot be predetermined according to simple functional strategies; it has specific characteristics according to the interplay of interactions in the context (Crosta, 1984, ed.). Planning does not consist only of public decisions, which should be consistent with the declared intentions and shared objectives. Consensus is not a prerequisite for action, but is formed and evolves throughout the process. The actors' strategies could change over time, but the cause is not always (or perhaps rarely) the interaction with urban and social reality that is valid as a context, but rather the need to react to the choices and actions of other players directly involved in decision-making (Crosta, 1990). The events that occur are at least partly an effect emerging from the set of actions and interactions that develop in the setting (Crosta, 1995, part III). Recurring attempts to give an institutional form to interactions to favour the emergence of 'joint action', risk weakening the political, strategic, and innovative value of unintended and undesired effects that social governance processes and territorial transformations continue to generate; in short, the will to order risks undermining the capacity for innovation (Crosta, 1996; 1998, Chapter 4). For the same reasons, methodical claims to govern the process according to pre-established schemes, procedures, and tools are in vain; any concrete experience of policy design implies notable margins of unpredictability and improvisation (Crosta, 2010, Chapter 6). To conclude, master plans cannot be understood as the solution to problems on the agenda. They are important if they affect the agenda itself, highlighting new critical issues within an

inexhaustible social process. I believe that those with some experience in the field cannot help but perceive the hard realism of these considerations. Even if the crisis of many official certainties in the discipline may arouse doubts and fears.

In this framework, the concept of the knowledge/action nexus should also change. The issue was also addressed with the same approach in more recent work (Crosta, 1998; 2010; 2021, with Cristina Bianchetti). The idea of knowledge used in planning practice cannot be reduced to *expert knowledge*, as Lindblom had long anticipated (Lindblom, 1977; Lindblom and Cohen, 1979). This does not mean endorsing a populist ideology that tends to negate professional expertise (Nichols, 2017). Professionalism is indispensable, but one must be aware of its limits, which modernist culture has underestimated (Fischer, 1990; Turner, 2014). Common sense is a nontrivial category worthy of reflection (Peels and van Woudenberg, 2020) and it certainly influences the formation of the convictions and reactions of those involved in the process (Crosta, 1998, Chapter 5). In addition, it would be misleading to rely only on the state of knowledge, whether expert or common, which could be valid at the beginning of the experience. New visions and reflections emerge in the course of the process: knowledge is formed and reshaped through *interaction*, as Wildavsky realized (1979); these are often unexpected results, ‘perverse effects’ of ongoing processes (Boudon, 1977). Multiple sources, even unorthodox ones, a multiplication of mechanisms to generate expert or common knowledge: the change in perspective is not marginal with respect to tradition.

Crosta’s proposed view may make us uncomfortable. The feeling is that the analysis is clear, the conclusions irrefragable. The ideal models may hold ideological value, but practice does not work in that way. Crosta’s reference to concrete experience seems to confirm that he was right when he questioned some stereotypes. However, a feeling of embarrassment remains. Perhaps the subject should remain at the mercy of events, in the expectation that some emerging effect is fully demonstrated? Could any individual move ultimately be justified because some unexpected effect could arise sooner or later? I am reminded of an observation made by Secchi (2000, p. 180), who warned against proclaiming the failure of a city plan. Even if the tool is not actually realized, it can always influence future images of the city and therefore the practices to follow (but the lack of answers to impending questions is not irrelevant!). I believe it is necessary to clarify; recognizing the limits of intentions and individual action does

not mean evading the responsibility for some choice (as Hirschman always said). Any choice should express a bounded, partial, and provisional rationality according to subjective hypotheses of priority and meaning that an outside observer might discuss or criticize. This element is destined to converge in the social process of change, with results that are generally unforeseen. It would be mistaken to find in Crosta's analysis the idea that intentionality in research or a partisan project could become a superfluous or irrelevant requirement. In this case, the alternative for the subject would only be to contemplate the course of events.

6.5 City Planning as Political Action

The relationship between planning and power, a historically controversial topic, was not the subject of special studies by Pier Luigi Crosta from the late 1980s on (a few references can still be found in the anthology published in 1984). Some judgements remain unspoken, but can probably be taken for granted. Today, conceiving of 'planning without politics' is nonsense, because this is no longer the time of Le Corbusier or Piccinato (for whom, '*le plan n'est pas de la politique*': Palermo, 2004, Chapter 9). Or it is mystified, because a post-political scenario tends to favour the confirmation of land and real estate interests (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Pinson, 2020). Subordinating disciplinary action to political power means accelerating the pace towards the horizon I have called *post-planning* (Chapter 1): a scenario that today seems increasingly probable. Claiming the 'urban revolution', as is still the case with David Harvey (2012, 2020) and Erik Swyngedouw (2018), continuing by inertia along the path traced by Henri Lefebvre in another era (Chapter 5) risks becoming an illusory exhortation or an alibi before the incapacities of the reformist programme. Crosta did not accept any of these simplifications, just as he rejected reducing the issue to the institutional practices of policy-making (Section 6.4). His *political* idea of the discipline favours the *social* dimensions of any important project or experience in spatial transformation: the issues of multiple interactions among the various actors involved; the problem of building consensus around strategies and actions in the local setting; or implementing interventions and the consequent social reactions within a never-ending process. This is not a classical vision following the model, for example, of the Geddes' civics, which presumed a political community capable of expressing a meaning, spatial order, a shared project (which also concerns the space as a particular dimension). The diagnosis of Italy made by Carlo Donolo (an author much loved by Crosta, as well as by this

writer) is merciless (2011): the home of particularistic individualism and lack of regulation. Indeed, Crosta does not take refuge in easy communitarian rhetoric. He preferred to observe the multiplication and concrete course of *publics* (plural) forming around problems of collective interest, sharing common knowledge that could be processed and transformed collectively into action (Crosta, 2013, with Pizzorno and Secchi; Bianchetti, 2008). The notion of community must be revisited (Crosta, 2010, Chapter 2; Blokland, 2017) with respect to virtuous models (that are still influential: Heywood, 2024).

The political aspect of the problems in this sense is marginal or beyond traditional plan-making. The issue also remained in the background of Campos' and Secchi's views: in the name of a planning tradition that was able to evolve over the long term, and tended to reassert its own autonomous primacy (Campos); or based on a nascent project that aimed to renew the disciplinary field, reinvigorating its identity (Secchi). Mazza was different. He moved from an inherited idea of discipline; he questioned it through experience; he discovered its radical limits; and he arrived, as an unintended outcome, at a vision that had little in common with tradition. In fact, politics and policy became discriminating issues. However, Mazza never rejected an attempt or the hope to rebuild a planning discipline that was renewed and more adapted to the times. I see great affinity between the substantive conclusions of Crosta and Mazza, with a difference that is not marginal: Pier Luigi Crosta showed no real interest in the future of city planning (despite some declarations of intent: Section 6.4). He completed a clear, merciless deconstruction of the disciplinary apparatus that grew in strength over the long term. It showed some sense that is not always obvious; noncontingent limits, a series of inconsistencies and weak points in the practice and language. He did not bother to reconstruct or even explore — with an eccentric and therefore perhaps unprecedented view — the issues of politics and policy that represented the natural background of his path (as he recognized when he was invited by Bruno Dente in 1990 to reflect on the topic of planning policy). Indeed, his more recent reflections seem to favour the analyst-researcher's point of view rather than the policy (or place)-maker (Crosta and Bianchetti, 2021). With regard to planning practices, only one perspective seems to emerge: the one that tends to legitimize the informal, adaptive processes of *tactical urbanism* (some of Crosta's reflections, 2010, seem to anticipate more advanced developments of the movement). His focus on the *everyday-maker* (inspired by Janet Newman, 2005) is exemplary. The same is also true of his concept of

policy design, which I already mentioned (Section 6.4): his openness to anything possible became the driver of improvisation, a perspective that was legitimized as a theory by Karl Weick (1989 and 1998). From a relentless deconstruction of disciplinary knowledge to taking note of events as they happen: this is a ‘political’ vision that makes me somewhat uncomfortable.

As an endless exercise, deconstruction risks becoming sophistry (that is ultimately unproductive), while the issues on the agenda remain untouched or intractable (Mouffe, 1996). Perhaps the analogy with the widespread, tenacious interest in French studies on the concept of ‘deconstruction’ shown by North American culture in the new century is valid (see, for example, the publications by Roudinesco, 2008, at Columbia University, or Gunkel, 2021; contributions have multiplied in the sphere of literary criticism). The trend has echoed the broad European reflection on post-structuralist philosophies (Norris, 2002; Williams, 2005; Dillet et al., 2013). The result is a rich repertoire of analytical reflections, although they have remained niche products, without significant effects on real practice. Indeed, in the world of planning, the most tangible consequence, as I have argued on various occasions, was the production of literary, calligraphic, and arbitrary exercises lacking any real interest (Section 10.2). There is an awareness of the possible risk of halting the virtuous demands of the reformist programme. It is good not to give too much weight to the claims of institutional policy-making or the self-promotion of expert knowledge, but it may be reductive to limit oneself to observing what is possible, while some responsibilities seem evident and justified, but also overlooked.

I can think of at least two families of topics. The function of expert knowledge is partial and at risk, but this cannot serve as an alibi to avoid all the problems of policy-making: a set of political, social, institutional, and organizational questions — a culture of improvisation is not enough — that the international field of policy design has tried to address since the 1980s (as a synthesis: Howlett, 2018; Howlett and Mukherjee, 2018; Peters and Fontaine, 2022). It would be interesting to assess urban planners’ capacity to make a substantial contribution to those impending questions. In this framework, the technical responsibilities of physical urban planning also re-emerge. Someone should care for them, because it is not possible to rely solely on the real estate market and architectural project (Chapter 5). The second large topic is the interpretation of *social* and *political* aspects. In the conclusion of the chapter dedicated to Gigi Mazza, I hoped for the discipline’s revival of the urbanist’s typical working style (Section 4.3). I

do not mean to allude only to brilliant analysts of urban space and social relations, designated with this label on the international scene (such as Sassen, Sennett, Soja, Harvey, and others of great interest). In Italy, too, we have been able to rely on significant experiences, such as ‘economic and social analysis of the territory’ (Secchi, Ceccarelli, Indovina, in Venice in the 1970s), or the ‘territorialist’ tradition of inquiry and design (according to the interpretation developed by Alberto Magnaghi in Milan and Florence starting in the 1970s). It might be useful to revisit those traditions rather than claiming a planning identity that is once again orthodox, or merely deconstructing a field has now been exhaustively investigated. In this framework, Pier Luigi Crosta’s work seems fundamental for receding from some orthodox interpretations of the discipline, although they remain influential. However, it does not seem capable of indicating new perspectives that could renew experimentation in the field. But that may not have been its purpose.

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7. Necessary and Irrelevant. Paradoxes and Responsibilities in Planning Culture (Alberto Clementi)⁴

7.1 One or Many

The dilemma is well known and does not allow for a simple solution: city planning is an institution, a form of knowledge, a practice (or better yet, a family of institutions, knowledge, and practices) that should present specific characteristics, e.g. distinctive conceptual frameworks, rules, and tools, but it also introduces a vast network of relationships with a set of phenomena and various sorts of mechanisms — social, cultural, political, environmental, economic, institutional, administrative, etc. To understand and assess disciplinary dynamics, it seems necessary to reconstruct the co-evolutionary processes of the changing society, investigating the multiple dimensions of the problem. However, the area of reference may become too open and intricate, putting the thread of discourse at risk. The most plausible alternative would be to circumscribe the field to more rigorously delimit the topics of interest and responsibility, with the risk, in this case, of avoiding influential connections and factors. If anything, the discourse could become introverted and self-referential, as sometimes occurs with authorial visions — which were important early on and seemed to re-emerge in the late 1900s after a long period of stagnation, as a possible strategy for reducing complexity (otherwise intractable?). Bernardo Secchi worthily represented the dilemma as a planner who wanted to refine a dense concept of the discipline (recognizing its multiple dimensions); at the same time, however, he claimed the dominance of an ‘internal’ history and reflection, and the desire to leave a mark on the course of processes due the author’s style and design. With respect to these positions, Alberto Clementi’s most recent contribution to the debate on planning (*Alla conquista della modernità*, 2020) is a clear reversal: a return to the challenges of ‘multiple, coevolutionary histories’, with all the awareness of the difficulties and risks involved, but perhaps also of the need today to find a collective, shared meaning in the processes, beyond the limits of an author or sector-based views. I will use this text as a common thread for reflecting on the author’s path of research and experimentation.

Reading the book, I had the impression I was being confronted not only with a story (‘one of all those possible’ on such a complex and controver-

⁴ This chapter is a revised and expanded version of the essay published in *Città Bene Comune*, Casa della Cultura, Milan, 14 September 2023.

sial subject), but also with a play, a work in five acts and nearly 90 scenes that renews the pedagogical intent of classical theatre. The sequence of acts marks an original path full of meaning. It opens with an overall anticipation of the entire journey and ends with a painful reflection on the disorder of the present and the uncertainty of the future. The middle contains three crucial steps (real *turning points*, according to Arjun Appadurai, 1996, 2013): the economic and social crisis (not just in Italy) of the early 1970s; systemic breakdown in Italy in the early 1990s; and the great global crisis of 2008 and its dramatic consequences. Each act develops in a sequence of numerous, well-defined scenes (each dedicated to a crucial topic or issue) that are at once detailed and fundamental and therefore effective as elements that draw the reader's attention to facts, characters, and influential events (but not always present in our memory and interpretation). In an overall network, these elements offer a convincing reconstruction of long-term processes and problems, becoming the essential framework for reconsidering and judging the evolution of Italian planning in the last 50 years. I find the approach interesting and fertile. Here, I am interested in drawing attention to the ways in which Italian city planning, according to Alberto Clementi, has interacted with the overall process of coevolution. The goal is therefore to trace the lines of reasoning dedicated specifically to disciplinary visions and actions. It should not be surprising that this thread is weak and essentially marginal. This is because the role played by the discipline in a changing society has not been very important in recent decades, despite certain claims or self-referential proclamations. But was it more influential in the past? Clementi reports an objective decline compared to a previous period after the Second World War that was supposedly more fertile. I would have my doubts, at least regarding Italy, where the planning culture was constantly behind with respect to more advanced international experiences (the long period of Fascism certainly affected it). In the 1950s and 1960s, the disciplinary voice even seemed more vigorous and edifying in Italy; however, it was primarily a late-Enlightenment pedagogical position full of warnings and exhortations, but largely incapable of effectively guiding real processes, with the risk of representing an abstract utopia, while the actual transformations were otherwise oriented and determined. It is true, however, that since the 1970s, the planning narrative has grown weaker and more fragmented, clearly losing its original visionary power, while a resignation has grown with respect to increasingly contingent, sometimes opportunistic forms and means of action. We briefly revisit some essential passages.

7.2 The Voices of Planning

The selection of disciplinary references presented by the author step by step over time, in no way claims to be exhaustive, but takes responsibility for subjective assessments and interpretations (which have, however, been corroborated in the long term by a considerable corpus of investigations and experimentation in the field). The choices do not strictly respect orthodox canons, but confirm a constant openness to multiple storylines and their intersections. The course of reasoning follows a spiral arrangement: the essential thread of the discourse is immediately delineated and salient issues are later addressed in depth (I intend to adopt the same method in my argument).

Following the Second World War, Italian planning culture presented itself as a progressive force that, at least in terms of values and good intentions, intended to contribute to the unfinished modernization of the country. Astengo's passionate and exhortative editorials in the journal *Urbanistica* perfectly reflect the spirit of the times. Opinions regarding the facts become more uncertain if it is true that the main experience recalled by Clementi at the time was Luigi Piccinato's plan for Rome (1962), where forecasts were grossly overestimated, future development was distributed along axes to expand road mobility, and urban design reflected general models rather than an actual interpretation of the context (Piccinato, 1964). The deviation between ideology and practice is a problem that should not be underestimated, not even in the (relatively) glorious phase. We should not forget the most radical objection, which Clementi pronounces firmly: the prevailing concept of city planning at the time tended to foreshadow the future of the city in 'rigid and authoritarian' forms. That view was dominant for a long time, even when the context took on notably different forms and characteristics.

Indeed, over time, critical aspects have become aggravated due to a series of factors and concurrent processes that the book documents exhaustively. The model of industrial development, strongly guided by the public in the years of accelerated growth, failed. Amid the unbridled post-modernity, tendencies towards dispersion — economic systems, settlement forms, ideological visions, value choices, and behavioural patterns — multiplied. Public functions became weaker due to crises in legitimization and a lack of resources (public debt grew, but not economy productivity). As masterfully argued by Carlo Donolo (Palermo, 2018a, 2018b), social cohesion was put at risk by individualist drivers, which heightened partisan interest

more than possible individual and social emancipation. The urban question assumed unprecedented and serious forms starting in the 1980s, with growing evidence of the critical convergence of not only functional problems, but also environmental (ecology, pollution, sustainability) and social (growing inequalities) problems. Spatial morphology had changed noticeably due to the composite effect of historical conditions, local movements, and selective impulses of globalization. The 1990s saw a multiplication of studies aimed at rethinking spaces, landscapes, and infrastructure (and their mutual relationships) and the book reports on them comprehensively. Among these, the national experiences that the author himself edited and soberly mention in the text seem worthy of attention: ITATEN and RETURB (1995–1998), URBAN (2000–2002), several contributions on landscape issues, and, finally (2007–2008), the study on spatial frameworks by the National Strategic Framework (I point out the main bibliographical references in Section 7.4).

Amid this changing scenario, public policies lost a lot of certainty. The hope of improving the consistency and joint effectiveness of public interventions on the economy and planning could only be in vain, if it is true that the country had always hesitated to engage in economic programming. Giorgio Ruffolo's 'Progetto '80' was quickly dismissed as a book of dreams (Ruffolo, 1969); only at the end of the century did the topic of 'new programming' reappear on the agenda with very ambitious goals that were largely not realized (Barca, 2006). The canonical visions and strategies of modern town planning seemed to have difficulty in the face of the evolution and spread of areas of intervention (among metropolitan centres, historical cities, dispersed settlements, and inland areas). The pure reiteration of the objectives and models of early modernity became unsustainable due to the weight of duties and lack of resources (with the risk of contributing to the irresponsible growth of public debt in the 1970s and 1980s). The emerging demands of spatial governance, increasingly fluid and diversified, wound up being incompatible with the rigidity and imposing nature of traditional tools. Starting in the 1960s, Campos Venuti highlighted the centrality of politics and administration in planning processes (Chapter 3). However, that (shared) move did not lead to a substantial revision of planning tools for many decades. On the contrary, a large part of the discipline continued to be wary of the possibility of intervening through area projects, criticized or rejected as they were by many planners as exceptions to the prescriptive logic of traditional master plans (a prime example was the period of 'complex programmes' in the 1990s: Cremaschi, 2001, 2003;

Palermo, 2004, Chapter 11). Clementi mentions just two planning experiences on the threshold of the new century: the plan for Rome, designed by a large group of reformist planners under the leadership of Campos Venuti (2001), and the plan for Milan, conceived and developed by Gigi Mazza (2001). Yet both cases had serious unresolved problems. Despite a very accurate and refined spatial framework (where the centrality of the railway infrastructure and an unusual attention to the urban project in certain areas of strategic transformation stood out), the experience in Rome did not convince Clementi due to certain choices of merit (in particular, the selection and sizing of areas to concentrate settlement expansion, but especially due to the lack of a clear ‘planning policy’ (which, in fact, failed to guarantee consistent and effective implementation). In contrast, the plan for Milan marked the triumph of flexibility and discretion: a system of rules was imposed on the existing settlement, but urban transformations were not prescribed a priori, given the often radical conditions of uncertainty. Proposals for intervention could be formulated by multiple public or private actors, which meant submitting them for evaluation according to the established framework of constraints and guidelines. This meant radically questioning the traditional dogma of planning as a device that prescribed the future. The case of Milan was probably the most important attempt in Italy (which was only completed at the beginning of the new century) to give cultural and institutional legitimacy to a practice that was normally considered ‘behaviour by exception’. Because the rigidity of instruments was becoming an increasingly critical issue, Clementi considered the alternative worthy of interest. However, he was always aware of the risks that a highly discretionary model entailed if the interpretations were too cynical or instrumental. The author therefore wondered whether that plan was not the key to the intense but questionable real-estate development in Milan over the last 20 years.

These two experiences thus led to a radical dilemma that could not be avoided. Clementi did not seem to find convincing answers along other disciplinary lines, which also attracted evident interest in the 1990s. I am alluding to the planning tools prescribing form-based codes that Gregotti and Secchi tested for a short time with a significant but only temporary impact in the media (Chapter 4). I am also referring to the official developments in Italian reformist planning, in the footsteps of Campos’ vision, a line which the author surprising did not leave much room for, whereas I think a critical reflection would be useful and timely (Palermo, 2019). On the other hand, attention is paid to a variety of contributions on the

related topics of socioeconomic analysis and decision-, strategy-, and policy-making. Some references, such as the Venetian school of ‘economic and social analysis of the territory’ (Palermo, 1992, Chapter 10) or the original research by Pier Luigi Crosta (Chapter 6) were useful for definitively focusing on certain objective limits in traditional planning, but they certainly could not suggest a concrete and sustainable alternative. Other potential contributions, such as the technocratic approach of ‘system theory’, instead presented impracticable paths that were quickly abandoned (Palermo, 1981; 1992, Chapter 5), while strategic planning gave way to intrinsically ambiguous experiments about which the author expresses a perplexity that I share (along the same lines as Gigi Mazza: Chapter 5). The conclusion is that a convincing alternative to such *rigid* and *mandatory* traditional planning still struggles to emerge, while uncertainty — regarding not only the evolutionary trends of cities and territories, but also objectives of public interest (developed in support of metropolises, the dispersed city, or weak areas?) — is an increasingly critical aspect. The book leaves us at a crossroads: accept a disciplinary practice as discretion and contingency, where functions risk becoming rhetorical or blatantly instrumental; or (try to) regenerate, share public guidance and a design-oriented approach that, in new, responsible ways, can combine certain emerging requirements: ecology, *smartness*, social inclusion (I am thinking of the EcoWebTown’ programme that Clementi courageously undertook years ago: 2016, Chapter 6). This hope struggles to become a concrete possible.

7.3 A Bright, Painful Balance: Without a Future?

In effect, the framework is not comforting. Italian planning appears to be an area that is not very sensitive to contextual changes that have grown in importance over time. The positions expressed by ordinary disciplinary actors (I am not referring to prominent figures such as those discussed here) appear not only dated, but constantly lag behind the most advanced frontiers of international disciplinary practice and research. The discussion seems to be introverted: in general, a self-referential orientation prevails, which often takes on clear ideological overtones. There is a modest capacity for innovation, even when it relates only to learning from experiences already completed in other countries. Immediately after the Second World War, the prevailing culture wanted to vindicate the modern project according to concepts of public function, design, and planning rules dating back to the early 20th century. In the 1950s and 1960s, the best-known modern planning models in Italy were developed: Matera, Padua, Assisi, Rome,

Bergamo. I note that no one today would be willing to support the topicality of those models. However, it seems to me that a true critical review of the limits of those experiences (reviewed after the fact) and the perspectives for the necessary renewal were lacking. Still, Luigi Piccinato's vision may seem reductive — even simplistic — if we compare his basic text (*La progettazione urbanistica*, 1947; reissued by Marsilio, 1988) with the main contemporary works available in the international literature in the mid-1900s. The weaknesses of the plan for Rome (1962), which Clementi clearly highlighted and it is difficult to deny, are a direct consequence of the limits of that vision (Piccinato, 1964). Giovanni Astengo's commitment could only be considered edifying and generous, but his proposals unfortunately proved to be out of place and time (Mazzoleni, 1983), more than 30 years after the plan for Amsterdam, or more than 20 years after the planning and design view of Greater London. Those traditions could not be reintroduced without appropriate care for substantial changes in the context.

The judgement is not as explicit and assertive in Clementi's text (this is my personal point of view), but the book certainly identifies and punctuates the main elements of dissatisfaction and criticism. These, moreover, long remained at the margins of disciplinary debate in Italy. The most evident tendency was the effort to strengthen, accelerate the modern transition (certainly seriously delayed in the country), in steps that were not always far-sighted and were rarely effective. Just think of the doomed attempts in the 1960s to make a general planning law (1942) more incisive and binding without fully being tested (Campos and Oliva, 1993). Over the long term, there has been no lack of reformist initiatives: a few sector laws in the 1970s (standards, housing, urban renewal, fair rent) and 1990s (on crucial issues for the public administration); before that, the intuition of Campos Venuti, who associated the original idea of city planning as spatial order and regulation, with recognition of the political-administrative dimension of practices, together with a courageous battle in favour of urban containment (Campos, 1967). However, the discipline could not, in general and for a long time, adopt reformist culture as a distinctive, cultural, and strategic perspective all at once. Only towards the mid-1990s, despite dissent or at least the reluctance of part of the discipline, did Campos manage to legitimize and drive a reformist programme. This was a late process compared to the best European experiences, from which Italy drew dated models that were actually already partly outdated in the original contexts (Chapter 3). The process was partially incomplete because the national reformist

programme foundered multiple times and the reformist orientations were gathered by the Regions unequally and not always consistently. Essentially, the process could not achieve the main objectives (outlined by Campos, 1995). In fact, the reintroduction of regional planning and the desire for a form of integrated spatial governance remained intentions on paper. The method of urban equalization (Micelli, 2004) was applied more frequently, but rarely related to the consistent implementation of choices based on a clear public rationale: negotiated agreements often became a constituent part of territorial transformations (as occurs, moreover, everywhere in the world). The main innovation was the organization of the planning model into regulatory, structural, and operational components, but after 20 years a reversal seemed necessary, with a return to the ‘unique master plan’ in the 2017 reform in the Emilia-Romagna Region and the INU’s most recent proposals. Moreover, the difficulties did not affect Italy alone. They affected — often severely — all reformist programmes undertaken in Europe in the early 2000s, due to the clear need to guarantee greater flexibility, strategic orientation, and development support than previous models. Good planning intentions largely turned out to be in vain or inadequate; the main experiments in spatial or strategic planning did not yield the expected results, such that radical revisions were sometimes required (Palermo, 2022, Section 7.2). The most common effect seems to have been a substantial deregulation of processes and a resignation to increasingly temporary project generation, which was certainly weaker than modern or reformist hopes. In this context, the controversial relationship between master plan and urban project also remained unresolved (Chapters 4 and 5). In this case, the problem did not relate to Italy alone. If we look at the international dynamics of urban design, we note repeated yet unsuccessful attempts to improve the incorporation/integration of planning and design (Gregotti and Secchi in Italy, Carmona and Punter in Great Britain, Bohigas and Busquets in Spain, and others, in various settings). But *starchitecture*’s proud claim to the autonomy of urban architectural design did not work either. The most common situation shows the proliferation of market operations that were often occasional, nontopical, ordinary, and sometimes irresponsible. The future does not seem to allow for more promising perspectives. Clementi’s book presents a snapshot of this situation without embellishment or useless modesty.

Does the book therefore express a deep pessimism, which may seem hopeless to some? At the same time, doesn’t it seem to indicate useful visions or tools for a turnaround that would be necessary now more than ever? I

gathered these questions in Patrizia Gabellini's and Maria Chiara Tosi's comments on the book (in the discussion held at Casa della Cultura, Milan, May 2023), but I am not sure I completely share such assessments. I believe that the author did not lack innovative and potentially important hypotheses and proposals over time; however, the traces must be sought in various (possibly) frontier areas.

7.4 Focusing on Side Branches

The book devotes unusual room (in planning books) to a set of marginal experiences and perspectives familiar to those who wanted to explore those paths for some reason, but which remain unusual or foreign to a large part of the discipline. Over time, I have had such opportunities, curiously enough in all the fields that Clementi invoked (indeed, several cases were shared experiences with the author).

In my training as a 'systems engineer' in the 1970s I personally encountered suggestions of the *systems view*, a methodical, rationalist, and essentially technocratic perspective from which I quickly distanced myself (Palermo, 1981 and 1983), a choice confirmed by the rapid decline of the trend shortly afterwards. Today, however, it is possible to observe a movement that I find surprising: a tentative revival of the systemic ideology of half a century ago in the new technological era of big data, smart cities, and artificial intelligence. Clementi noted the trend as one of the factors and emerging possibilities of the current change. I would prefer to make a distinction. I do not doubt the importance of big data for commercial strategies in this consumer society. Instead, I consider any idea of basing the new 'urban science' that some authors continue to promise on *big data* with an absolutely inductive method to be an epistemological mistake (Palermo, 2022, Section 3.1 and 4.4).

In Venice in the 1970s and early 1980s, I discovered the original project for 'economic and social analysis of the territory' (but similar tendencies were also clear at that time in the schools of architecture in Florence and Milan). This original expansion of horizons in institutional planning undoubtedly paved the way for significant contributions to the interpretation and criticism of ongoing processes, beyond the surface and the evidence of spatial forms (I pointed out some essential sources in Chapter 4). In hindsight, it is easier to recognize some limits: a sometimes ideological and partisan vision (that conditioned perspectives and created prejudices);

an unbridgeable gap with respect to the practices and responsibilities of ordinary planning action; and a substantial deficit of reformist culture (which undermined the real impact of analytical and critical capabilities, even if they were relevant and innovative). According to Clementi, a less ideological and yet conceptually irreproachable reference, was Pier Luigi Crosta's contribution to representing the real processes of policy-making in that same period (I also recall the decisive contribution of Bruno Dente, 1990 and 2011, who was able to bring these themes to the attention of more traditional circles of Italian political science). Recognizing the interests and strategies of influential actors and the resulting interactions; understanding decisions to be the emerging by-product of complex coevolutionary processes that are rarely determined by the intentions of a single party alone, regardless of how powerful it is: these moves seem absolutely pertinent to reconsidering real planning processes (as Crosta has shown: Chapter 6). They remained outside the current logic, which favoured physical design and regulation due to a defect of reformist culture (i.e. *realist, pragmatic, possibilist*, as Campos said), which has long conditioned society and politics in Italy. This deficit led to the representations outlined by Crosta and Dente being regarded as an analytical exercise, as lucid as it was (seemingly) abstract in relation to planners' everyday responsibilities.

In the 1990s, together with Alberto Clementi and other travel companions, I tried to reconsider territories, infrastructure, and landscapes in forms that were more suited to the dynamics of the time, which no longer seemed to refer to the traditional modes of institutional geography and planning. Perhaps the idea of infrastructure should not be associated exclusively with mobility functions, but it became interesting to explore (and try to guide) the potential connections between infrastructure projects and spatial transformations (Clementi, 1996, 1999; Clementi and Pavia, 1998). Perhaps the idea of the landscape should not be frozen within an identifying, binding vision (Palermo, 2007, 2008) that runs the risk of being immobile and nonhistorical (Clementi, 2002). As the author reiterated in the book, the landscape ages (i.e. it lives) with its inhabitants; it must be understood as an experience of collective life and therefore as a strategic resource (Wall and Waterman, 2017). Perhaps the view of the future of our territories cannot be codified according to pre-established categories and generalized models. It would be necessary to reconstruct the specific coevolutionary connections between territories, the environment, society, economy, and politics in the field to identify the territorial systems that actually emerge with particular differences and roots, potential, and resulting strategies

for governance (Lanzani, 1991 and 2011; Clementi, Dematteis, Palermo, 1996). These research exercises did not have a very significant impact, perhaps because of some inherent limitations, perhaps due to a set of political priorities that were, as now, posed differently. I remember an (informal) comment made by the Minister of Infrastructure, Paolo Costa (a professor of urban economics, by the way), when confronted with the findings of ITATEN and RETURB in the late 1990s: ‘this is not what we need’. Such an analytical commitment could only be confirmed by a political system that takes responsibility for building or at least planning a more dignified future in the long term. Italian affairs have long shown the dominance of more immediate interests, which lend themselves to less complicated management and seem to ensure widespread consensus. Exemplary in this sense was the focus on housing policies — as Clementi reminds us in the book — compared to the substantial long-term marginality of more complex issues of spatial governance. If politics refuses to design the future, investigations at the frontier become academic (which can be worthwhile for future memory, at best).

In the early years of the new century, I interacted professionally with the ‘new programming’ led by Fabrizio Barca under the impulse of Italian President Ciampi (Palermo, 2004, 2006, 2009). The expression itself reveals a few well-justified ambitions. What was at stake was the reintroduction of the country’s programmatic commitment after many decades of inertia or clear avoidance of such responsibilities. The cultural matrix was objectively technocratic and the approach rationalist. However, there was a clear desire to reconcile technical requirements with the mobilization and active involvement of local systems with an original pedagogical intent, because the goal was not just to improve public spending capacity and guarantee the consistent, effective implementation of ongoing projects, but to strengthen the future potential of the public administration, also locally (Palermo, 2004, Chapter 11). The objective was not met (Nicola Rossi, 2005) and the spread of interventions across the territory undermined the possibility of reviving a clear vision and public strategy of national interest that was unified and reform-oriented (as Clementi argues well). The attempt to carry out *integrated projects*, capable of synthesizing problems and issues of different types (spatial, social, environmental, and so on) in the specific setting was also largely unsuccessful. In fact, the local interventions that were actually completed generally presented more occasional and traditional features; the planning machinery in many cases intercepted interests and opportunities already emerging from the context. Realizing

the difficulties of integrated projects, the ‘Department for Development and Cohesion Policies’ itself tried exploring the route of strategic plans for the development of weak areas in the following planning cycle (2007–2013). I don’t agree with the programme (in effect, the results were not memorable and even Clementi was perplexed). This was a dated approach that other countries had already tested for decades with disappointing or at least controversial results. The rhetoric is ambiguous: such as the image of the ‘city as a collective actor’, which would take the place of the much more realistic metaphor of the urban *growth-machine*. Due to a series of objective impediments (which I have discussed elsewhere: Palermo, 2009; Palermo and Ponzini, 2015a), strategic planning struggles to become an authentic opportunity to clarify and recompose the interests in question. In many cases, it is reduced to a spatial communication or marketing tool, rather than effective policy-making. For weak areas, moreover, it seems difficult to rely on the mobilization of an active network of local actors. The entire strategic process risks being reduced to an exhortative and edifying (but often banal and repetitive) narrative. I must recognize, however, that the course of more recent events justifies some nostalgia for the generous wishes of the ‘new programming’ of the early 2000s. Today, the NRRP takes the form of an opaque and perhaps weakly structured list of multiple isolated interventions, where the opportunity to spend seems to become the decisive factor, but the efficiency of the public administration did not improve after so many years (indeed, we can fear some failures in the use of resources, which would be unbelievable and improper). At the same time, any pedagogical intent, such as the desire to create the conditions for a more solid and effective public function in the future would seem to vanish (Barca, 2006; Donolo, 2021; Barbera and Luongo, 2024).

With regret, we must be aware of these results. I believe that the most serious disappointment is tied to the failure of *integrated projects*. This is really a crucial point for planning practices. We need not only operational projects (today this elementary objective seems to have become endangered), but also planning projects that are aware of the context, environment, collateral and cross-scale effects, the potential impact on the evolutionary course of the relevant territory, and resulting responsibilities (Chapter 13). The capacity to combine the multiple aspects of the problem becomes an essential requirement. In the 1990s, we saw a variety of experiments in ‘complex programmes’: PIT, PRUSST, URBAN, and even others. Clementi not only participated directly in those experiences, but also grasped their essential function in planning visions: the future representa-

tion of a complex territory cannot merely serve for compilation, but must rely on the selection of integrated projects with an important territorial and strategic impact — the scenario anticipated by his original ‘*Piano di Inquadramento Territoriale*’ for the Marche Region (1997). This is therefore a key question. It is a pity that in many cases there was still a large gap between the rhetoric of integrated project and the reality of pre-packaged proposals looking for implementation opportunities. This rhetoric, as with strategic rhetoric, is also in danger of functioning as mere heresthetic (as anticipated by William Riker, 1986). This may be a problem that applies to all of city planning today, which — as I have argued for years — risks being reduced to a simulacrum (as a form and procedure limited to accompanying the course of processes that find their most important resolutions elsewhere) or becoming the lever that facilitates the dominance of the strongest and most enterprising interests (Palermo and Ponzini, 2010; Palermo, 2022). If this were the case, we should recognize the substantial irrelevance of the discipline compared to the original intentions. However, this does not imply a lack of hypotheses and proposals to play a more dignified role. I do not believe that new inventions are necessary. The ideas of territory, infrastructure, landscape, vision, or urban project that Clementi developed over time and tested as far as possible remain fully influential in my opinion (Clementi, 2012, 2016). These are the material conditions that continue to be lacking such that operational developments can be more significant. Therefore, I do not believe that Clementi’s message should be viewed as pessimistic or defenceless. It is a lucid representation of the current state, which should overlook serious limits and uncertainties of possible scenarios.

7.5 A Call to the Minimum Responsibilities

Why should the perspective change in the near future? For what reasons should we ultimately rely on the possibility of translating good intentions into concrete action? In effect, the reasons why city planning is less and less relevant for the fate of society and the environment are not only institutional and political, but especially social and cultural, i.e. deeply rooted. A sudden palingenesis is not plausible. Nor is it true, however, that the only alternative is a patient or resigned, or at least passive, wait. I think it would be right to call urban planners back to some minimum responsibilities. This appeal does not emerge formally from Clementi’s book, in which he prefers to adopt a style that is sober and composed (perhaps even too polite). All the essential elements, in my opinion, however, are available

to the reader, who could draw certain conclusions as possible prerequisites for the desired change.

The first step is to review the plan-making function on the urban scale. According to the canons of the modern project, this was the planner's essential responsibility. The aspiration seemed justified, given the imposing and constituent nature of that planning tool, which anticipated, designed, and regulated the future of the city (or rather presumed to formally interpret such functions). The master plan of our times has largely lost its prescriptive and perhaps even structural value, assuming a more limited and intrinsically vague strategic function (as shown in the most recent revised legislation for the Emilia-Romagna Region). It does not seem legitimate to understand this position as a conquest. In fact, the outcome was long opposed by the disciplinary culture, in both its modern and reformist versions (just recall the severe criticism of the planning paradigm proposed by Gigi Mazza in the late 1900s, which must be accepted today as a current and pertinent frame of reference, and perhaps the only sustainable one). Eventually, town planners almost everywhere adapted to that perspective, whether out of necessity or out of resignation. However, the importance of a strategic approach cannot be overestimated, and its innovative potential even less so, if it is true that these orientations have been tried and tested elsewhere for nearly 50 years, with results that have never been exciting (as even Clementi documented). This planning model remains incomplete in its constitution. A judgement as to the quality and importance of the tool remains largely undetermined until it is possible to assess certain decisive complements in the form of policy-making, negotiated agreements, area projects, or concrete interventions, i.e. an idea of planning as *effective action* (no longer just regulation or visioning). This is because the regulations are weak and the vision remains vague until the operations have taken shape. This means reiterating that what counts is the way in which *planning becomes action*. Disciplinary actors are misleading themselves if they assume that their role can be limited to focusing in certain assumptions, in the form of *regulations* or *visions* that are becoming increasingly weak or vague. Accepting this interpretation of the role means giving city planning an increasingly bureaucratic and formalistic function, which will always be considered useful for the operation of the political and administrative system, but will be socially marginal, resulting in only a modest professional reputation.

The second step regards regional planning, i.e., the one that should be the

future vision of a complex territory. The discipline has traditionally addressed this problem with a range of planning tools on different territorial levels, leading to a spatial framework, environmental protection, and strategic orientation. The repertoire has rarely led to convincing results. The reformist experiences of the late 1900s tried to enhance various forms of spatial planning, strategic spatial planning, and scenario planning, on a large scale, but the results (as I have already argued) were disappointing. In fact, such tools have been downsized everywhere in recent years, even cancelled without much regret in more than one context (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2014; Sykes and Sturzaker, 2024). I neither understand nor share the INU's orientation that, reasoning once again on the possibility for national reform (*UrbanisticaInformazioni*, no. 305, September 2022) seems to aim to suggest traditional planning levels again. It is not important that by making independent choices, each governmental body develops its vision of the respective territory. In my view (although I believe the perspective is corroborated by Clementi's experiments and reflections) the priority is to enhance inter-institutional cooperation between multiple levels, i.e. the effective capacity for *multilevel spatial governance* (Palermo and Ponzini, 2010 and 2015a). The crucial issue of the future vision for a complex territory should relate to inter-institutional agreements on *political priorities* and *large shared projects* of clear cross-scale relevance (the two aspects are complementary and mutually essential). I believe that it should be the primary responsibility of planners to reject the multiplication of plans on paper, but to strive for more organized, legitimate, and effective governance (Enderlein et al., 2010).

The third step regards the concrete reality of transformation projects. Clementi's analysis documents the bleak gap between the good principles that inspired some *interpretive, critical, and design-oriented* visions of the discipline, and current practices that clearly favour more immediate objectives of material interest and easy consensus. The deviation of the urban project in recent times seems embarrassing. In the period after the Second World War, Italy anticipated an original and fertile field of morphological studies, demonstrating the essential connections between master plan and urban project over the long term in different but nonetheless important forms (thanks to De Carlo and Gregotti above all). The transformations in our cities today too often seem unworthy of those traditions. In the last 10 years, I have denounced the case of Milan many times (which I take as a negative model in the Conclusion, Chapter 14), but the trend is general: it introduces the idea and forms of the *neo-liberal city*, a reality that

is difficult to deny (Pinson, 2020). Distancing oneself from the current trend should be a minimum responsibility that planning culture should not evade, even if it is not enough to lash out against ideological models if one remains cautious or even silent with respect to the concrete operations that our urban realities continue to generate. Alberto Clementi's polite discourse does not raise its voice against these issues; it renounces sermons or invective, relying on the strength and clarity of the arguments. However, it seems that all of his dense analysis pushes towards conclusions similar to those that I present in this last section. The capacity to undertake and manage urban policies and projects that are not only concrete, but consistent with the principles of reformism and a *physical* and *design-oriented vision* of the territory and its transformations become decisive. Alberto Clementi's research and planning experiences had been moving in this direction for some time (at least 30 years), but with all its difficulties (Clementi, 2012, 2016).

Connections with the figures and works of those I have presented as possible 'new classics' of Italian planning seem interesting. Younger by about 10 years, Clementi was able to reflect on their experience. In no case did he assume them as a model, nor did he bother to develop a great new narrative as Campos and Secchi tried to in different ways. Nor did he support Mazza's original commitment to re-establish planning regulation in ways that were technically more evolved and socially better justified. He noted Mazza's and Crosta's important contributions to deconstructing the language and disciplinary paradigms, but he did not limit himself to acting as an analyst and critic. Instead, he tried to combine a revision of the conceptual frameworks with a better capacity for action. Some steps seem fundamental: a pragmatic concept of the master plan as one of the available policy tools, to be conceived and used in the most productive ways. This means recognizing the influential function of visioning with respect to traditional regulation, although the vision is never understood as a generic outline of objectives and guidelines, but rather as a network of concrete urban projects of strategic and cross-scale interest. Such projects should always have clear spatial value, i.e. be rooted in the context and capable of integrating multiple aspects of the problem. These are irreproachable principles on paper. Interpreting them in practice is a more complicated job than formulating a traditional strategy for regulation or strategic guidance. It is not clear if the discipline is ready to assume these responsibilities.

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Part II

8. The Last Frontiers: How the Discipline Is Changing

The thesis developed up to this point is that thanks to some emerging figures, Italian planning made potentially significant contributions to the evolution of international planning culture in the second half of the 20th century, although the actual impact remained limited for various reasons. Opinions of the most recent phase are different. It seems harder to identify new ideas, innovative programmes, and leading figures, while planning schools maintain their regional roots and transnational relations are significantly influenced by market interests and strategies (Ponzini, 2020). Formally, an international circuit has formed, which would draw inspiration from the most proven models of evolved disciplines; it is not clear, however, where and how this apparatus can intercept ongoing fundamental movements, and especially, support the most convincing and innovative perspectives. In fact, there are trendy contributions that generally seem to lack a drive towards change that animated formally related movements in the early 1900s. The ‘new urbanism’ is a pale copy of the CIAMs (Eric Mumford, 2002), more aware of professional demands than a visionary desire for change. ‘Tactical urbanism’ marks the triumph of contingency and feasibility, with the risk of losing the civic values and commitments for which town planning developed. Individual authors mostly moved in the wake of known paths. Andreas Faludi (2018) suggests the umpteenth revision of the disciplinary paradigm to ensure that spatial planning has the legitimacy and relevance it has always lacked. John Forester (2013) insists on the mediator role of the *planner*, but the critical and emancipatory concept of the role is now ritually evoked. Emily Talen (2018, 2019) does not abandon the main road of new urbanism or suburban development, never doubting the premises and approach despite the controversial evidence of experience. Among emerging figures, Kim Dovey (2009; 2023, with Quentin Stevens) unhesitatingly follows the path of *urban assemblage* and

tactical urbanism, without questioning whether and how that vision can coexist problem-free with other essentially alternative traditions. The list of examples could easily be extended. The lack of critical and self-critical drive may seem common in the area. With wisdom and pragmatism, Ernst Alexander (2022b) rightly recognizes the dominance of practice and the weight of contingency; however, he does not feel the need to publicize the distance between his position and other official theses. This critical framework is also lacking in the best summaries of planning theory. Even sophisticated and brilliant authors such as Philip Allmendinger (2017) and Robert Beauregard (2020) limit themselves — as I observed in Chapter 5 — to making an eclectic census of all positions in play.

It is curious to realize how different Italy is, at least with reference to the authors I discussed in the first part of the book. The original track is a *tragic* dimension that stems from the awareness of actual difficulties and the proven failure of the best intentions (Givone, 1988). Recognizing the limits, however, does not mean abdicating responsibilities and roles, but it becomes a strong drive to renew visions and practices. Campos Venuti gave constant proof of indomitable positivity — albeit within a framework of critical realism — through a series of successive adjustments/adaptations of his approach: openness to the administrative question (in forms unthinkable for masters Piccinato and Astengo); the reformist use of the available tools; legitimization of the environmental question; and the distinction between regulation and visioning. This holds even if the failure of the reformist programme and the impasse of an exemplary experience such as the plan for Rome in the new century show that the ‘tragedy of Italian reformism’ is actual fact (Palermo, 2001 and 2019). Bernardo Secchi’s repeated and radical turns (first as a town planner, then as an urbanist, and finally as a city designer) grew out of his ability to question his original role and an inexhaustible drive towards a more adequate interpretation. The difference from the easy ‘paradigm shifts’, which were so frequent in international planning, is that Secchi never relinquished the topics and challenges of previous periods, but tried to include them in a broader and more responsible vision, even if his generous attempt was not always successful. Gigi Mazza was the practitioner that drew the need for a profound revision of the disciplinary apparatus from a critical and realistic comparison with experience. This led him to focus on nearly unmentionable (due to orthodoxy) issues such as the flexibility and discretionary nature of planning choices, while being forced to note that these were in danger of becoming ‘wicked problems’. Pier Luigi Crosta irrefutably showed the

insuperable limits of any intentional approach in this field. In doing so, he questioned the very paradigmatic innovations attempted by Campos and Secchi, indicating a different perspective that could reveal some affinity with the emergent paradigm of informal planning in international culture, but could be understood as an indication of the dissolution of the discipline (as it is institutionally understood). On the other hand, Alberto Clementi's attempt to 'sew and bind' the multiple demands in question still seems far from the goal; indeed, it does not seem to have been understood and legitimized by a large part of the discipline. Critical sensibilities and a drive for innovation thus seem to be particular features of the Italian experience (at least according to the sources I have selected), but they are not enough to draw a bright future. The first aspect that emerges is the inherently *tragic* dimension of planning problems. Should we assume that this is an Italian anomaly, or do similar traces also appear in the international literature (Foley and Lauria, 2000)? Since consolidated sources do not seem to offer useful indications, the idea in the second part of this book is to systematically explore international journals in the field to create a base of big data that can potentially verify the hypothesis, offering current elements for comparison with the situation in Italy. The experiment I conduct is a careful reading of several authoritative and recent sources in a search for the most important traces with respect to the views of the Italian authors discussed up to this point.

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9. Repetition and Differences

9.1 Two Families of Texts

In the 1980s, it was not uncommon to prepare planning texts under the influence or even some suggestion of French philosophical thought with a post-structuralist orientation (in Italy as in the United States). Bernardo Secchi was one of the first to offer a high interpretation of the evolution and impact on disciplinary culture of certain discursive formations, inspired by the work of Michel Foucault (Chapter 4). The repeated attempts in the English-speaking world to analogically transfer the philosophical visions of a few renowned authors (Baudrillard, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault himself) to the discipline — as unjustified theoretical frameworks that were therefore arbitrary in the context — seem more scholastic and less fertile; the operational developments were usually empirically irrelevant (Chapter 10). I do not intend to follow either of the two models, but only use them as a preliminary (and perhaps effective) means of communicating an image that has become familiar thanks to Gilles Deleuze (1968): ‘différence et répétition’ (we also find traces of this in Bernardo Secchi: Fabian, in Renzoni and Tosi, 2017, p. 85). In its most elementary form, the message may be expressed basically in these terms: there are different families of texts that are always worth distinguishing. Many contributions are limited to replicating the essential features of a given identity (which is not being questioned). Other rarer ones are strong enough to trace a ‘new beginning’: they mark a difference from the most common stereotypes, opening up new and promising perspectives. The capacity to recognize and distinguish these unequal sources may be decisive for an effective investigation and meaningful reflection. Each in his own way, the five authors discussed in the first part interpreted a singular path with respect to the images handed down by the discipline (which were often reduced to an ideological narrative). The multiplication of journal entries, on the other hand, does not become the realm of innovation, the most advanced frontier of disciplinary research; on the contrary, it represents the triumph of repetition in many cases. In fact, extended lines of pure dissemination of some ‘received view’ open in the form of unoriginal conceptual dissertations (pure transcription from field to field or scholastic exegesis of the source or translation). Sometimes (but not always) the reading is accompanied by some empirical exercise that is most often sketchy or incidental in its final context, while the conclusion is usually limited to reiterating the need to continue the inquiry according to the most trivial academic logic, envisaging an inexhaustible ‘production of papers by means of papers’.

The sequence of formal passages — from the formulation of theoretical hypotheses to the traces of future work — becomes the standard format that journals seem to recommend. And yet it seems clear that a search for *differences* should be the priority or the main reason for interest in investigating the literature. This is surprisingly rare, however, in a field in which *repetition* seems to prevail.

9.2. Distant, Divided Worlds

Other difficulties arise due to the lack of communication among traditions and different contexts. In the English-language literature, there is almost no trace of references to the five authors I discussed in the first part of the book. And yet these are certainly not ‘local’ figures. Campos and Secchi had significant international experience, one in Spain, the other in France and Belgium. However, there is a well-known, deep, and long-lasting gap between physical planning in the Mediterranean and urban planning in the English-speaking world. In the English-language literature, it would also be difficult to find meaningful references to French, Spanish, or Portuguese planners. More surprising is the case of Crosta and Mazza. Both had direct, nontrivial relationships with the world of urban planning. We can see that early on, Crosta adopted heretical positions with respect to disciplinary orthodoxy; perhaps he was understood at a certain point to express other roles and cultures. Mazza, on the other hand, continued to think and act as a town planner, or better yet, as an urban planner, interacting with institutional players and publishing in international journals. However, his positions — often critical and innovative (Chapter 5) — were substantially ignored. Objections fell on deaf ears (I am thinking of a moderate but ground-breaking contribution such as Mazza, 1995a). His hypotheses and proposals for disciplinary renewal were not discussed, as if they were a contribution of strictly Italian interest. This seems to be the crucial point. It is not essential to find some citation of our authors in the international literature. The concerning question is why it contains no trace of the problems, the viewpoints that some Italian planners have identified and developed. In more than one case these are objectively important contributions. The divide, however, seems deeply rooted. There are few traces of the essential themes of Campos’ ‘reformist urbanism’, Secchi’s ‘design-oriented approach to urban planning’, Alberto Clementi’s integrated view of the ‘*projet du territoire*’, or even Mazza’s more flexible and discretionary vision, which was certainly influenced by the British tradition (Booth, 1999). Perhaps there is a certain self-referential aspect to leading countries in the

sector (or those that consider themselves to be so). Or one might wonder whether our intellectual debate is not considered unnecessarily sophisticated and too abstract from the view of ordinary officials, professionals, or disciplinary scholars (although it is difficult to direct this objection at Campos Venuti). Otherwise, the doubt might arise that something has changed or is changing in the sector. Perhaps the priorities or emerging questions are no longer the same as the ones that were perceived and legitimized at the turn of the century. The fact remains that the mutual autonomy and indifference of national urban-planning cultures is a serious limitation that should worry disciplinary actors. Paradoxically, the closest link regards only certain ideological positions that have seemed to survive everywhere over time; they also often take merely exhortative and ultimately repetitive forms. In contrast, institutions, paradigms, and tools can vary considerably in space and time, without such plurality becoming the subject of comparison or reconsiderations, with few exceptions. These generally do not investigate different traditions within the West, but only divisions between the West and other parts of the world (Sanyal, 2005; Roy, 2011; Robinson, 2022). Nor is the custom of comparing national planning systems in Europe enough. The frameworks that emerge are compilations: they reflect a basis of shared prejudices but do not explain differences or attempt to anticipate future prospects (Healey and Williams, 1993; CEC, 1997; Larson, 2006). The resulting practice is adapted to ordinary operational needs, but it does not legitimize recurring ambitions and claims for disciplinary foundations.

9.3 Towards the Primacy of Everyday Practices

I want to anticipate the main message that also seems to emerge from the journals. Planning and design should deal with the problems of everyday life. The need does not seem unreasonable, even if it contradicts Bernardo Secchi's orientation, as he reiterated the extended horizon of the planner's work in the 2010s (Secchi, 2013, with Pizzorno and Crosta). However, the relevance of a long-term perspective cannot become an alibi for avoiding the urban problems of the moment. Nor can the self-referential nature of theoretical reflections (the most serious limitation, as we shall see, of a journal such as *Planning Theory*: Chapter 10) be a sustainable alternative. A practical orientation capable of even short-term influences therefore seems justified, but it should not become an alibi for minimizing the nature of the problems, as if the priority for action makes Bernardo Secchi's refined analyses or Gigi Mazza's subtle arguments vain or superfluous.

The reference to everyday practice was inspired by a critical worldview in which Henri Lefebvre, as a Marxian scholar, intended to highlight forms of alienation in current practices that, in his opinion, were determined by the capitalist mode of production (Goonewardena et al., 2008). This view was developed coherently in the three volumes of the *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, published over a period of 30 years from 1947 to 1981 (Chapter 5). In 1980, however, Michel De Certeau presented a new perspective on similar topics (*L'invention du quotidien*). It is important to look at *everyday practices* because they hold generative value: everyday spatial behaviours arise from experience, repetition, and interactions. They weave spontaneous impulses and practices of collective learning and adaptation; they create inhabited places and generally structure meanings and ways of using urban spaces. Basically, they draw on ordinary experiences to give life to a real city that does not always closely correspond to the strategic and normative design adopted by governing authorities. The issue of change is therefore the order of the day, without being determined by some ideological prejudice, as occurred with Lefebvre. Immersion in daily life remains the essential step, but as an open hypothesis, which may raise some objections. The first cause is the apparent rejection of clear interpretative and critical assumptions. Can we really rely only on pure observation in the field? It seems reasonable to consider some risk of empirical naivety. Is the study of interactions and spatial behaviour enough to reconstruct the authentic meaning and means of using urban spaces, as well as their organization? I have many doubts, if I think about Bill Hillier's (unconvincing) attempt to explain the material genesis of the urban structure based only on the analysis of individual mobility flows (Hillier and Hanson, 1984; Hillier, 1996). In addition, the lack of a critical spirit could favour the legitimization of existing conditions and relationships. Whatever the intention, 'behavioural analyses' are often useful for normal market needs. The trend is clear, for instance, in the topic of *smart urbanism* which now draws media interest (Greenfield, 2013; Marvin et al., 2016; Karvonen et al., 2018). I would, however, not reject a certain caution: the orientation is justified and interesting; it should not become a new, simplifying, or perhaps instrumental ideology. I do not know the extent to which such caution is shared in a discipline that has taken this path in the last 20 years with evident relief or unbridled enthusiasm, after the failure or stagnation of other hopes.

In 1999, Chase, Crawford and Kaliski launched the topic of 'everyday urbanism'; an eccentric cue at the time in a disciplinary framework that still preferred radical, communicative, or post-structuralist orientations, if

not neo-rationalist ones — positions that were also mutually exclusive! In fact, the approach was hardly mentioned in theoretical reviews in the early 2000s (even if the importance of the issues was recognized by an authoritative source such as John Friedmann, 1999: Chapter 6). The authors' vision was centred on the dualism between the concrete reality of everyday urban life (which introduces existing spaces and forms, individual behaviour and interactions, and mass aggregate effects) and the abstract world designed by the city government (as spatial ordering or a system of rules and functions). Such a distinction/opposition recalls De Certeau's (1980) dualism between the level of public governance strategies and that of the inhabitants' movements and individual experiences. The book by Chase et al. presented accurate descriptions of ongoing phenomena along with some guidelines that prioritized the issue of *public space* with an orientation that would later be called 'tactical urbanism'. This policy of targeted interventions, well delimited (even for moderate sizes) but capable of producing immediate and tangible benefits for certain categories of subjects, was to be conceived following inclusive reasoning, granting ample space to the subjects' mutual learning and creativity as opposed to purely technical expertise and bureaucratic programmes. In the last 15–20 years, this tendency has inexorably been confirmed; contributions on the topic have multiplied quickly. Tactical urbanism has become a trendy disciplinary movement (Lydon and Garcia, 2015; Silva, 2016; Wohl, 2017; Webb, 2018; Stevens and Dovey, 2023), extolling the coevolutionary and informal nature of urban transformations and a weak concept of government action. A series of books based on different perspectives have expanded on the topic. After Lefebvre's and De Certeau's interpretations, other authors (e.g. Sheringam, 2006; Jacobsen, 2009; Storey, 2014; Berger, 2018) tried to draw a comparative framework of emerging concepts of everyday life in the fields of sociology, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, pragmatics, interaction, communication, cultural studies. A number of environmental questions ('the nature of everyday life': Loftus, 2012; Meyer and Kersten, 2016) and cultural issues have been explored (forms of collective life in the multiethnic city: Perrone et al., 2011; the human landscape of everyday life: Waterman, 2022), along with the key function of practical reason in ordinary life (Sunstein, 2023), the impact of new information technologies on everyday practices (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011; Greenfield, 2017; Elliott, 2018), and the aesthetic quality of real urban experiences (Light and Smith, 2005; Mandoki, 2007; Saito, 2007). While these reflections are useful for focusing on the conceptual framework, more operational contributions have developed aspects and experiences of place-making that

document a significant shift, from the more traditional idea of a place as a matrix of life experiences (the way in which ‘everyday spaces structure our lives, behaviour, and well-being’: Bernheimer, 2019) to the transformation of places themselves into ‘lifescapes’ as a result of urban practices (Pink, 2012; Lapintie, 2022). An experienced designer such as Jan Gehl has shown how design can interpret this new perspective from a technical viewpoint (2019, with Sim David). Not only that. Some scholars have gone further (Manzini, 2019), assuming that the ideology of design as an everyday practice can provide the basis for a new political paradigm (‘politics of the everyday’). Manzini has thus constructed a manifesto of good intentions (activism, creativity, cooperative spirit), but in my opinion, it holds only rhetorical value: ‘change the world from where you are’ (ibid., p. 75), ‘everyday lives make policies’ (p. 71); ‘from activism to transformative normality’ (p. 83); ‘the systemic effects of everyday choices’ (p. 77). Mere exhortations.

The orientation towards everyday practices seems even more evident in the journals. In the planning world, the weight of common sense and ‘interactive knowledge’ (which is formed through interactions in the field) compared to the role and expertise of experts continues to grow. The knowledge-action relationship is no longer conceived following rationalist or technocratic models, but rather as coevolutionary learning and consensus-building, which trusts in the possibilities of cooperation rather than the radical nature of conflict (a point that refers back to insurgent positions that are now in relative decline). The attention shifts from great visions over space and time to the local scale and on a shorter timescale (Chapter 10). In urban design, the need for a paradigm shift has come up many times in quick sequence. The scope of the renaissance in the late 1900s was to offer an integral alternative to the now-documented failure of planning. In the 1990s, in contrast, the aspiration to integrate planning and design within a new planning model, which was to include form-based codes and area projects for urban transformation, took hold. That phase has also ended, and the most common approach in the new century has followed in the footsteps of everyday urbanism: an interest in the practices of inhabiting the concrete spaces of the city; an inclusive, experimental, coevolutionary view; and the revival of the Geddes’ philosophy of ‘short steps, long vision’ (Chapter 11). The trend is clear and merits reflection. Should it be understood as the mark of pragmatism that is finally concrete and functional, assuming as a priority the capacity to solve impending problems *here* and *now* (Mack and Herzfeld, 2020)? Otherwise this is a symptom of a meta-

morphosis: the generous ambitions of the roots have fallen away. Planning has to fall back on functions that are less heroic (which can only be a good thing), but perhaps ambiguous or instrumental as a supportive contribution to what exists, but weaker than civic and social responsibilities. Secchi (2005, Chapters 5 and 6) recognizes the importance of the everyday sphere, but is suspicious of any form of *short-termism* (Lampert, 2024). How, then, can we assess and guide the trend? This is the issue I aim to explore in the second part of the book. Great principles certainly enlivened the precursors and still inspire the Italian authors discussed in previous chapters. What happens in the most advanced international journals?

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10. Actions and Words. The Diverging Worlds of Contemporary Urban Planning⁵

10.1 'Bridging the Gap'

How many times in the world of planning have we heard a call to bridge the gap between theory and practice, representations and reality, discursive formations and concrete actions? The need seems obvious, but good intentions risk becoming a call for principle that struggles to overcome the stage of mere exhortation, while profound differences persist between the world of urban facts and planners' intellectual constructions. To address the issue, I am going to perform what for me is an unusual exercise: considering the representations of urban planning that emerge from some accredited journals in the field. Could these sources be a useful tool in a certain phase for understanding and assessing the fundamental trends in the discipline? The answer might seem obvious, if one thinks of Bernardo Secchi's design-oriented approach to urban planning (1989). This collection of articles was published over the course of several years (in *Casabella and Urbanistica*), presented as a unified and coherent work capable of expressing robust thought and well-structured argument, despite the variety of occasions. In general, however, there may be legitimate doubt in the world of architecture and planning. Opening the latest issues of some historical journals in the field, a curious observer would struggle to piece together an overall, critical, and prospective picture that is both meaningful and exhaustive. The landscape that emerges seems to be traditional, nearly immobile and inert, yet sometimes unstable and ephemeral, under the impulses that emerge occasionally, and rather fragmented and confused in general. The extemporaneous variety of the topics and cases does not help to clarify any connections that have long been unresolved, which unfortunately affect the reputation and authority of the area. I have always thought that in this field, the production of less partial, occasional contributions in the form of demanding essays or books was more important for representing and discussing disciplinary culture and the practice. Any attempt to assimilate these publications with the exacting style — incomparable for the elevated requirements of rigour and innovation — of edited journals in mathematics and physics, risks being naive and misleading. In this case, what prevails are contributions to popularize or comment on experiences that have now been completed, or opening horizons that hold value as eventual scenarios

⁵ A preliminary version of this chapter was published in *EcoWebTown*, no. 26, 2022, pp. 1–12.

that are perhaps plausible or desirable, but now lack any concrete developments. It is true, however, that journal articles generally involve shorter preparation and printing times compared to books, so they may be a more sensitive indicator of current or emerging trends. This is why I open this chapter with a quick survey of recent contributions in some international journals.

The frame of reference is now so crowded that it is difficult to orient oneself, so I adopt two very simple criteria. The first option tends to favour sources that may draw on a very long tradition and (once) undisputed authority. I am referring to the British *Town Planning Review* (established in Liverpool, the cradle of the first teachings in town planning) and the *Journal of the American Planning Association* (published in another mother site of city planning, Chicago: Bennett, 2010). At the beginning of the 1900s, the two journals provided evidence of two nonequivalent cultural orientations: the *physical* concept of planning in Great Britain, and, in the first decades of the century, North American *city planning*, which was more attuned to legal, administrative, procedural, social, and environmental issues. The latter option introduced the controversial role of theory. There is no shortage of doubts as to the legitimacy and importance of the theoretical reflections that the discipline cultivated over the long term, not without uncertainty and reconsideration, although they rarely gave life to true critical revisions. In this framework, it might be interesting to observe the trends of sources that have made theory their distinctive focus, such as *Planning Theory*, which has been published by SAGE, in Great Britain, since 2002 (for a brief period in the late 1900s, Gigi Mazza edited a preliminary version in Italy). The most common objection to these intellectual exercises highlights a risk of abstraction, academics, or irrelevance. To observe the disciplinary reactions to these potential effects (not without plausibility), I suggest considering another journal, also published in the UK for a couple of decades now, which, by its title, aims to build a bridge between theory and practice: *Planning Theory and Practice*. Based in Oxfordshire (Milton Park), it rallies authoritative academic figures, but also maintains relations with the main British professional association, the Royal Town Planning Institute. Countless other sources could be considered, but I presume that this selection may offer an indication of the trends: two historical journals with a hundred-year horizon and an up-to-date exploration of the controversial terrain of theories in the past 20 years. It will also be necessary to limit the horizon of the observations. I have chosen the 2020–2022 period, which was marked by intense, partially unexpected criticalities with re-

spect to health and the environment above all. It is reasonable to ask how the discipline, long affected by a now-endemic crisis, wanted to react to the new systemic emergencies and knew how to do so.

10.2 Current Orientations in the Disciplinary Thinking

We open the four journals that I have selected⁶ from the period in question. The *Journal of the American Planning Association* published volumes 86–88 (I examined 12 issues). This is the journal of reference for the APA, the largest professional association in urban planning. In 2018, it counted about 40,000 associates in 90 countries (the largest presence is in North America). It was undoubtedly one of the oldest journals in the sector, whose first indications date to 1915 in Chicago (under the title *City Plan*). This was followed by *City Planning* (starting in 1925); then the *Planners' Journal* (in 1935) and *Journal of the American Planning Institute* (starting in 1944). The JAPA format has been published since 1980. From 2019 to 2023, Ann Forsyth (Harvard) was the editor in chief. The *Editorial Advisory Board* consists of nearly 50 members. In the period in question, there were few clearly famous masters and just two Europeans (a representative from the Delft school and Yvonne Rydin from the Bartlett School, London). This results in a gap between the international perspective of the APA and the guiding board of the journal, which is strongly rooted in North America. The impact factor of JAPA reached a peak in 2021 (4.8), but the index has continued to vary significantly over time (in the three previous years, the index was, in order, 2.5, 3.8, and 1.9).

Between 2020 and 2022, *Town Planning Review* published volumes 91-93 (17 issues at the time of my investigation). Published since 1910 by the University of Liverpool (which established the first course in civic design at the time), the journal quickly became an institution in British planning, predating by four years the establishment of the first professional body: the Town Planning Institute, which in 1959 received the Royal Charter and in 2018 counted about 25,000 members, most of whom are British (just over a thousand had a different nationality). Management of the journal remained rooted in the territory. During the period in question, it was directed by

⁶ In total, about 400 articles were consulted. I limit myself to explicitly citing in the bibliography only the contributions that I consider worthy of special interest. In all other cases, it seemed sufficient to cite the author of the article, volume number, and issue number of the text (for example, 'Forsyth, 87-1, 2021' indicates a paper by Ann Forsyth, published in vol. 87, no. 1, year 2021, of the journal analysed in that section). The journals are accessible online and interested readers can easily complete the information.

three scholars: two British men (Alex Lord and John Sturzaker, the former representing the University of Liverpool) and one North American (Daniel Hess). The editorial committee is more international and consists of about 30 members, with the most well known including Alterman, Davoudi, Lauria, Ann Forsyth, Freestone, Stiftel, Emily Talen, Tewdwr-Jones, and Verma. For some time, the journal has not expressed a clear editorial orientation (the editors avoid taking explicit positions); it is configured as a collection of contributions that are incidental in many respects, despite the number of monographs. The chosen topics are classical (regulation, densification, green urbanism), but the somewhat emotional and outsized focus on the pandemic in its most acute stage (as the exclusive topic of the first three issues of 2021) stands out. For some time, the impact factor has been modest (less than 2 in 2021 and even lower in previous years).

Planning Theory represents a radically different case; edited in London since 2002 (after a brief stint in Italy), it reached volumes 19–21 in the period in question (11 issues at the time of my investigation). Its theoretical orientation is confirmed by the editor in chief, who has always had an eccentric profile with respect to disciplinary practices. The first were Jean Hillier and Michael Gunder, who proudly proclaimed themselves to be ‘post-structuralist planners’ in homage to certain orientations in late 20th-century French culture; then (following Gunder’s death in 2018) came Angelique Chettiparamb (Reading), the author of pioneering studies because they were inspired by systems and complexity theories. At any rate, the journal was able to draw the attention of the most authoritative figures in international planning. In the past, figures with great notoriety have been part of the editorial committee. During the period in question, Hillier and Sanyal (with specific editorial responsibilities), Susan Fainstein, Sager, Stiftel, Huw Thomas, Thorgmorton, Verma, and Yiftachel were present (among others). It is true that membership may be reduced to a merely formal act (in fact, some people are on the boards of multiple journals, even with different orientations), but potential interest in the theoretical questions of founding or bringing innovation to the discipline seem clear. The impact factor seems to confirm this attention. Despite the specialized orientation (compared, for example, to JAPA, which is aimed primarily at a vast professional corporation), it exceeded 3 in 2021, at the same level as 2018 (it was slightly lower in the two intervening years).

Planning Theory and Practice is a contemporary, also British, experience. Volumes 21–23 were published in the period in question, and my investi-

gation covered 14 issues. Each is opened by an editorial, written by different voices from time to time, which reflects on the topic at hand but also tries to trace a thread of continuity and consistency between all the contributions. This is deliberate, but often a little forced and not entirely plausible. The desire to build a bridge between academia and the profession is the *raison d'être* of the journal. It is supported by a network of authors with clear academic prestige, but also has a privileged relationship of debate and cooperation with the Royal Town Planning Institute (a role already covered in the past by the *Town Planning Review*). In the period in question, it was run by Heather Campbell (British Columbia, Canada; up to 2018, Sheffield, UK). The editorial committee included emerging scholars and leading figures in the late 1900s (such as Booher, Susan Fainstein, Healey, Roy, Salet, Sandercock, Sanyal, Allen Scott, Talen, and Verma); a few authoritative figures (Forester, Jill Grant, Kunzmann) took on specific editorial responsibilities. The impact factor in the last year was close to 4, with an increase since 2016 (when the value was just above 1). It is worth nothing that in all the publications considered here, the value of the indicator is much less than the normal levels of the most prestigious journals in science or medicine. This means that the mechanisms of distribution and citation are not strictly comparable due to consistency and influential capacity (the worlds remain different, despite attempts at imitation). We now look at the salient feature of the most recent content of these sources.

Journal of the American Planning Association (JAPA)

Paradoxically, this journal is aimed at professionals in a large number of countries (90), but it retains a *regional* character — even though it covers the entire United States of America! In fact, one can count on one's fingers the problems and planning experiences during the period in question that belong to contexts other than North America: an extemporaneous contribution from the Netherlands, singular excursions to South Africa or Asia; less sporadic attention to Australia. Despite this, the journal editor (Ann Forsyth, from the second issue of 2019) says that the horizon is to be international (Forsyth, 87-1, 2021). Perhaps the cultural hegemony of the North American schools and experiences in the entire disciplinary field are taken for granted. Forsyth also claims a generalist orientation (*ibid.*, 86-2, 2020), i.e. a willingness to deal with the main problems emerging in the world of urban and regional planning, with reference to multiple fields of intervention (housing, settlements, infrastructure, mobility, environment) and different disciplinary functions (regulation, forecasting, and conservation but not design). This should be a choice for continuity with respect

to a disciplinary tradition that dates to Harvey Perloff in the mid-1900s, but an important difference emerges. According to Perloff, the generalist aspiration was justified by the availability of a common method for dealing with the variety of problems (Burns and Friedmann, 1985). However, the journal does not have a unifying frame of reference that could be valid as an effectively shared theoretical vision and methodological approach. The generalist orientation is only seen in the juxtaposition of a variety of topics whose development meets contingent criteria; there is sufficient affinity between the cases and also significant divergences. With respect to the planning problems, the journal does not express an editorial line, although each issue opens with a foreword by the editor. In some cases (but not always), the contribution alludes to fundamental questions: What is planning (Forsyth, 88-1, 2022)? How can we understand and build theory (ibid., 86-4, 2020; 87-2, 2021), research (ibid., 87-3, 2021), knowledge of the future (ibid., 86-1, 2020)? How can we overcome the embarrassing gap that normally divides theory and practice (ibid., 85-2, 2019), academia and profession (ibid., 85-4, 2019)? The scope of the interventions, however, is clearly circumscribed. They are not concerned with critical reflection and even less so with possible revision or conceptual innovation, but rather with recalling useful guidelines and criteria for composing the texts to publish in the journal (the discourse becomes patently self-referential): What style of argumentation and writing is recommended (Forsyth, 88-4, 2022)? How does the peer review operate (ibid, 87-4, 2021; 88-2, 2022)? What is the purpose of the different sections of the journal (ibid., 86-1, 2020)? How can the databases underlying the studies be managed and shared (ibid., 88-3, 2022)? In effect, JAPA presents itself as a collection of specific experiences with heterogeneous, contingent characteristics. Each case is illustrated and commented on according to generally careful investigations, but they do not become material for theoretical reflection or even some empirical generalization useful for orienting practices. The contribution of knowledge and assessment is mostly tied to the specific case and context. The recommendations tend to favour a set of topics and objectives that are undoubtedly edifying, but remain vague in terms of the most appropriate tools for achieving virtuous aims, and totally elusive with respect to design issues (urban design falls outside the disciplinary domain). In most cases, conclusions are provisional and not free of uncertainty, which do not depend on a lack of knowledge, but generally on unresolved tensions or contradictions between competing or even conflicting interests. The good intentions of urban planners are not enough to face the inertia and friction of real processes, which continue to generate difficulties and dilemmas that

are difficult to solve.

In effect, the argumentative style follows a typical sequence that is faithfully repeated in most published contributions: ‘analysis/good intentions/difficulties/dilemmas’. I have already hinted at the richness of empirical analysis. This often concerns careful quantitative investigations that process great large-scale official databases often using nonelementary statistical methods. The main limit is the aggregate nature of the sources, which allow for comparisons over space and time, but not local studies. In fact, specific quantitative investigations designed by researchers in a given context are very rare. On the other hand, there is no lack of qualitative inquiries conducted in some problematic area through targeted interviews involving a multitude of privileged testimonies (politicians, technicians, administrators, citizens, or users). Overall, analytical contributions represent some of the solidest results in the journal, almost as if JAPA wanted to compete with the glorious *Urban Studies*. Another salient characteristic — it seems difficult to take it as a result — is the constant call to good values and intentions. The themes of equity, inclusion, participation, sustainability, quality of life, and community life receive pervasive attention and apparently constitute a shared priority. This is not obvious because planning was often intended in North America as a tool used for the urban *growth machine* (Palermo, 2022, Section 4.7); but isn’t this perhaps its primary mission? JAPA, which is also directed mainly at professionals, seems to support a different point of view: the undisputed dominance of values. Perhaps this is a coherent effect of the ‘Code of Ethics’ that APA wanted to support; perhaps it was just a rhetorical option. Nevertheless, on paper, some ethical principles were celebrated and promoted as rarely occurs in other disciplinary contexts (the emphasis is certainly reduced in the other journals that I will comment on here). This does not mean that the final balance is positive. Due to a sort of counterweight, the statement of good intentions is generally followed by the recognition of nontrivial difficulties that condition practice and do not seem to admit simple solutions. We open an issue from the journal at random, for example, the last publication I examined (88-4, 2022). We find a call to favour inclusionary zoning, which should avoid any form of social and housing discrimination. The conclusion, however, highlights the obstacles to fully achieving the objectives that overlap in practice (Wang and Fu). Modifying zoning rules can become a great opportunity for justice and civil and territorial progress, but we cannot exclude the risk of gentrification and, in general, an inequitable distribution of the resulting benefits (Grodach). Accessibility is a historical issue/objective of planning;

however, it is not easy to address it without raising problems of justifiably distributing the investments to be determined and implemented (Martens et al.; Brown et al.). Similar considerations arise in relation to the issue of controlling urban sprawl because the ‘edge city’ model (Garreau, 1991) is ambitious, but has not always yielded convincing results (Day et al.). Fighting climate change is a moral obligation before a political one, but the measures on the agenda raise considerable problems of environmental justice (Fitzgerald). Collaborative planning assumes convinced, effective agreements between institutions and social parties, but experience shows that forms of dissent, resistance, or conflict are very common (Margerun et al.). In the continuous search for new, more functional techniques, planners have long turned their attention to the management procedures of scenario planning. We must admit, however, that the indications resulting from the first experiments remain somewhat vague and uncertain, making it difficult to base or justify choices involving great responsibility (Chakraborty and Sherman). The list of issues and problems is truly emblematic (though this be any issue of the journal). These are evidently well-known fears, voices that have already been heard. There is no trace of a critical review nor do new perspectives emerge. Good intentions must be measured against the inflexibility of practice.

The question does not only concern difficulties. The journal continually tends to reintroduce a series of emerging dilemmas that lend themselves to a tragic end, because frankly, there is no way out. One large set of dilemmas regards tensions arising between demands for public regulation and market interests and strategies. Roads are designed by engineers according to standards of functionality and traffic safety and involve notable land consumption. Would it not be more efficient and appropriate to designate a part of that space to more productive building investments (Millard-Ball, 88-1, 2022)? Planning standards generally envisage large areas for parking. Again, are there no good reasons for resizing the uses intended for this purpose (Hess and Rehler, 87-3, 2021), allowing instead for new processes of densification (perhaps with social or profit-oriented purposes)? The planning-based treatment of accessibility issues seems unsatisfactory for more than one reason. On the one hand, the infrastructure and transport system fails to remedy widespread inequalities and injustice; opportunities for certain social groups remain objectively inferior (Bierbaum et al., 87-2, 2021; Blumenberg and King, Siddick and Taylor, 87-4, 2021). On the other hand, the standards adopted on time limits for access to certain services often prove to be oversized compared to the perceived needs of

the users themselves, with a resulting waste of standards and resources (Merlin et al., 87-4, 2021). The system therefore offers too much or too little! The glorious orthogonal grid performed an unquestionable role in spatial ordering and organizing settlements (Case Scheer, 86-1, 2020). Isn't now the time to adopt more flexible, contextual rules to meet unanswered needs and/or foster growth (Boeing, 87-1, 2021)? The lack of housing at affordable prices is a constant in a variety of contexts. Why do measures to support production struggle to improve the situation, often favouring vested interests in the end (Raynor et al., 87-4, 2021; Garde and Song, Le and Guo, 88-2, 2022; Wang and Fu, 88-4, 2022)? Why do investments in infrastructure and transport fail to impact the needs of the weakest requests with no alternative in certain contexts (Dong, 86-2, 2020; Millard-Ball, Palm et al., 87-4, 2021)? Why do urban regeneration projects very often lead to social exclusion and gentrification (Pendall et al., 88-1, 2022; Chava and Rennes, 88-2, 2022; Grodach, 88-4, 2022)? Why is urban planning unable to ensure functional, convincing organization of settlement expansion, which often leads to negative, i.e. unexpected and undesirable, effects (Keunhyun et al., 86-2, 2020; He et al., 86-3, 2020, on the case of Hong Kong)? The regretful point is that not only are these questions well known, but the journal does not offer positive or original contributions on such issues; it merely confirms that a dilemma persists.

The repertoire of available techniques is very traditional. Zoning is still the main tool. In reality, the version that arouses even greater interest is the single-family and exclusionary model, i.e. the most rigid and elementary one, implying a ban on deviating from the single-family home model over very large territories. In fact, a decade ago, nearly two-thirds of the US population lived in this type of dwelling, adopting the resulting lifestyle (Whittemore and Curran-Groome, 88-3, 2022). Only in Australia was the percentage higher (75%), but this was decreasing due to policies and preferences with a different orientation. The tendency towards reduction is also seen in Canada, where the same measure was equal to 55%. The average in Europe, which is useful for comparison, did not exceed 35%. This atypical situation aroused great debate in the United States, at least in the field of planning. Some scholars have determinedly supported the need to radically change the rules, abolishing the exclusive limit. In some contexts, the vision has become a political project (such is the oft-cited case of the 'Minneapolis 2040' plan in Minnesota; see Mogush and Worthington, 86-1, 2020; Kuhlmann, 87-3, 2021). The reasons are clear: that settlement pattern entails large waste of land; it does not meet the widespread and

unsatisfied demand for housing (especially with respect to social housing); and it does not favour the development of urban functions and values (for which there seems to be a growing demand among the younger generations). A policy of reasonable densification seems justified (Manville, Wegmann, Yerena, 86-1, 2020; Whittemore, 87-2, 2021); however, there is no shortage of objections. This settlement type is deeply rooted in the *genus loci*; any increase in density in private areas would possibly meet to the needs of owners or the solvent market, but hardly social needs; any attempt at political imposition of an alternative land regime or settlement form would be highly unpopular and could lead to a serious crisis of consensus; and it is unlikely that the political system would want to take such risks (Searle and Phibbs, Chakraborty, Knaap and Finio, Kendig, Etienne, 86-1, 2020; Honey-Rosé and Zapata, 87-2, 2021). This is therefore another dilemma that is difficult to solve. The most likely result is a stall. In reality, this issue introduces a specific aspect of a more radical alternative (which is certainly not unprecedented). Is it fairer, or at least more effective, to rely on certain, enforceable rules, or is it better to give free rein to consensus building on a voluntary basis, through suitable mediation or negotiation? There are also diverging opinions on this issue. The discipline still seems sensitive to the need for binding prescriptions (Davis and Renski, 86-4, 2020; Berglund and Redaelli, 87-2, 2021; Buter et al., 87-3, 2021; Raynor et al, 87-4, 2021), but society and politics are reluctant or explicitly opposed to them, while some planners are ready to acknowledge such ideological orientations, recognizing the essential contribution of private operators to the good governance of spatial transformations (Turner and Stilller, 86-1, 2020; Kim et al, 86-2, 2020; Stern and Lester, 87-1, 2021; Rigolon et al., 87-4, 2021). The dilemmas therefore inevitably affect the sphere of proudly stated values. The actual equity of planning measures is an uncertain fact with risks in many settings (Goetz et al., 86-2, 2020; Agrawal, 87-1, 2021). Are planning choices really consistent with the principles of justice (social, environmental, and spatial) or do they express subordination to stronger interests, i.e. do they respond to partisan priorities and strategies (Loh and Kim, 87-2, 2021)? Participation can become a ritual. It should incite energy and build consensus, but in many cases it runs the risk of performing only rhetorical or instrumental functions (Dewar, 87-3, 2021; Pokharel et al., 88-1, 2022; Cohen-Blankshtan and Gofen, 88-2, 2022; the topic is covered extensively in vol. 85 of 2019). This is nothing new.

They seem to me to be the main voices in the period. To understand and assess the sense of the journal, I think it is also useful to focus on topics

that instead seem elusive. The environment seems to become a priority only in serious emergencies and in relation to post-traumatic strategies and justice (Miller, 86-3, 2020; Spencer et al., 88-1, 2022; Chandrasekahr et al., Zoe-Rivera et al., 88-2, 2022; Balachandren et al., Watson, Meerow and Keith, 88-3, 2022). Some space is reserved for climate change (Goh, 86-2, 2020; Kim et al., 87-1, 2021; Buter et al, 87-3, 2021; Fitzgerald, 88-4, 2022) or environmental justice (Carolini and Raman, 87-1, 2021; Sadler et al., 87-3, 2021; Lieberknecht, 88-1, 2022). However, meaningful references to classical problems — green spaces in the city, ecology, sustainability — are missing. There is no trace of thinking on places, not even (what were once) fashionable forms of place-making or form-based codes (the concept of regulation is traditional, as I have documented). The issues of urban design (which even Forsyth dealt with when she worked at Cornell University) are completely avoided, as if it were another world compared to planning (this is honestly recognized by an authoritative and interesting scholar such as Robert Beauregard, 2020, pp. 4-5). JAPA therefore does not object to a historical division between planning and design, which has caused significant damage. Urban politics and policies are issues that remain in the shadows, even if there is no professional that ignores their weight or consequences. The journal limits itself to a few entirely sporadic notes. It is worth ascertaining that political and technical preferences can be divergent with respect to the priority of spatial planning. Politics is certainly more sensitive to tax reduction or service functionality than to reciting the ethical values of planning (Han et al., 87-2, 2021). It is worth checking the consistency — sometimes inadequate — between the form of the plan and actual implementation (Ohm, 87-1, 2021). There are legitimate doubts as to the effective influence (to be assessed) of the master plan over the most important decision-making processes and spatial transformations (Liao et al., 86-1, 2020). All these elements are worthy of interest, but they remain suspended in a vacuum, because there is a lack of nonepisodic inquiry on the relationship between politics and planning. Equally weak is the discussion on issues of governance, which, for a multi-level structure, is an ever-present challenge that is difficult to avoid. Only a few, evidently occasional contributions are available: a case of integration between spatial policies on different scales in the Netherlands (Yu et al, 86-4, 2020); a model of transport planning in the United States that aims to coordinate different levels of government, also introducing mechanisms for public deliberation (Ray, 88-3, 2022); an experience in regional planning in the US, which would reconcile multi-level coordination functions with a local place-based approach (Randolph-Currid and Hakett,

88-2, 2022). In reality, there is also a surprising lack of any analysis on plan-making, i.e. the construction and implementation of a planning tool (as if the question were now taken for granted). I came across only one contribution on the subject, which addresses the question in relation to the impending problems of climate change, unfortunately merely paraphrasing — even today! — the old rational-comprehensive model (Meerow and Woodruff, 86-1, 2020). Not even the vision, or better yet, *visioning*, is the focus of attention. As I mentioned above, only a few contributions on scenario planning are available (Knaap et al., 86-2, 2020; Avin and Goodspeed, 86-6, 2020; Chakraborty and Sherman, 88-4, 2022) as the latest version of the largely unsuccessful experimentation of various forms of spatial or strategic planning in recent decades. Unfortunately, the current proposal is still technically and politically weaker than previous solutions. Consider not the simplistic generalizations of management consultants, but the experiments — sophisticated but not very productive — that Bernardo Secchi courageously attempted in complicated settings (Paris and elsewhere: Chapter 4). This cannot be an innovative or convincing perspective for developments in the discipline (Palermo, 2022, Chapter 10). I have already noted that the analytical contributions are remarkable; however, there is a lack of any debate on the problems of planning knowledge, which is not only analytical, but also interactive, communicative, participatory, insurgent, and more. A few marginal notes can only be found in some of Ann Forsyth's editorials (which I have already mentioned), but these are just exhortations: 'theory should...', 'planning would like...', 'relations between academia and practice should be more detailed and fertile'. As an editorial policy, the journal does not aim to neglect theoretical problems, but is only willing to consider references that are truly useful for practice. The risk is that the box remains empty. In fact, this willingness and care remains latent in most contributions. On the other hand, a progressive drop in interest in theoretical questions was objectively documented by JAPA in the past 30 years (Fang and Ewing, 86-4, 2020).

To draw some sort of conclusion after a thorough but unexciting reading, my impression is that the journal is a largely self-referential organism. It addresses a closed corporation that sees no reason to question itself. It is used to living with the conditioning of the real world and seems unable or unwilling to react to difficulties and the resulting uncertainties. In form, it is always ready to proclaim virtuous principles and considers itself to be on the right side of history. The effective times, means, and possibilities of concretely applying those values do not seem to be a priority worthy

of investigation or discussion. In addition, the arguments are laid out with indisputable care (the JAPA style), but they are already well known and therefore unoriginal. The image of disciplinary/professional practice that emerges from the journal is therefore partial and perhaps biased. Enormous space is granted to certain edifying values (equity, inclusion, participation) and close attention is devoted to the more traditional problems of regulation (e.g. single-family homes, exclusionary zoning). Yet in the background, in the shadows, but impending, are the concrete interests that have the capacity to affect urban and regional transformations. On everything else, silence. If this is a generalist vision, if this is a global horizon...

Town Planning Review (TPR)

This journal offers an image of the discipline that is different in many respects from the framework just outlined above. The observation lends support to a hypothesis: It is imprudent to take a unitary and shared concept of planning for granted. Practices (and the prevailing interests and guiding orientations before that) vary noticeably according to context depending on institutional, social, or even cultural factors. TPR is a British journal, sensitive from the beginning to the needs of the profession in the UK (where the Royal Town Planning Institute is essentially a national institution, while APA is more widespread around the world). However, unlike JAPA, this Liverpool-based journal shows a more significant international openness, at least within the borders of the old continent; there are numerous contributions dedicated to European countries along with cross-border comparative analyses. In addition, while it lacks a declared cultural line (the editors forego an editorial at the opening of each issue), the recurrence of monographic (hence somewhat programmed) issues is much more frequent than in JAPA, for example, on densification (91-3, 2020), regulation (92-5, 2021), green urbanism (92-6, 2021), environmental policies (in Germany, 93-2, 2022), and localism (in the UK, 93-4, 2022), but also on the New Urban Agenda drawn up by the United Nations in 2016 (92-6, 2021). The list of specific topics to investigate and reflect upon mostly correspond to those in JAPA, but the weight of the individual elements changes considerably, as does their importance in the resulting overall framework. I have noted the impassioned and pervasive emphasis (which is perhaps simply rhetorical) that JAPA tends to place on the principles of equity and participation with respect to territorial choices. The orientation of TPR on the same topics seems less ideological and more pragmatic; it looks at concrete variations in particular situations, without leaving much room for ideology or good intentions. Participation should not be only ritu-

al (Tippet and How, Sheng, 91-2, 2020). It should guarantee the right to active and influential participation for the weakest subjects (Wakely and Martaraararchchi, 92-4, 2021; Radcliffe, 93-1, 2022). It is necessary to prevent stronger partisan interests from gaining the advantage over those that oppose them, with good reason, to excess densification (Dockerill, 91-2, 2020; monograph on the topic 91-3, 2020) or development projects that could risk environmental or climate effects (Nurse and North, 91-2, 2020; Hooper, 91-5, 2020; Goode and Charles, 93-3, 2022). This is not an ideological campaign, but the adoption of specific positions with respect to a concrete problem.

Regulation is naturally an essential issue, but there are also different means of discussion in this case. In the period of reference, it seems that not a single contribution dedicated to zoning (let alone single-family housing) or even preservation was published in TPR (despite the latter's presence of a richer historical heritage than in North America). Now-classic questions of land and fiscal policy are of more interest: land evaluation (Ball et al., 93-4, 2022; Dey Bisvas and Hartman, 93-5, 2022); value capture (Jones and Stephens, 91-6, 2020; McKearney et al., 92-5, 2021); and planning gain (Thompson and Hepburn, 93-3, 2022). In relation to the fundamental dilemma — prescriptive or flexible rules? — the prevailing disciplinary orientation favours a clearer and more binding regulatory value, also as a reasonable reaction to the deregulation adopted by the conservative government for more than a decade (McClymont and Sheppard, Harris, Clifford and Ferm, 92-5, 2021). However, there is no shortage of openness towards greater flexibility in particular contexts, for example, with respect to environmental policies in Germany (91-4, 2020) or densification in the Netherlands (91-3, 2020), two settings where close attention is paid to the problems of environmental and spatial justice that can result from the adoption of soft rules. Like JAPA, TPR does not intentionally deal with plan-making, but the focus on issues of planning policy and a variety of spatial policies is more extensive and meaningful. For the first point, the cornerstones are the institutional issue of 'localism' (as defined by current British law) and the related problem of interactions, interdependence, and possibilities for cooperation between different levels of government. Localism looks like an ambivalent phenomenon or orientation (Gallent and Robinson, 2013; Parker et al., 2019); it can be understood as a virtuous opportunity for bottom-up participation, or as a pretext and impetus for partisan interests (Lee et al., 93-3, 2022; Yuille, 93-4, 2022). Technically, it is a question of appropriately determining the relationships between

the neighbourhood plan, the main instrument of localism (Graham, 91-1, 2020), and the local plan, the more traditional device with a directive scope over a larger area (Saler, 93-1, 2022). The topic recalls the function of territorial governance (Hickman and Martin, 91-1, 2020), and thus the relationships between public powers and private interests, issues that were already anticipated by Labour policies at the time of Tony Blair. In fact, dating back to that time are visions of new public governance (Osborne, 2010), which assumes cooperative relationships or even substitution of the private sphere for the public one, to make the provision of certain services more efficient. These topics of investigation are therefore closely correlated with British planning and policy. The interest in some spatial policies is also rooted in the context. The issue of housing is treated indirectly, through the lens of densification or localism (I recall only one focused contribution, but it concerns China: Feng, 91-1, 2020). More attention is devoted to the problems of infrastructure, always searching for better integration with the territory (Marshall, 91-1, 2020; Neumann, 91-5, 2020), and the large-scale spatial coordination of certain sector policies (Bafarasat et al., 93-4, 2022). Environmental issues are especially prominent, due not only to potential conflicts between public reason and private interests (Van Karnenbeeck, 92-4, 2021; Whitten, 93-5, 2022), but also to the possible ambivalence of the related policies, between truly reformist demands or pure greenwashing strategies (the dilemma is the key to the monograph devoted to the topic: 91-4, 2020). In contrast to JAPA, interest in traumatic situations of environmental disasters are marginal (the difference in the natural conditions of the two contexts is incisive). For example, the issue of climate change does not draw the appropriate attention (Iutto et al., Fuchs et al., 93-2, 2022).

There is a surprising amount of space dedicated to the pandemic: three whole monographs in 2021 (92-1, -2, -3) and a few other essays. This was perhaps an emotional reaction that produced meaningless results. An increasingly high living density always increases the risk of pandemics. The most common settlement forms have proven to be inadequate in the face of the health emergency due to problems of organization, accessibility, provision, and distribution of green or public spaces (it is unclear whether the objection is also aimed at the models of new urbanism or new towns). The rail system was not capable of safely managing the demand for mobility with respect to pandemic risks. The quality of public space becomes a priority that requires greater care, even if the health-based limits of using the space socially seem to negate a real possibility for using them in the

short term. The importance of private life at home is growing, but the market does not offer appropriate (solvable) solutions due to size and quality. In particular, increasingly compressed living standards are not compatible with the growing need for homeworking. It seems reasonable to wait for some change in demand and the housing market. What should have been asked of urban planning during the pandemic? An (original) capacity for a temporary, quick, and effective answer to emerging crises. More far-sighted preparation for possible future threats (but we know that the principle of precaution is adopted sparingly and reluctantly by politicians when the costs of the measures, in terms of economics and consensus, seem too high). Assuming responsibility for the risks faced by the weakest groups, because any disaster, whether natural, health-related, or economic, affects those social strata most severely. A profound renewal to meet challenges, which should infuse the city project, rules, governance, management ... *everything*. This is nothing to object to (apart from the emphasis on total change), but these are trivial observations and resolutions whose implementation is complicated. The editorial commitment has not generated significant results.

On other fronts, however, there are clear affinities between TPR and JAPA. We find the same embarrassing — in my opinion — voids. Not a word on places, visions, design; just one guide to residential design is the exception, however unimportant (Moreton, 91-5, 2020). Not one word on the foundations of the discipline: What knowledge does it concern? There is only one authoritative contribution in which Barrie Needham (92-4, 2021) admits that the knowledge used by technicians in the planning process has been and probably will always continue to be unreliable! Not a word on the theory of planning, as if the topic were irrelevant. There are some considerations on the professional practice, such as roles (Moroni, 91-6, 2020), ethics (Hickman, 93-3, 2022), or training (Adams et al., 91-5, 2020). However, the concept of the role does not go beyond the distinction between public or private parties; it does not investigate the multiple functions that professionals can perform in actual processes — regulation, design, management, mediation, negotiation, attention-shaping, and more. Considerations on educational processes are limited to reporting possible problems of consistency between the typical offer of British schools and the educational demands expressed by rather different social and cultural contexts in other parts of the world. The view the profession has of itself is not exciting (Taylor and Close, 93-4, 2022). The perception of some critical issues is therefore not lacking, but the way to restore its reputation

and authority is not clear. I fear that the only perspective suggested by the journal in the period in question is to leverage the New Urban Agenda promoted by the United Nations (Stiftel, 92-4, 2021; Hague, 92-6, 2021). This is a hypothesis, an illusory attempt that recalls other naivety from the past. It is good that the Agenda was signed by a world forum (after a development process that was actually long and difficult). We should not forget, however, that this is only a virtuous manifesto (containing 175 points!), expressing a wish (and nothing more): that future cities will be more ‘just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient, sustainable’, amid a framework of inclusion, prosperity, and quality of life that should become more widespread and satisfying over time (UN, *New Urban Agenda*, 2016, p. 5). The assumption that this orientation of values will offer new concrete opportunities for urban planners to play a more influential and valued role in the near future (to ‘reinvent the profession’, argues Cliff Hague, 92-6, 2021) is an unfounded and implausible hope. This was evidenced by the disappointing experience of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in Europe at the end of the 1990s: this policy document — or rather a manifesto of principles — formulated and shared by the European Union, raised many expectations, hopes, and illusions, but had almost no effect. The problem is that urban planners do not have the political or institutional, or even the technical or operational conditions that enable good intentions to be translated into concrete facts. The journal offers no indications on this front. Like JAPA, it outlines a representation that is widely directed at the past. The illusion of progress that was even an essential requirement when the discipline was founded is far off. The framework shows extensive inertia (the same problems continue to recur over time) and a low capacity for innovation (original ideas and, even more, innovative experiments are missing). More than progress, we are dealing with an eternal present that does not even seem comforting. This is perhaps a limit of journals such as JAPA and TPR, which have a long and glorious history, but perhaps remain too tied to traditions and the professional world. Can less *agé* publishing projects more sensitive to the challenges of theory and research open different, more favourable perspectives?

Planning Theory (PT)

This journal is a good database of tests regarding the question presented above. It was founded this century and theory is its primary focus. It has drawn the interest of important authors, although the editorial line is not clear in this case either. The editor in chief, Angelique Chettiparamb, only intervenes rarely (with two editorials in the period in question). The issues

raised are not insignificant: the nature of the discipline and theory (Chettiparamb, 20-1, 2021), the relationship with practices (ibid., 21-1, 2022). The contributions, however, remain superficial and not very original: there is no clarity on the essential nodes nor do they introduce hypotheses or new visions; rather, they are limited to expressing good intentions. As with JAPA, the primary interest seems to offer indications useful to authors that intend to present contributions for publication. The journal only rarely presents a monograph. In the period in question, a reflection on the ideologies underlying different concepts of planning (19-1, 2020) is the exception, a topic that evokes long-ago traditions rather than current experiences and questions. In most cases, they are collections of incidental contributions, not even revealing clear thematic priorities; variety and occasionality are the prevailing characteristics. Overall, it seems more difficult to classify the published works according to the conceptual frameworks adopted for JAPA and TPR, which rely on general categories such as regulation, politics, equity, the environment, and so on. The uniqueness of the contributions becomes a defining feature and the reader can expect some surprise. For example, the last issue I consulted (21-3, 2022) deals sequentially with models of spatial analysis, the responsibility of colonial planning, the ways in which spatial choices are co-produced, and the issue of the right to the city in very different contexts, from Asia, Africa, and South America. Can we see a common thread to guarantee the identity and continuity of the journal? I think the only possible reference is a certain idea of theory that I frankly find questionable. The main purpose of theoretical work should be to foster understanding, justification, and the realization of current planning practices in a given context via appropriate exercises in observation, critique, design, and implementation. Theory would therefore consist of a set of principles, methods, and tools based on investigations in the field, critical thinking, and design criteria useful for orienting and making planning action effective. This is not the case. The style of the journal favours a different approach. Theories are considered as potential assumptions — mostly external and pre-established with respect to the discipline, as systems or traditions of thought, or at least authoritative visions (usually reputable), which were developed in some place and time, without a direct relationship with planning experiences. There is no shortage of pretexts because the problems of urban planning, by constitution, bring into play a wide variety of issues beyond the discipline: economic, social, political, legal, environmental, historical, anthropological, psychological, philosophical, etc. We could realize that some planners feel an occasional need to venture into these domains in search of new theoretical sug-

gestions. Some problems may arise due to the means and sense of such explorations. The most common hypothesis, assumed as a principle that does not seem to require verification or discussion, is that it is interesting to transfer some external thought into the planning domain by analogy. A transcription follows: planners' discourses are rewritten following the new language. The hope is that this exercise can open other new and more effective perspectives for interpretation and action to disciplinary actors, even if in most cases these remain pure exhortations after a few years. The reservoir of potential references may seem inexhaustible, given the variety and complexity of the implications that come into play in any planning practice of a certain difficulty. The intellectual exercise, however, should respect some requirements. The choice of a theoretical 'external' reference should be justified with specific convincing arguments (why does that hypothesis — and none other — seem promising in the disciplinary field?). In addition, a reasonable principle of subsidiarity would always seem valid. It is not appropriate to involve extraneous and uselessly sophisticated systems of thought if other simpler, more familiar conceptual frameworks can produce substantially equivalent results. Finally, the analogy may not be based just on formal assonances.

As an extreme example, I find the idea of transferring the complex thought of Jacques Lacan to the planning sphere entirely unjustified, only because the psychoanalytical categories of 'lack, force, desire, fantasy' may seem vaguely pertinent to reformulating some planning rhetoric. The same problems may be stated in simpler, more effective ways. In fact, more than 15 years of practice on the issue of Lacan inspiration have not produced any significant result (Gunder and Hillier, 2009). One example: Lacan's notion of 'empty (floating) signifier' is proposed to highlight the ideological and instrumental role of certain images used in planning rhetoric, although they do not express a well-defined, unitary, or indisputable meaning; they favour an ambivalence that allows for a variety of interpretations and consensus over time. According to a similar (but independent) orientation, the vision of the future of a territory can be considered a 'boundary object' (Star and Griesemer, 1989; Star, 2010); the analogical use of the concept in the discipline was proposed by Matysalo et al. (19-3, 2020). The sense of such an object may be perceived, but it is neither unambiguous nor complete. The edges remain blurred; the identity may be mobile (at least in part) according to drivers emerging from the context. The margins of indeterminacy and multiplicity (albeit with respect to certain fixed and shared points) may become a positive factor in the course of the process, facilitating confron-

tation, communication between different visions, and the emergence of a cooperative strategy. This is essentially nothing new, although we should conclude that deleting any references to Lacan's 'empty signifier' and replacing them with the concept of 'boundary object' does not change the substance or strength of the argument. Yet the suggestion remains: in the period in question, we find at least three contributions that make an explicit appeal to Lacan's view (Jabareen, 20-3, 2021; Bahmanteymouri, *ibid.*; Wang, 21-2, 2022); other traces refer to the influential mediation of Ernesto Laclau (1985, with Mouffe; 2005) or Slavoj Žižek (1999, 2008), two authors who were among the first to explore an analogical use of Lacan's thought in culture and politics. The same process was replicated countless times in relation to other possible sources. Before Lacan, Gilles Deleuze was for some time a leading author of some theories in planning, but the results were no longer fruitful (Hillier, 2007; Ballantyne, 2007; Saldanha, 2017). It is easier to justify references to Bruno Latour, for example his idea of *assemblage* as an emerging mode of social and territorial transformations (Latour, 2005; Yaneva, 2022), or the idea of nature as a construct that is socially determined, at least in part (Latour, 1999, 2015). There is no shortage of good reasons to evoke Michel Foucault's original visions; several planners and geographers have grappled with this exercise, not always with notable results. Here, Foucault's concept of power inspired a work by Yvonne Rydin on the relationships between power, ideology, and regulation (19-2, 2020). The highly topical themes of the *political* and the *post-political* have justified widespread attention in the discipline (Swyngedouw and Wilson, 2014; Beveridge and Koch, 2017, 2019) to a range of renowned authors: Mouffe and Laclau, Hardt and Negri, Rancière, or Badiou. It is a pity that their positions are different and sometimes contrasting, while excursions in planning often tend towards undue superposition or confused interweaving (Palermo, 2022, Section 4.8 and 4.9). There is no lack of more occasional references, which may be considered fortuitous and generally remain singular experiences. I have already noted the use of the 'boundary object' notion (Matysalo et al., 19-3, 2020). Blecic and Cecchini (19-2, 2020) literally paraphrased the concept of 'anti-fragile' developed by Nassim Taleb (*Things that Gain from Disorder*, 2012), to discuss the issue of resilience in planning. The aim is to suggest an alternative to the more widespread concept, which alludes to the ability of a system to recover its pre-existing equilibrium after an external perturbation. The idea is that the reaction to a crisis may also involve a proactive transformation: a hypothesis that was already widely explored by the design culture and is not alien to the interpretations of resilience (Palermo, 2022, Section 4.5),

without any need to appeal to Taleb. Andreas Faludi took Jan Zielonka's (2014) idea of a 'new medieval order' as a system of powers arranged on different levels with permeable local borders, partially overlapping areas of sovereignty, and a network of functional connections and interactions in space. The goal was to find an alternative to the 'territorialist' concept of the discipline. This was a necessary alternative in his view because such a notion would represent a closed, myopic culture, a conservative idea of governance, but also an obstacle to the functions of spatial planning (Faludi, 2018; the book review, edited by Jonathan Metzger, can be found in 20-1, 2021). Faludi evidently disregards the reasons why Alberto Magnaghi long supported an edifying vision that assumed territorialism as a founding paradigm (the last contribution was Magnaghi, 2020). What remains is the simplicity of an analogical exercise by Faludi that is only valid as a vague suggestion. Other references may emerge from later journal issues, even in original and surprising forms. With all probability, however, the concept of the theory will not change, so the limits I have highlighted will not be overcome. PT is arranged as a basket of impromptu excursions, sometimes arbitrary or superfluous, which unfortunately often cannot produce solid or innovative results.

The point is: Do these exercises at least give some clarity on open problems in planning theory? Paradoxically, these may be the source of further confusion and ambiguity. We find ourselves in a world of increasingly indistinct nuances, where dilemmas have no solution, but rather reproduce endlessly among unresolved uncertainties and possible combinations. For example, it is known that the tradition of communicative planning does not leave significant room for the forms and means of exercising power. The theoretical reflection in PT tends to show that this is not exactly the case: the two spheres are often intertwined (Westin, 21-2, 2022). Vice versa, the agonistic concepts of planning generally leave problems of consensus-building in the shadows. Theoretical reflection may mean that recourse to forms of mediation and consensus building become indispensable (Kühn, 20-2, 2021). The strategic orientation was created to recognize and possibly reconstitute contrasting interests and visions (although without ensuring that the distribution of benefits is equitable). However, the implementation of that process does not rely only on forms of strategic rationality, but can or should make use of persuasive communication techniques; two distinct forms of rationality — strategic and communicative — therefore come together in practice (Matysalo et al., 19-3, 2020). The most traditional concept of planning rationality — the so-called rational-comprehensive model

— is generally considered passé. However, some nostalgia and allusions survive. ‘Revisited’ forms of rationality are explored, which should work as a surrogate; the problem lies in making what is rational and political co-exist (Ozdemir, 20-4, 2021). The idea of politics that PT seems to favour is oriented around demonstrations of *insurgence*. Any reference to traditional policy-making is missing. Attention is aimed at movements that emerge from the social aspect, when it is thrown into crisis by political tension (Huq, 19-4, 2020). These processes tend to question the established order, claiming new rights. They give rise to self-organization and produce new know-how beyond the limits of expert knowledge (Sletto, 20-2, 2021). A new order, or at least some important transformations, may emerge from practice. In form, the processes may be considered illegal, but they are not without good justifications (Basta, 21-2, 2022). At any rate, it is a potentially important alternative to normal institutional procedures which could give a positive boost to the democratic quality of the processes (Zakhour, 20-2, 2021). What is certain is that participation is growing (Alfasi, 20-2, 2021) in nonritual but potentially transformative forms (Zakhour, 19-4, 2020). There is an evident positive bias towards the family of processes that seem pure and risk-free, and should take the place of institutional planning. It seems to me that a doubt remains: Is it reasonable or useful to place some experience of self-organization and ordinary forms of public planning on the same plane? I remain perplexed, even if the option was endorsed by Friedmann, Sandercock and many others. For the journal, the problem seems not to have existed.

The issue of planning knowledge continues to be another source of doubts or dilemmas. Is it better to aim at expert knowledge or rely on social interaction? One contribution in PT (Boonstra and Rauws, 20-4, 2021) suggests not rejecting any opportunity. An urban form can be investigated with the methods of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975, 2011), i.e. as the outcome of objective events and factors, which would be possible to reconstruct, measure, correlate, and thus explain, or as an *assemblage* of the actions of and interactions between influential actors, according to the active and process-oriented view that was developed by Bruno Latour (2005). These are two profoundly different perspectives; once again an eclectic attitude prevails and no one takes a position. Once again on the issue of knowledge: the possibility of conceiving the planning discipline as a science frankly seems to have been excluded now for a long time. However, one contribution in PT indicated some emerging idea of scientific activity. It does not refer to Karl Popper and classics of epistemology, but rather to contributions with-

out exceptional renown which would associate scientific value (only) with a presumed systematic character of disciplinary operations (presumed, because not even this requirement seems to apply to many current planning practices). In this sense, even planning could be understood as a scientific practice (Behrend and Levin-Kehtel, 19-2, 2020). It is not clear how this view (which I consider to be unfounded) could introduce any perspective for planning technicians, unless the requirement that it be systematic is meant to allude once again to the (unsustainable) rational-comprehensive ideology. However, the interest in science does not exclude a renewed attention to the issues of ideology, which PT seems to want to revive after a long phase of relative marginality. Proclaiming its end was a mistake. Planning visions, rules, and processes are certainly influenced by a set of latent beliefs or prejudices, which may be instrumental or unfounded. As the Enlightenment teaches us, it is the city planner's responsibility to highlight such assumptions in order to better understand and act (Sheperd et al., Davoudi and Galland, Zanotto, 19-1, 2020; Hue, 21-2, 2022). Space for criticism, therefore, but not design practice: it continues to lack any reference to urban design. Or rather, the matter of design is touched on in one contribution (Van Dijk, 20-1, 2021), but it only refers to systems thinking as a methodical approach that should strengthen the experiences of collaborative planning; the physical aspect of design is still excluded.

This series of contributions has a paradoxical effect in that it creates problems for the most popular theoretical references in the discipline (such as communicative theory and all other references mentioned thus far). In fact, it shows how each position is in practice contaminated by other visions and perspectives, theoretically considered distinct or alternative. Whence the impression that theoretical work must always start from zero, or it is always unfinished or essentially useless. In reality, some considerations express or imply a clear instrumental intent. As mentioned above, Andreas Faludi inveighs against the territorialist paradigm (Faludi, 2018), but his criticism does not target the sovereignist or deregulation experiences of British localism (discussed by TPR and PTP). The main problem is that that vision blocks the aspirations of (ineffective) European spatial planning! Whatever the logic of the individual moves, the resulting framework is extremely uniform. We cannot identify the fixed points around which the discipline could rebuild its foundations. Theoretical reflection does not help to take a stand in the face of alternative paths that the discipline has explored at different times and in different contexts, which are now supposed to coexist in an indistinct space (where technocratic power may coexist with insurgent

practices). Nor can it be said that these language games would allow for a focus on original or generative concepts. In the period in question, the published texts seem to identify only a couple of relatively unusual proposals. Thomas Buhler (20-4, 2021) suggests that *vagueness* should not always be considered a limitation in relation to conceptual frameworks, scenarios, strategies, or even action programmes. The reason — a bit opportunistic — would be that less stringent preliminary commitments would allow for greater behavioural freedom throughout the processes (even a change in route if necessary). The issue of the boundary object emerges again, but the observation is clearly banal. It would be useful to remind the authority of Vittorio Gregotti's arguments: a project may only be vague, i.e. it admits versatile, yet justified variations of quality over time, if these possibilities are wisely constructed from the outset. Vagueness is therefore not disengagement, but design skill (Gregotti, 1986, 1993, 2014), whereas Buhler's contribution only seems to evade the responsibility of disciplinary actors. On the other hand, John Forester calls attention a notion with no history in the discipline: the concept of *kindness* (20-1, 2021). Why doesn't planning deal with this? The author alludes to some desirable prerequisites in the city planner's vision and action: inclusion, sensitivity, recognition, respect for human vulnerability and suffering. I do not think the suggestion is clearly justified (starting with the arbitrary choice of the name: why not 'civility', if 'politeness' or 'courtesy' seem less pertinent?). I do not think that the concept opens new, relevant perspectives; rather, it could easily be replaced by any simple paraphrase.

I must conclude that, as a whole, those who do not look at individual contributions find a picture that is not only confusing, but essentially immobile, because any theoretical vision appears to be at risk of contamination, while the 'analogy/paraphrase/exhortation' cycle remains the guiding feature, repeated inexorably without any really significant effects. Despite some voices of (sober) dissent, these are impromptu and objectively marginal. Ernst Alexander (21-2, 2022) reiterated the limitations of much theoretical discourse. It is necessary to re-establish the dominance of the practice; any reflection should move from specific facts and processes that often cannot be reduced to the schematization proposed by current theories. Bish Sanyal (20-3, 2021) distanced himself from the most common concepts of the relationship between theory and practice, harshly criticizing the independence or eclecticism of certain theoretical discourses (which are unfortunately the most widespread). The pretext was the review of a book by Haughton and White (2019) that aimed to clarify the possible contributions

of the theory to practitioners in the field, but according to Sanyal, it failed in its purpose due to an overly abstract, academic approach. I share these references; however, this relates to (only) two contributions in three years, compared to nearly a hundred articles published. If this is the common line that sets the nature and sense of the theory, I understand the scepticism or indifference of many professionals.

Planning Theory and Practice (PTP)

With PT, this journal shares a generation (pertaining to the new century), explicit attention to the problems of theory, and attention for a multitude of leading figures in the discipline. The most interesting distinctive character is obviously the desire to investigate and strengthen the relationships between disciplinary theories and effective practice, an objective that can only be shared, but which continuously gets out of hand, despite the best intentions. In contrast to JAPA, TPR, and PT, there is a clear editorial line here. Each journal issue opens with an editorial, occasionally entrusted to different voices from the editorial staff (during the period in question, the editor in chief, Heather Campbell, wrote only once, 22-1, 2021). Each text presents the key topic of the issue and a quick explanation of the thread that ought to connect the contributions in the issue (although the claim of unity and coherence of the whole is almost always questionable; journals are not compiled according to an editorial plan, but based on spontaneous contributions sent in by aspiring authors are bound to endure some limits of contingency and uniformity). However, a cultural line does emerge, we could say, a planning ideology that is clearly oriented and continuously reiterated. The period opens with a reference to the hard times the world is experiencing, among increasingly serious environmental crises and new health threats. The discipline is called to new responsibilities and should express a better capacity for action (Upton, 21-1, 2020). John Forester says that it is necessary for city planners to take charge of more rigorous, high-performance commitments. It is not enough to refine the topics of environmental and social justice (Schlosberg, 2007; Newton, 2009); planning action must show itself to be capable of offering effective answers to human vulnerability and suffering (Forester, 21-2, 2020). The author expresses this orientation through the concept of kindness, which we already encountered in PT. David Scott (21-3, 2020) addresses the problems of the COVID emergency, which in his view evoke the typical dilemmas of resilience: the goal should not only be to look for some form of sustainable adaptation to critical issues of the moment, but to seize the opportunity for a progressive transformation of a wider scope and horizon, from *bounce*

back to bounce forward. Mee Ng observes (21-4, 2020) that the goals of sustainable urban development formulated by the United Nations in the New Urban Agenda (already referred to in TPR) are more relevant and urgent than ever in the time of the pandemic: their realization should be a shared priority. According to Jill Grant (21-5, 2020), COVID is changing urban planners' way of thinking. The demands for inclusion, equity, and progress that are always dear to reformist planning are finding new support and greater strength. It is a pity that when the time comes to reason about the tools available for the purpose, the author (after reiterating the inadequacy of many traditions, new urbanism and others) is only able to suggest the line of scenario planning (whose contribution, in my opinion, remains marginal and ephemeral, as I mentioned above). In early 2021, Heather Campbell had already reflected on the perspectives of post-pandemic planning (22-1, 2021). The global health crisis aggravated the weight of limitations and difficulties that had long conditioned the discipline. Can it give a positive impetus to change? The challenges are complicated; criticism and exhortations are not enough. A substantial renewal of institutions, paradigms, and practices would be necessary (but at the moment these are just hopes). John Forester (22-2, 2021) suggests learning from experience. It is not enough to state goals and to have expert knowledge; the capacity for mediation that planners know how to exercise in the course of the processes (as the author has been arguing for decades) is decisive. Andy Inch (22-3, 2021) is disturbed by the obvious and perhaps unbridgeable gap between the need to revive planning (which COVID highlighted) and the orientations of the British government which, with Boris Johnson's white paper (*Planning for the Future*, 2020), foreshadowed an increasingly weak and marginal planning practice: Is there no more future for town planning? In this phase, Chrystal Legacy (22-4, 2021) would like to see a discipline capable of resisting the (questionable) choices of the current power. To this end, it would be necessary to rediscover the *political* dimension of planning, in a radical sense (in the footsteps of Rancière, Badiou, and others). It is a pity that such tools are nothing more than strategic spatial planning or scenario planning (vain talk and presumptions based on past experience). As per Nick Bates (22-5, 2021), challenges, criticalities, and limitations are certainly weighty; a certain disappointment and weariness in the planning world is understandable, but the discipline must continue to hope for radical change. However, in 2022, the discourse took even more generic, vague forms. Katie McClymont (23-1, 2022) reiterates the need for experiences to be rooted in the context. Mee Ng (23-2, 2022) hopes for rules and standards that are more consistent with the principles of spatial and envi-

ronmental justice. David Scott (23-3, 2022) reintroduces the same issue in relation to policies for the energy transition. Finally, in the last contribution that I consulted for this review (23-4, 2022), Jill Grant warns urban planners: when the political system asks for improved planning practice, it is time to worry, because reform initiatives in the sector generally express regressive tendencies, which the discipline should counteract. This is therefore the sequence of positions that should delineate PTP. Recognition was a long time in coming, but I believe in the usefulness of the exercise. The sequence itself irrefutably shows the journal's edifying and exhortative orientation, but also the poverty of the tools and the weak plausibility of a substantial change.

This impression is confirmed if we go into the contents of each issue. The opening exhortations are followed, as prevailing fact, by the continual reiteration of certain dilemmas that seem chronic and intractable (the same tendency, the same limitation already emerged from the three journals considered above). Unresolved questions affect issues that should be crucial for disciplinary action. The investigation does not allow the critical points to be untangled: they generally reproduce them, sometimes even aggravating them. As Abdhul Khakee (21-1, 2020) recognizes, we should admit that these dilemmas are not only unsolvable, but also increasingly complicated, or even insurmountable. Should the discipline still worry about conceiving and building a better future, or can it limit itself to responding to trends emerging from the context in adaptive ways (Ferreira et al., Jon and Reghezza-Zitt, Scott and Lennon, 21-1, 2020; Zapata et al., 22-4, 2021)? Should it recognize the priority of the values/goals of equity and inclusion (celebrated by other journals), or resign itself to human compromises, as often occurs in daily practice (Ferm and Raco, Porter et al., 21-2, 2020; Porter et al., 22-1, 2021; Bates, Brookfield, Oseland and Haarstadt, 23-2, 2022)? Is it inevitable to acknowledge the ongoing deregulation, or is it legitimate to hope for a revival of the purpose of planning? In Britain, this means calling into question the National Policy Framework of 2012 (see Sheperd, 22-4, 2021). Every demand raises a variety of problems when it must be developed technically; the relevant questions are not only technical, but require political judgements and ethical choices. Is it appropriate to aim for a prescriptive concept of regulation or is it more reasonable to favour voluntary or market-based negotiations and agreements? The journal contains many contributions of various orientations on the subject, a clear indication of the recognized centrality of the issue, but doubts remain unresolved (Searle, Powe, 21-2, 2020; Cowell et al., Kosunen et al., 21-4, 2020;

Boulton et al., 22-1, 2021; Saldert, 22-3, 2021; Biggar, 22-5, 2021; Parker et al., 23-1, 2022; Hirvola, 23-2, 2022). Should decision-making see to cooperation between the parties or rely (also or predominantly) on competitive selection (Granqvist et al., 22-2, 2021)? Should planning adopt a long-term, large-scale strategic orientation (Hutter and Wiechmann, 23-1, 2022; Goodspeed, 23-4, 2022), or is it more appropriate to focus on specific tactical, circumscribed actions (Vallance and Edwards, 22-5, 2021) — or at best, simple urban acupuncture (Hemingway et al., 23-2, 2022)? Should we be more concerned with the continuity of planning actions (Vuksanovic-Macura et al., 21-5, 2020) or with the ability to respond to emerging crises (Reckien, 21-3, 2020)? Should localism be understood (in the UK) as the proper recognition of spatial and cultural differences, leading to improved opportunities for democratic bottom-up participation (Yuille, 2023) and cooperation between different levels of government (Buhler, Mattila et al., 22-2, 2021)? Or is it instrumental leverage (and easy rhetoric) that allows partisan interests to prevail, or at least hinder the creation of public welfare (Sturzaker et al., 23-1, 2022)? The allusion here is particularly to the contentious and often conflicting relationships (Brownill and Bradley, 2027) in the past decade between the neighbourhood plans (desired by the Conservative government) and the more orthodox local plans, a topic already raised by PT. Is it right to continue to exclude design issues from attention? In reality, PTP (in contrast to the other journals) opens at least a small window. Urban design becomes a topic of discussion from two points of view: the governance of physical planning processes (Richardson and White, 22-4, 2021) and design review (Morrison and Honegger, 23-3, 2022). The question of design governance is associated with a few recent experiences in Scotland that are not innovations, but rather the recovery (after some time) of an approach that was widely tested in England, but which today is in steep decline. The reflection on design review is more original. It addresses the specific issue of the sustainability of urban projects and therefore the ethical dilemmas that arise between the demands for preservation and development (Knapp et al., 23-3, 2022), although they do not lend themselves to a purely technical treatment in schematic and repetitive forms. Similar or complementary dilemmas emerge from various other directions. In these processes, should we rely mainly on expert knowledge or is it important to recognize and enhance local knowledge, which is tacit or arises from social interaction (Ndwenya et al., 22-5, 2021; Mattila et al., 23-1, 2022; Westin and Joosse, 23-3, 2022)? To enrich knowledge, are we able to conceive of spatial research that is not banal (i.e. not repetitive, ritualistic, often uncritical), but rather original, creative, and capable of

truly affecting the quality of processes (Jon, 22-2, 2021)? Is the contribution we can expect from new information technologies (big data, artificial intelligence, smart city) merely instrumental, or will it change the vision, meaning, and quality of planning (Yamu et al., 2017)? This is one of the most hotly debated topics in the journal, with a substantially positive orientation (Potts, 21-2, 2020; Connelly et al., 21-3, 2020; Duminy and Barnell, 21-4, 2020; Sjoblom and Niitamo, 21-5, 2020; Chen et al., 22-2, 2021; Kitchin et al., 22-3, 2021; Mattila, 23-2, 2022; Mattila and Nummi, 23-3, 2022). To conclude, how should we imagine the future role of the planner? As a pure witness to values and aspirations that are not actually respected; a professional willing to adapt to market needs; or an agent of innovation, capable of counteracting deplorable trends, but also of achieving concrete positive, albeit partial, results (Parker et al., 21-3, 2020)? And will academia be able to provide adequate answers to the variety of emerging problems (Mladenovic et al., 21-1, 2020; Corbera et al., 21-2, 2020)? These are not original questions; rather, it is the triumph of *déjà vu*. The problem is the eternal return to the same issues, which means a lack of original, convincing, effective results.

My conclusion is that the journal offers a regretful portrayal of the uncertainties and difficulties in the discipline. The image is not new, unfortunately; it does not seem to open new hopes. Note that in this area, theoretical discourse avoids distortions that are so common in PT. There is no trace of suggestions drawn from other disciplinary domains and transferred to the context following dubious analogies. As it should, the theoretical analysis always represents a specific effort of investigation, interpretation, and generalization of actual practices. However, it is difficult to maintain that the results of such effort are more convincing. Perhaps Ernst Alexander (2015, 2022a) is right: there is no (at least not relevant) planning theory or even planning as a general category, but just a set or variety of specific practices to address in a given context with an approach and techniques that certainly rely on experience, but require specific skills of design, selection, and development. This is the effort that counts, while (for Alexander) less energy could be devoted to the historic aspiration of securing a solid basis and clear institutional recognition for an ‘undisciplined discipline’ (D. Pinson, 2004), i.e. a field of practices that are difficult to order and direct based on general or predefined frameworks. Perhaps the conclusion could be more disenchanting: urban planners seem destined to remain the guardians of virtuous principles and intentions in a reluctant and distrustful world that always tends to favour other priorities. As in the times of the modern pro-

ject, planners and urbanists become the witnesses of a crisis and hope. That model, however, proved to be an ideology, and general, concrete, effective alternatives do not seem to be available. All that remains is the assumption of responsibility, commitment, and the possibility of action aimed at creating better conditions in each specific case and context according to a pragmatic vision that appreciates partial progress and satisfactory solutions. If it is legitimate to conclude that keen exhortations are the main contribution of PTP, doubts as to the possibility of interpreting a more ambitious role risk being founded.

10.3 A Divided, Confused, Immobile Framework

The framework outlined in the previous section is not comforting. As reflected in the four journals, academia seems weak, hesitant, repetitive, willing, but lacking adequate tools; more satisfying prospects seem unlikely in the short to medium term (perhaps even over longer horizons). The inability to translate the best intentions into real facts weighs heavily, while critical junctures seem to become permanent dilemmas (this negative evaluation has led me to limit my collaboration with journals in the sector, which has been intermittent, without ever becoming a priority commitment). Internationally, the situation is complicated by emerging characters in the area, which tend to aggravate the problems.

In fact, the framework seems profoundly divided as to values, roles, visions, paradigms, tools, and strategies. The series of dilemmas I have just illustrated is an embarrassing effect of current divisions. These find resounding confirmation in the interpretations of planning that have gained greater fame on the international scene, and draw divergent and in some respects immeasurable paths. For Andreas Faludi (1973), planning was a technocratic action that should respond to solid criteria of comprehensive rationality. For Patsy Healey (1997, 2003, 2007), the essential requirement was the capacity for inter-institutional cooperation, following an idea of collaborative planning that would have been able to overcome tension or conflicts among diverging interests. For Judith Innes (1995, 1999, 2016), the key to the processes was communication: technicians should work to improve conditions and opportunities for undistorted communication to foster fair and shared understanding of the choices in question. John Forster (1987, 1989, 1999, 2006, 2009) confirmed and clarified that view. Planners come to play a decisive role in the course of processes, if they act as facilitators, mediators, or even therapists, using their expertise to

overcome difficulties and alleviate the suffering that plagues social relations. Leonie Sandercock, on the other hand (1998, 2003), never relied on comprehensive rationality or expert knowledge. The virtuous outcome of processes was associated with the self-organizing capacities of local society. Along the same lines, a radical concept of planning took shape, arguing that only profound changes in institutions, laws, and behaviour could lead to more equitable and sustainable spatial choices (Grabow and Heskin, 1973; Leavitt, 1994). More recently, the insurgent planning paradigm has celebrated the functions and positivity of local self-governance. The role of technicians cannot be limited to mediation; it becomes relevant and useful if it can activate social energy and giving technical representation to emerging design capability (Friedmann, 1992, 2011). The curious fact is that these incomparable positions should coexist in the same disciplinary and cultural space (as I have documented on various occasions: see Chapter 5). Italian planners may feel disoriented or uneasy when faced with this disordered variety. These images of disciplinary work are very distant from concrete experience. In fact, issues of regulation remain marginal (which take technically primitive forms such as single-family zoning in JAPA), while issues of design are considered extraneous to the field (exclusion is a constant). I consider this choice to be one of the main causes of the regression and objective crisis of the planning discipline. It seems fair to observe, however, that the theories briefly mentioned here represent an error shared by each individual author. In fact, each exalts a dimension of the problem that is relevant but not exclusive (technical rationality, communication, cooperation, conflict, local autonomy, and so on), taking it as the dominant factor for creating an ideological vision, instead of worrying about building contextually sustainable balances among the various demands, despite the plausible, recurring tension. Moreover, this need re-emerges constantly, precisely through the dilemmas that continue to torment the discipline (as resulting from the bibliographic summary in Section 10.2).

The framework is not only divided, but also deeply confused. There is a lack of adequate work to distinguish, compare, and evaluate emerging theoretical visions that are so different and essentially alternative. Instead of distinguishing and choosing, the discipline prefers to adopt an eclectic or ecumenical attitude. In my opinion, John Friedmann was primarily responsible for this trend, as his monumental *Planning in the Public Domain* (1987) legitimized an idea of the discipline as a range of incomparable options, oscillating from the pure technocratic model to the insurgent forms of social self-organization. In relation to the problem and context, technicians

would only have to adopt and apply the most relevant option, as if the enormous differences in the concept of the role and practice were irrelevant. In my opinion, this orientation has led to a lot of damage. Eclecticism and contingency have become an alibi for the need to clarify some fundamental issues: What is planning? What theory, knowledge, practice, relations are there between these elements? These are questions that continue to be formulated and reformulated in the literature (as we observed in the four journals), in forms that are often superficial and inconclusive. This limit also arises in the work of authors whose profiles are certainly interesting. I am thinking, for example, of Graham Haughton (Philip Allmendinger's historical co-author) who, together with Iain White, published *Why Plan? Theory for Practitioners* (2019), a book reviewed by Bish Sanyal in PT (20-3, 2021). I have already hinted at some of Sanyal's criticism (Section 10.2), which I consider justified. Indeed, how can Haughton seriously present professionals with a list of *twenty-two* urban theories worthy of interest, in which — with extreme levity or indifference — he calls into question Keynes, neo-liberalism, Marxism, colonialism, and insurgency, as well as post-politics, nudging, assemblage, informality, gender, and more (the poor worker might legitimately fear that he has stumbled into Luis Borges' Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge). I believe a similar objection may apply to the recent book by Robert Beauregard (*Advanced Introduction to Planning Theory*, 2020), reviewed by Ernst Alexander in PT (21-1, 2022). A scholar as refined, experienced, and well-balanced as Beauregard accepts a compilatory representation of the domain of planning theories, which includes all the positions that, at some time and place, have interpreted and guided disciplinary thought. In this field, theoretical work is not asked to meet demanding requirements (Neuman, 2005); the mission is not to tell practitioners the best way to act in the context. Most scholars seem to accept more modest functions, offer good justifications to the practice, clarifying at least the reality and sense in a given situation. Rather different (and partly incomparable) visions have been devised for this purpose. Beauregard faithfully surveyed the main orientations, which were mostly inspired by high traditions of thought (to mention just a few big names, not only Habermas, Marx, and Aristotle, but even Wittgenstein or Lacan: see Chapter 6, which should act as a conclusion and perspective). The discipline does not seem ready to renounce any of the attempts made by its exponents in various ways, times, and contexts, to give an order and sense to a complicated and elusive subject. What is missing is a minimum amount of critical work aimed at recognizing and assessing the differences in intents, arguments, and effects. It is as if each position could boast

the same credibility and fertility. The discourse therefore becomes purely self-referential, within a presumed academia that never questions itself, but is so weak and uncertain that it is not considered very authoritative (or useful) by the outside world. It seems clear that the framework remains confused because the discipline eludes the responsibility of distinguishing and choosing.

The situation is also serious because this state seems to be permanent. The rate of innovation in the discipline is modest. New stimuli may emerge from the outside world (the real one) — the pandemic was the last instance. However, the impression is that they are easily absorbed within the most traditional visions and behaviours (just consider the banality of the contributions aroused by the recent pandemic). The doubt is that this stasis is correlated with the peculiar difficulties of the theoretical work, or disciplinary foundation in a field such as this. Perhaps Ernst Alexander (2015) was right: urban planning is essentially a practice. Attempts at generalization push to now known thresholds that can never be overcome. Hence the compulsion to repeat the same doubts and questions. Very probably, the concept of the role is wrong and the understanding of the real practices is insufficient. I believe that if planners truly aspire to change after a clear interminable stall, they should question the sense and means of their action in the real world. Unfortunately, the literature I have referenced offers few useful indications. It is not due to a parochial spirit, but the visions presented in the first part of this book seem denser and more interesting overall. Each develops a dominant issue: Campos' 'reformist planning', Secchi's city design, Mazza's regulation and control of spatial development according to flexible and discretionary principles, and Crosta's social production of urban transformations. Each author takes responsibility for a choice, which is nevertheless based on an overall reflection that aims to consider and interweave the main aspects of the problem. The international literature I have investigated does not seem to address this complexity or present clear choices among the possible options. Instead, it seems to coexist with eternal dilemmas and substantial eclecticism. I have acknowledged this outcome with some embarrassment.

10.4 Not Evading Responsibilities

A certain unease due to the current state is not unusual in the discipline. It arises periodically in the international literature in the form of *cahiers de doléances*: the economy, society, and politics unfortunately continue

to place serious obstacles in way of planners' mission; they tend not to recognize its merits or even certain functions that would be indispensable. In Italy, for example, just a dozen years ago, Leonardo Benevolo (2012) proclaimed and denounced the 'collapse of city planning'. My point of view is likewise critical, but I don't feel it necessary to join the choir due to a fundamental difference in assessment. Benevolo and other scholars seem to attribute the main responsibility for the crisis to external factors, i.e. obstacles that daily life continue to create in the work of urban planners. If they were allowed to act freely according to science and conscience, with the adequate support of resources and consensus, the results would be excellent. My opinion is different. I believe that the discipline holds serious responsibility for the course of the crisis; that overall, it has been inadequate for complicated challenges and often poorly stated problems; that it would be irresponsible to evade critical aspects and not try to react. The first step is a critical diagnosis of the situation. The most important fact is the now irreversible crisis in some models. The ideal proposals of modern town planning would certainly seem out of place and outdated today — an ideology in reality, because its concrete results were exceptional episodes. The fixed point is that the concept of planning as a public function to direct and control land uses and transformations has been discredited and lost a perspective, whether relating to general or prescriptive plans. However, the signs of crisis are now clear, even in the family of reformist programmes that took shape in many European countries between the 1990s and the first decade of this century. Those programmes represented an attempt at institutional and cultural renewal, now deemed indispensable due to the evident obsolescence of the modernist tradition. Even in the variety of national solutions, such programmes have shared progressive demands and edifying values (equity, sustainability, greater functionality, etc.). However, after some time, the impulse seems to have died (we could think of the reformist programme inspired in Italy by Campos Venuti 30 years ago); without substantial renewal, the risk is irrelevance. We should accustom ourselves to proceeding without glorious models (Palermo, 2014).

To better understand and assess what is happening, it may be useful to observe the evolution of city planning in North America, which, in this field as in many others, seems to anticipate trends (this is why I have chosen some international journals as sources). From the early 1900s, it seemed clear that a 'public/general/prescriptive' idea of town planning, according to the original German model, was incompatible with the *genus loci*. In fact, local society immediately tried to explore some alternative that was

more consistent and functional with respect to the context. For a few decades, from the time of social Taylorism to the Chicago School of Tugwell and Perloff in the mid-1900s, the hypothesis of process rationalization was explored with a pragmatic spirit and a management orientation. However, that thread could be considered substantially exhausted since the early 1950s, although paradoxically, some technocrats (such as Andreas Faludi) tried to reintroduce it in Europe in the early 1970s. Much more important was another series of experiences in North America: the concept of planning as a community practice; attention to the problems of building social consensus on territorial choices; the importance of social learning and social mobilization; the ‘insurgent’ contribution of certain forms of self-organization or, if anything, local self-governance. One of the consequences was that the discipline has taken the form of a range of radically divergent options: the pure technocratic model on the one hand and the possibilities of insurgent planning (which I frankly find hard to accept as relevant forms of planning) on the other. As I mentioned above, that eclectic vision was backed by John Friedmann and other authoritative masters, with adverse effects, in my opinion (Palermo, 2022). One relevant point, however, does not seem to be open to discussion: planning in North America does not direct or control, but in many cases — perhaps the majority — it does not even guide the course of processes (in the sense of public guidance); rather, it accompanies and facilitates them, while partisan interests and initiatives become solidified and are settled, at least partially. In this framework, two distinct profiles of disciplinary actor emerge. One is the social figure of the facilitator, mediator, or activist, who plays an important role by interacting with the main players in the process. The other is the official, the bureaucrat who must guarantee formal compliance with laws, rules, and procedures, which are often obsolete or somewhat confused; a necessary but emotionally unexciting role. This scenario evidently underestimates the functions of urban design. Perhaps it assimilates (reduces) them to a bureaucratic exercise, but — as I have documented — the world of planning guiltily tends to ignore this dimension. If we reconsider this scenario in the context of Southern Europe and Italy in particular, the first observation is that the facilitator and — more obviously — the activist play a much more marginal role. The risk is that the dominant figure in the discipline only acts as a bureaucrat. To clarify the possible implications, it seems useful to recall the notion of post-democracy developed by the British sociologist Colin Crouch in the early 2000s (Crouch, 2004 and 2020; Palermo, 2022). As Crouch observes, we fortunately live in a democratic regime, but political forms, rules, and processes always seem poorer in

participation, passion, and shared meaning. This is a problem, because no political regime is eternal; even democracy may be at risk. Isn't something similar happening in city planning as well, as an institution and practice? Formally, its function is indispensable in any mature democracy. The risk is precisely that they only concern *forms*, a series of obligatory fulfilments to be performed ritually, as accompanying otherwise decisive processes in the time necessary for them to mature. If city planners are identified as bureaucrats, I understand the crisis in their calling.

Are there concrete alternatives? There are a few, but they are not very comforting. In Italy, for example, if we shift the focus from great figures to ordinary profiles, there are many reasons for perplexity. There is still a nostalgic group that would like to reintroduce the modernist vision: rare voices destined for irrelevance in my opinion. Instead, there is a group richer in disciplinary players that I could call 'specialists in trespassing'. The issue was introduced above with regard to PT. Urban planners have many pretexts for exploring some extra-disciplinary field, which interweaves in some way with the domain of planning. The result is the 'analogy, paraphrase, exhortation' sequence that I illustrated in relation to that journal. Reiterated over time without significant effects, it becomes a repetitive and substantially elusive exercise. I do not like planners in academia unless they have a more concrete, productive commitment. This is also because the academia in question, which I believe I have shown based on authoritative sources, is uninteresting and not very productive. In contrast, my opinion of another family of profiles is different. There are many urban planners at institutions and in the profession who do not deal strictly with the canonical problems of traditional planning, but rather with a variety of emerging questions in urban policy. There is no shortage of opportunities because many sector issues were introduced by the missions of city planning. The question of health has played a constituent role in the origins of the discipline; a century later, it took the form of the healthy city and biopolitics. For 40 years, sustainability has represented a crucial challenge on paper; for 20 years, it has been smartness, resilience, biophilic design; the pandemic for a few years, and so on. One can understand and appreciate the fact that some planners have been concretely dedicated to one of these fields, contributing to investigations, programmes, and operational projects. The problem is that these activities remain occasional replacements, which do not allow a disciplinary paradigm to be recreated or renewed because there is a lack of serious confrontation with disciplinary traditions and inherited criticalities (continuous experiences or a break?).

Above all, the issue of the possibility of or need for a paradigm shift with respect to tradition remains in the shadows; the possible shift from the domain of planning tools to the world of urban policies is not on the agenda. Perhaps something is happening in practice in this sense, but I cannot find an institutional or cultural instance. This figure therefore remains in balance. Perhaps it represents just an extemporaneous digression; perhaps it is the symptom of a need for renewal that is increasingly difficult to avoid. The conclusion seems to be that the array of people mentioned here really does not arouse enthusiasm: false prophets, the last neo-modernists; know-it-alls, amateurs, and imitators, the systematic cultivators of trespassing; practitioners in search of a role, shadow-operators of urban policies; or bureaucrats. At the end, the most exciting figure seems to be the activist or facilitator, although these are marginal in our context and there is an obvious gap with respect to the heroic (or tragic) concepts of the planner. However, I believe that a particular responsibility of the discipline is to acquire an awareness of reality and eventually try to react.

10.5 Between Practice and Reflection: Attempts at Dialogue and Renewal

Recognizing the centrality of practice means questioning not only roles, but also conceptual frameworks; it is not a paradox. It seems to me that the survey of the journals shows that many frameworks in use are inappropriate or counterproductive (because they create negative effects), or at least inadequate. The images adopted to express the essential functions of urban planning may become a problem. It makes no sense today to continue suggesting purely an author's vision that still belongs to modernist tradition, nor the arbitrary idea of theory that circulates widely in the literature, and even less the banal rhetoric of marketing that only responds to market interests. Paradoxically, despite the proliferation of academic discourse in recent decades, the planning culture still seems uncertain or elusive compared to the selection and sharing of essential priorities. It seems difficult to claim that planning regulation and plan-making are still the main mission, as was true in the early 1900s. Nor can the managerial orientation of city planning, which was long tested throughout the century with unconvincing results, be a plausible alternative. My hypothesis is that the future of the discipline will depend on the ability to refine the topics of urban policies and urban design together (two major issues that are practically absent from the specialized literature). It might be useful to take an image that has attracted some attention in recent years, yet with different meanings and implications: 'planning without plans'. For some (e.g. Stefano Moroni, in

Ernst Alexander et al., 2012), the expression alludes to the replacement of traditional planning tools with a normative code used almost automatically, with possibly general significance. Others — myself among them — intend a shift in disciplinary responsibilities, from traditional forms of regulation and planning to the sphere of planning policies and urban projects. The reason is simple. The technical and political content of the most advanced urban plans are increasingly weak and vague (Chapter 5). They therefore need essential complements to ensure adequate operational capacity and the production of planning effects of some importance. As a result, it is difficult to base the reputation and effectiveness of the discipline only on similar tools. An official and publicly recognized commitment towards planning policies and urban projects (which already have been tested in occasional and informal forms, as I anticipated in Section 10.4) may be a wise, strategically convenient move, because it may improve the visibility and influential capacity of the discipline. This step, however, would mark an uncommon discontinuity. A true dilemma is outlined, proving to be decisive for orienting practices. Should urban planners continue to deal only with the preconditions of urban facts (whether rules or visions), or are they willing to measure themselves against the challenges of *effective action* (through policies and operational projects), contributing directly to the production of spatial transformations through significant contributions that can profitably integrate the expertise of the usual figures in those fields: architects, engineers, lawyers, administrative experts, managers, and others? I have no doubts as to the second option; it is justified and convenient for the discipline. We have to recognize, however, that any change would not be trivial. It would require some radical innovation that affects the cultural roots of the discipline and its action (even those who, like Arturo Lanzani, 2024, are clearly aware of the limits of current practices hesitate to acknowledge the objective weakness of planning as public guidance). A cultural turnaround is indispensable because we cannot assume that legal formalism, normativism, ideologies of the ‘good city’ and ‘good planning’ (assumptions typical of disciplinary orthodoxy) can serve as a guide and tools for planning practice that intends to measure itself with action. The constantly reported gap between theory and practice is an inevitable consequence of adopting conceptual schemes that are largely inappropriate with respect to the aims and content of actual practices. I suggested that the traditions of critical realism, pragmatism, and possibilism should be taken as pillars of the desirable revision: as ways of thinking and acting largely unrelated to traditional planning culture, but justified within the new horizon (Palermo, 2022a, Chapter 9).

A change is also necessary with regards to the operational and technical functions in use. It is always useful to distinguish the essential functions that constitute the plan of action, provided that the consistency and necessary integration are ensured. Gigi Mazza long suggested (2004b) a fertile framework that recognizes three distinct domains: regulation, visioning, and design (Chapter 5). In each of these areas, it is possible to identify questions and dilemmas that are decisive for the concept and fate of the discipline. In my opinion, these are more specific, radical, and decisive compared to the somewhat ritualistic and repetitive issues, which (as we have seen) recur in the international literature. If the topic is regulations, the usual means of disciplinary discussion may be outdated and insufficient. Discussing only single-family zoning (as an exclusive limitation) implies looking at a past world, albeit one that is still very influential, in various contexts, in the imagination and in the preferences of local society. Towards the end of the 20th century, the suggestion of form-based codes was one of the strategic innovations of a professional movement (*new urbanism*), whose ambition to re-establish the discipline quickly proved to be unsustainable. Attention has also now been resized significantly in its original contexts (the design of urban neighbourhoods or suburbs, according to the American dream). Growing attention to the idea of mixed-use is a reasonable tendency, but certainly not innovative. The hypothesis was anticipated by many decades; if anything, one must bemoan the delay with which it was considered in certain contexts. One consistent disciplinary trend that has remained solid over time continues to reintroduce the idea of a unique density and building index. It introduces arguments of equity that I find seriously questionable. Equal opportunities for citizens should apply (only) if the urban and environmental conditions of the land put to use are equal or similar (as taught by Norberto Bobbio, 1995). The fear is that this option is an opportunistic choice, because it can facilitate political consensus and simplify technical work (but it actually opens up an uncertain and risky space to transfer building rights, which could raise complex problems of justice and governance). Rather, I believe that the crucial issue of regulation imposes itself on an opposite front: the contextual differentiation of rules, the demand for possible margins of flexibility, public responsibility for discretionary, but transparent and accountable use. This orientation seems justified and appropriate in our times. This assessment is not shared by many disciplinary players, but the dilemma would be worth discussing. What is certain is that recourse to rigid, uniform rules rather than diverse, flexible, and discretionary rules opens the way to two types of profoundly different practices. The gap between theory and practice largely depends

on the rhetorical use of some model — such as the claim to uniformity and certainty of the rules — which, in fact, is largely avoided in current practice. One does so, but does not admit it officially. If these are the conditions, it is useless to invite us to bridge the gap.

Visioning is a field of experience that has attracted increasing attention in the last 40–50 years based on a different logic: as a necessary complement to canonical approaches, but also, according to some trends, as a potential surrogate for more traditional tools. The flow of discourse on the issue escalated into a real stream of words and exhortations. The scope was initially only to enhance the methodology of planning, improving its cognitive, forecasting, and visionary capacities. In the last 30 years, however, the topic has become the vehicle for a tendentious renewal, replacing the old logic of prescriptive planning with an approach that is more aware of local development, social interactions, and mutual agreements. In this sense, the vision may become a surrogate of traditional master plan. The gap is not insignificant. Clarifying the available options and preferential choices is a responsibility that should not be avoided, whatever the context. My opinion is that the trend has revealed clear limitations. The movements towards new models and experiences in spatial planning, strategic planning, strategic spatial planning, or just scenario planning (increasingly weak hypotheses and tools of marginal interest) have produced an impressive amount of rhetorical exercises and recommendations that have often acted as a diversion from objective difficulties of the field. However, it is difficult to deny that concrete results were generally modest and not particularly positive. In fact, many planning reforms in recent decades have remorselessly erased these rather controversial elements. I believe that some distinctions are also essential in this field. Without regret, we can do without many interpretations on the issue, as edifying stories for a virtuous, vaguely desired future. Who can say no to such promising principles and intentions? The problem is that the effects were generally not significant. The vision makes sense and can be influential if it becomes a concrete device for real governance processes, which in a complex territory can only exist on multiple levels. The vision can become a device that favours and sanctions agreements between different entities and levels of government that have some responsibility for the territory in question. Interaction and consensus-building should take a selection of large transformation projects with certain strategic value as being at stake (not counting the number and size, but strength and quality of potential effects over the entire territory). All the rest is secondary: the construction of synoptic frameworks, the list of

virtuous objectives, planning guidelines. In this field as well, substantially alternative concepts emerge, alluding to incomparable practices. It would be appropriate to recognize the dilemma and take a position.

The topic of urban design is probably the most important, although it is largely avoided in the international literature on planning. Some suggestions have re-emerged in the new century due to the themes of sustainability, in the updated form of the eco-city (Beatley, 2011; Palazzo and Steiner, 2011; Tang, 2013) and more recently, according to the perspective of smartness, with extensive reference to aspects of technological innovation (Bibri, 2018; Karvonen et al., 2018; Barlow and Lévy-Bencheton, 2019; Allam, 2020). Over time, it has seemed clear that those dimensions are important but not decisive, as some rhetoric that express partisan interests would have it. They should be understood with a critical spirit and appropriate irony, because the issue of urban design has an overall value that transcends any specialized refinement (or simplification) (Chapter 13). The ecological and environmental aspects are important, but cannot cover other possible problems according to the known strategy that tends to favour greenwashing effects (Harvey, 2014). Technological innovation opens new perspectives, but also unknowns or misunderstandings (Greenfield, 2013; Cowley and Caprotti, 2018). It is not possible, however, to overlook other questions (which Secchi anticipated clearly and rigorously): ‘open space design’; the urban (non-object-based) concept of architecture; an idea of the environment that is not decorative or merely technical, but socially constructed and verified; the relationship with the historical and morphological context; external effects and cross-scale features; and responsibilities with respect to the evolutionary course of the future city (Palermo, 2017). Based on a rich tradition, the disciplinary debate in Italy seems to introduce a complex idea of urban design without favouring the fashionable issues in the most recent phase. The fact remains that good principles echo weakly in current practice (as demonstrated in Milan). In addition, the issue remains marginal in the concrete work of many Italian planners, whether they are occupied by executive projects in the wake of modern town planning (even if there were not as many or timely experiences as theory would have hoped). More rarely, they have tried to explore the issue of designing prescriptive codes for transformation areas in the new planning models in the 1990s — for example, Gregotti’s and Secchi’s pilot experiences — but those were not always ‘real’ projects according to De Carlo (Palermo, 2007). The outcomes were controversial and the trend quickly died out, just as the form-based-codes movement in the United States is

marking time. The discipline now seems to hesitate instead of standing up to play a concrete role of investigation, design, and implementation in actual design processes. I think that the choice is inevitable if urban planners are not satisfied with working on the prerequisites of phenomena, but wants to (also) have an effect on actual practices. It would be a convenient choice in terms of image and perspective, if it is true that traditional commitments are becoming increasingly weak and marginal. The choice would also be consistent with the idea of a vision that I argued above: that it can be understood as a sort of a large-scale ‘*projet urbain*’, which selects, organizes, and guides a potentially integrated package of territorial choices located on different but interdependent scales. The demand for such an approach is increasingly substantial, given the modest quality of many major ongoing transformations — although the problem is certainly not just technical expertise, but also affects the crisis of politics and the blindness of partisan interests. It is noteworthy that the topic attracts attention in Italy (it is one of the main threads in Alberto Clementi’s research, 1999, 2016; brought to attention again by Lanzani, 2024, with thorough, convincing arguments), while it is generally absent from the international literature.

The issue of relationships between theory and practice is refined in the discipline in ways and means that are often repetitive and frankly useless. Ernst Alexander (2015) was right when he reiterated the primacy of practices in this field, but this does not mean that the theoretical discourse is superfluous or can be abandoned. We probably need to better understand the nature, sense, ways of effective practices today to find more pertinent, useful, and justified conceptual frameworks, guidelines, and forms of action. I have tried to take some steps in this direction. I am not sure if my hypotheses and proposals are convincing, but some indications seem sound to me. A design-oriented approach should become a priority for the planning process; the dominance of practice must prevail over the supposed autonomy of theoretical reflection; if the general function of public guidance is subject to objective limits, disciplinary responsibility vis-à-vis the development of concrete policies and projects should be clearer and stronger. These principles seem difficult to avoid.

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11. Between Planning and Design: Tension, Mingling, Results⁷

11.1. Oscillations

Can city planning evade the responsibility to ensure or give a relevant physical form to the evolving urban space? The question is not trivial. In Italy, Bernardo Secchi took this route without hesitation, arousing some surprise among those who admired his refined profile as an analyst. Gigi Mazza, on the other hand, had always shown some perplexity about the traditions of physical planning, and tended to assign urban planners with a core of specific responsibilities preliminary to any design practice. Campos Venuti looked for reasonable and effective mediation between the two perspectives, but he was certainly not prepared to share the idea of the dominance or autonomy of urban design. In effect, doubts or dilemmas of the same sort arose everywhere. A direct commitment to physical design seemed essential in many contexts and for long periods, but it is also true that in the mid-20th century, in North America especially, a vast and influential movement of (city or urban) planning arose, tending to recognize and perhaps favour other dimensions of urban problems. According to Harvey Perloff's schematic reconstruction (1956), the discipline has always dealt with controversial legal questions. In the 1920s, the need emerged to provide planning tools with a more adequate basis of knowledge and justification, so the schools of planning devoted increasing attention to demographic, economic, and spatial analysis. Between the two wars, interest in political-administrative functions grew progressively, partly because the difficult circumstances required an increasingly pervasive and influential public role of governance. The criticism following tragic events such as the Great Depression and the Second World War highlighted the need for social analysis and policies. Only after a few decades did the environmental question really enter planners' agendas. The trend, however, is clear: in that context, the discipline tried to measure itself against the complexity of the factors and processes in play, in search of a city vision and planning project that was as 'comprehensive' as possible. This orientation was fostered by the widespread distrust of the more rigid, imposing tradition of modern European planning, which was clearly foreign to the spirit of local American society. The close connection between design and regulation, which was crucial for German town planning in the late 19th century but dominant in the CIAM view, became an obstacle to the detailed specification of

⁷ A preliminary version of this chapter was published in *EcoWebTown*, no. 28, 2023, pp. 4–39.

morphological issues. A planning academy was therefore created, which was actually very heterogeneous, unstructured, sometimes unrealistic, and frankly inconclusive (Chapter 10), encountering great difficulty in finding fertile, sustainable connections with the domain of physical planning.

In fact, throughout the century, we can observe a sequence of ‘shifting involvements’ (to use an effective expression by Albert Hirschman, 1982). At the beginning, the issues of urban design adopted a constituent function for the developing discipline. The observation applies to both *Der Städtebau* by Joseph Stübben (1890) and *Town Planning in Practice* by Raymond Unwin (1909). It evokes a variety of well-known issues, events, and personalities, such as Haussmann’s great urban transformations in Paris or ‘the art of building the city’ according to Camillo Sitte (the two most noteworthy historical references according to Lewis Mumford, cited by Giorgio Piccinato, 1974). It also recalls the industrious ranks of ‘town planning officials’, whose ordinary work in Germany at the turn of the 20th century was well documented in manuals by Baumeister, Stübben, and Eberstadt (who certainly influenced Luigi Piccinato’s training). In reality, these were different positions: the idea of modern planning for the expanding industrial city in the German tradition; the British culture of ‘garden suburbs’ and satellite cities; and rationalist visions — but also extreme functionalist models — of the CIAMs, starting with the ‘ville radieuse’. However, the potential dualism between planning and design was sanctioned by two simple and recurring points of criticism that seemed to apply to all three positions, despite their differences. The first was that such formal exercises — all of them — tended to underestimate the substantial extent of the problems, which were always social, political, economic, and environmental. The second related to the claim that they assigned a regulatory value to the resulting designs, often over a long period of time and in some detail, conflicting with the interests, desires, and dynamics of the settled society. In the second half of the 20th century, as in more recent years, these elementary premises inspired and justified — in the vague domain of planning — the restless development of multiple lines of experience and reflection: rationalist, systemic, critical, communicative, deliberative, post-political, insurgent, and even other orientations (the differences are profound, but the discipline seems to have accepted a common cumulative vision, which avoids choices and responsibilities, favouring an eclectic or ecumenical attitude).

Not even this commitment, however, led to good results. A negative bal-

ance was already clear in North America around the middle of the last century. The failure of the Chicago school of rational planning, promoted by Tugwell and Perloff (1947–1956), may represent an emblematic threshold. A rationalist orientation was surprisingly reintroduced in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to Andreas Faludi’s technocratic vision and Giovanni Astengo’s passionate enlightenment, although with unsuccessful results. It could not have been otherwise (even though some representations continue to evade any critical judgement: Gaeta, 2024). Nonrationalist variants of planning have reached the present day, albeit in less convinced or convincing forms and ways over time. At the same time, voices in favour of a ‘return of urban design’ have multiplied, numerous and authoritative, in a variety of contexts. In the mid-1950s in the United States José Lluís Sert started an intellectual movement (Harvard, 1956) aimed at reviving the role and need for urban design in the face of the well-documented failures of the most ambitious planning programmes (Krieger and Sanders, 2009). The effects of that initiative (which gave voice to a widespread feeling) were not immediate. For some time, it was only possible to note the emergence of a few related orientations that were certainly authoritative, but still unique. These included contributions to the subject by the University of Pennsylvania (home, in 1957, to one of the first educational programmes in ‘civic design’ (re)activated on the continent: Colarossi and Latini, 2007) or the original vision of Kevin Lynch (1960) at MIT, who taught people to study the relationships between form, meaning, and behaviour in space. In the same period, an objective reintroduction of the original issues of town planning emerged in Great Britain. Contributions by Keeble (1952) and Gibberd (1953) were reissued several times, but this was especially due to Gordon Cullen, who brought to attention the lost issue of the *townscape* (1961). In Italy as well, there were many outstanding contributions within an overall framework that was, however, rather traditional, conformist (with respect to the ideologies of unfinished modernity), and not very enterprising (with respect to the challenges of change). I am referring not only to an original line of studies on urban morphology, which have also become a point of reference internationally (Muratori, Caniggia, Aldo Rossi, Aymonino), but also to a number of authoritative visions capable of reconsidering the lost relationships between architecture and planning, testifying to the possibility of a physical and design-oriented concept of planning (Samonà, Quaroni, De Carlo). However, those important experiences long remained partial and circumscribed, or — I could say — exceptional. Only in the last quarter century has it been possible to observe the development of design-oriented — intellectual and profes-

sional — movements that were more robust, widespread, and shared. In the United States, a number of trendy schools developed: the new ‘urban design manifesto’ conceived by Jacobs and Appleyard at Berkeley; the developments of the ‘collage city’ and planning as an experience of *bricolage* led by Colin Rowe at Cornell University; or the reintroduction of the planner’s design profile as an architect-planner at MIT (Rodwin, Sanyal). The influence of a number of movements with clear professional aims was also considerable: the ‘new theory of urban design’ developed at the University of California by Christopher Alexander (1977, 1987); the ambitious ‘new urbanism’ inspired by Miami professional Andrés Duany (Duany, Plater-Zyberg, 1991; Talen, 2005); and the more complex and sophisticated line of ‘landscape urbanism’ (Mostafavi and Najle, 2003; Waldheim, 2006, 2016). In Great Britain, the sensitivity towards the *townscape* gave rise to an ideological movement (well interpreted by Rob Krier, 1979; Leon Krier, 2009), but several schools of *urban design* (London’s Bartlett School, for one) also established themselves and seized the challenge. Is it possible to renew the culture and techniques of planning according to a concrete, effective, shareable vision of space, forms, and an urban and city project (Carmona and Punter, 1997)? In Spain, the most interesting innovations took the form of ‘*urbanismo estratégico*’, a reinterpretation of urban planning that exalted the generative role of the large urban project, where a focus on the morphological and architectural dimensions did not exclude increasing attention to the strategic and social value of operations (Bohigas, 1991, 1998 and 2004; Busquets 1992; de Solà Morales 1996 and 1999). In Portugal, an authoritative programme of urban morphology studies solidified (Vitor Oliveira, 2016, 2019), interacting with developments of the planning school of Porto, where Nuno Portas long played a leading role (Portas, 1965, 1998). In France, criticism of the modernist tradition led to a substantial line of research on the ‘*projet urbain*’ (Huet, 1984; Devillers, 1994; Panerai and Mangin, 1999); however, that suggestive vision of the city and the city plan quickly required robust complements on the level of urban strategies and policies (Ascher, 2001; Pinson, 2009), issues that were historically marginal for a planning tradition that in France had long been centralist and prescriptive. In Italy, Gregotti and Secchi tested some of Ludovico Quaroni’s intuitions in the 1990s, although they dated back more than 20 years: the opposition between plan and project is not justified and it is possible to conceive of planning tools wherein the urban project plays a decisive role. This is just as the inimitable work of Giancarlo De Carlo (1964, 1966, 1992, 2005) had always shown in the long term. In the meantime, the international literature began to offer summary frameworks

on the state of experiences in different contexts: contributions by Jon Lang (1994, 2005) and Grahame Shane (2011) on outcomes in the United States and by Matthew Carmona and John Punter in Great Britain (Punter, 2010; Carmona, 2014) stand out. However, the set (albeit notable) of those practices and pioneering reflections never seemed capable of overcoming the most radical reasons for uncertainty or disorientation. Margins of ambiguity or contention remain unresolved among architecture and city planning, master plan and urban project, planning regulation and development strategy, urban design and decision process, space and society. The risk is that many generous aspirations are perceived only as pure academics, while practice proceeds in increasingly contingent, if not opportunistic forms. Is it time for realism rather than design-oriented hopes?

11.2. Viewpoint

I want to immediately anticipate my own point of view (adopting the expression used in the literature when a journal publishes an author's personal vision of some issue in question). It is not just a hypothesis, but a set of interpretations and opinions resulting from rather precise documentation and the consequent reflections. Following the *abductive* concept of the disciplinary discourse that has been outlined in Italy by eminent figures such as Quaroni and Secchi, I intend to immediately expound what, in my opinion, are the main points of the issue, reserving the right to present the essential empirical evidence in support of this view in the following sections. This is based on three types of considerations.

First, the connection between planning and design is an essential requirement (Palermo and Ponzini, 2012, 2015b). Without physical or design-driven content, planning risks becoming an empty box; even less so a rhetorical or merely procedural device. I personally noted this conclusion long ago with a certain bitterness because I had approached planning half a century ago precisely with the idea and hope that relevant space would open up in the field beyond the threshold of pure physical planning (which did not really interest me). That perspective was not successful (better to realize and acknowledge it), which is why I remained in the realm of analysis and criticism. On the other hand, even design needs an adequate culture of planning. There is no doubt: the so-called 'modern planning project' was undermined by an inadequate view of society and politics (of the administration itself). If I reread Luigi Piccinato's analysis and exhortations following the Second World War, the effect-disappointment is inevitable.

The author can point to nothing more than an abstract and dogmatic view of the planning tool (which clearly does not work, but the responsibility would always lie with others), yet at the same time, there were many more critical and thoughtful international voices. Unfortunately, the same limit also seems to be valid more recently with respect to crucial topics. For example, I believe I have shown (Palermo 2022, Section 4.7) that the most influential developments in environmental planning in North America — certainly innovative due to studies and contributions from the rapidly expanding ‘urban ecology’ (Alberti, 2008; James e Douglas, 2015; Hall e Balogh, 2019) — tend to assume a myopic and obsolete vision of decision-making processes in most cases, still based on systemic or (even) rational-comprehensive paradigms (Daniels, 2014; Steiner, 2018). A more relevant reflection on real underlying processes should become an unavoidable commitment (Davoudi *et al.*, 2020). To this end, the most critical and innovative developments in the planning discourse might offer some significant and fertile suggestions.

The second consideration is that the essential prerequisite involves respect and dialogue between the two worlds, recognizing each other’s partiality, or rather incompleteness, and favouring every request for cooperation instead of lingering on sterile oppositions or claims (Gleye, 2014). It is absolutely useless for each side to continue to claim its dominance over the other, understood as a mere addition to a vision that would be legitimate, authoritative, or adequate in itself (i.e. functional and perhaps self-sufficient). The consequences of these opinions are negative. On the one hand, there is a tendency to reduce the function of design to a mid-level operational step in the framework of a (presumed) ideal process and planning method, which should determine the essential prerequisites and possibilities of design. On the other hand, the dominance or even autonomy of design is claimed, but the necessary conditions (social and political-administrative) for translating any programmatic frameworks or virtuous projects into action continue to be underestimated — as in the heyday of modern planning. The contrast (documented in Palermo, 2022, Section 2.5) becomes insuperable if two essential moves are missing: distinguishing, choosing — in one field and the other — the most relevant paradigms, in a variegated framework of often immeasurable, eclectic, confused positions; and exploring the links and potential effects of the necessary interactions among the respective visions. The balance also risks being inconclusive on the side of design, which should represent the indispensable innovation — or reintroduction — of a fundamental tradition that is knowingly neglected. In fact, Matthew Car-

mona (Bartlett School, 2014) must bitterly note that despite many generous efforts, even urban design remains a ‘mongrel discipline’ (a fate common to planning, which always appears messy and incomplete). Jonathan Barnett (University of Pennsylvania, 2014) reaches the point of recommending ‘not [to] define urban design too narrowly’. A certain vagueness and approximation must be accepted of the discourse in order to cultivate all the emerging opportunities (but the author subjectively distances himself from the modern project and neo-traditionalist nostalgia, trusting in the ‘green’ turn and a systemic vision: Barnett, 2016). After half a century of unsatisfactory approaches and experiments, the risk of having to sing a requiem remains, as is the case with the demanding Alexander Cuthbert (University of the New South Wales, Sydney, 2007), who even then recommended proclaiming the end of the presumed new discipline (an opinion shared by Michael Sorkin, City College, New York, 2009). In the early 2000s, however, collective reflections on the topic multiplied. The most common form was the multi-voice *reading*, aimed at exploring the innumerable potential aspects of the theoretical and practical field in question, which introduced all sorts of questions: physical, morphological, aesthetic, functional, environmental, social, economic, and political (Cuthbert, 2003; Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007; Krieger and Saunders, 2009; Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2011, reissued in 2020). The paradox is that while the set of relationships worthy of interest continued to grow, the distinctive core of the intended disciplinary area remained vague and uncertain, apparently destined to a permanent state of ‘elusiveness’, which seemed impossible to overcome (Richard Marshall, Harvard, in Krieger and Saunders, *ibid.*, Chapter 4). Is all that remains to note the irreducible plurality of factors, agents, and processes in urban design, which eludes any claim to intentional vision and unitary control (Brent Ryan, MIT, 2017)? Out of inertia or resignation, the most recent contributors seem to accept an eclectic view that juxtaposes irreconcilable positions without reflection (Roberts and Nelson, University of Westminster, 2024), as was already the case in planning (Chapter 10)!

In fact, the third and last consideration regards the possible results of demands for regeneration in the field. Based on extensive documentation, I believe three perspectives emerging in the long term can be identified (particularly after the Second World War). The first affirms the centrality, if not the dominance, of the urban project or architecture. It thus reflects the old idea of the ‘*città per parti*’ (‘city by parts’; Quaroni, 1967) and a concept of urban transformations that favours ‘strategic places’ and ac-

tions capable of producing relevant, morphogenetic, and cross-scale effects (Secchi, 1989). They are excellent proposals, but a doubt is called for: Can the course of experiences push towards the dominance of contingency and feasibility? With the ultimate risk that ‘anything goes’ provided that some effect is possible? Initially, that vision actually tried to respect the issues and values of the ‘architecture of the city’. Following this, it had to accept the hypothesis — which was not obvious and indeed foreign to the culture of modern planning — that ‘*gouverner par projet*’ was the most appropriate and effective way of managing major urban transformations (Pinson, 2009). This is a fact: every important project introduces a complex political/administrative dimension. This means that even design needs ‘policy tools’; indeed, it is the practice of physical planning itself that is configured as ‘public policy’, as Jonathan Barnett foresaw in 1974. Today, however, the best intentions seem to have become a faded memory. The related discourse becomes increasingly rare or ritualistic, with respect to both the urban project and emerging questions of urban strategies and policies (even the forms of communication become more generic and banal). The result may actually be absolute contingency, in which the strongest and most enterprising market interests usually prevail.

Another line of experience, one that is radically different, instead tried to address the issue of possible blending between the planning and design cultures, aiming for a more current and relevant regeneration of planning tools. There are numerous, authoritative witnesses (which I referenced in the previous section): Carmona and Punter in Great Britain; Busquets and Bohigas in Spain; Nuno Portas in Portugal; Huet and Devillers in France; Gregotti and Secchi in Italy. The movement seems to have been substantial and more widespread in Great Britain, and more tied to emerging figures elsewhere. At any rate, the trend substantially died out in the span of 20–30 years. Only a weak echo remains today. Carmona (2018) argues that the long period of innovation and experimentation has nevertheless led to significant progress in the current quality of physical planning. However, one fact seems clear: the most ambitious experiments in a design-oriented and integrated reinterpretation of planning tools have left no perceptible traces in Great Britain (some institutional innovations were unhesitatingly cancelled by Conservative governments in office from 2010 to 2024). In Italy, Gregotti and Secchi themselves, with a timely, independent decision, decided to put an end to the period of ‘new planning models’ even in the early 2000s. The thread seemed destined to collapse from exhaustion; perhaps it could not even survive as influential rhetoric.

What remains available, however, is a vast set of concrete contributions to everyday life in today's cities and communities: dealing with spaces, forms, and functions with specific characteristics and dilemmas to respond to everyday problems related to behaviour and action in the urban environment with respect to roads, traffic, building types, greenery, pedestrians, urban consumption, recreation, and so on. Of course, I do not underestimate the material importance of these practices for the quality of life of individuals and communities (Chapter 9). However, the radical slippage in ambitions and intentions (which is not even the object of a clear critical self-reflection) is striking. There is no longer a trace of the paligenetic aspirations of the great urban project or new design-oriented planning tools. The first task is to guarantee locally satisfactory responses to certain essential functions of living according to a 'behavioural' perspective, which no longer introduces an idea of the future, or much less emancipation or progress, but rather focuses above all on what is local, everyday, present, according to the needs, perceptions, and actions of the relevant subjects. I do not underestimate the realism or pragmatism of this orientation, which should at least ensure a range of specific, concrete, timely benefits. However, we cannot ignore the gap with the claim to a not-so-distant past. Must this resizing be definitive?

11.3 Three Journals

To build and discuss these hypotheses, I made a systematic survey of the three main urban design journals available today: the *Journal of Urban Design* (since 1996); *Urban Design International* (since 1996); and *Journal of Urbanism* (since 2008). The timeframe (up to autumn 2023) thus covers the last 30 years. This is probably the key period, because the most important revitalization programmes in the sector only matured in the late 20th century, finding adequate room for experimentation in the following decades (the time since then now allows for some documented opinions). We look at the salient characteristics of the three editorial projects⁸.

⁸ As in Chapter 10, I have preferred not to fully quote all the sources examined (there are about 1,800 contributions, the precise list of which would make consulting the bibliography laborious). I have limited myself to selecting the texts of greatest interest. In all other cases, I have adopted the method anticipated in Chapter 10, indicating for each source the name of the journal, author's name, volume number, and issue number (the necessary information for the reader to find the text on the web, where it is always available, even with free access in some cases).

Journal of Urban Design (JUD)

This journal originated in circles of the Bartlett School, at a time (the mid-1990s) when interest and the potential influence of urban design issues were growing in Britain. The opening text (entrusted to the editor in chief, Taner Oc from the Bartlett School, together with Steve Tiesdell, from Aberdeen, who cooperated with the London school: Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007) celebrated ‘re-emergent urban design’ (1-1, 1996) as a field of interest and practices situated at the crossroads between architecture, planning, and other spatial disciplines, which by then had a remarkable repertoire of approaches and traditions. According to the authors, the area could legitimately aspire to calling itself a ‘discipline’. Over time, it had addressed increasingly complex topics — from the formal and aesthetic concepts of its origins to the challenges of the public realm and place-making — with a growing focus on the cultural and social matrices of urban behaviour, in addition to material conditions. It was an ambitious programme, an assertive vision that left little room for doubt.

The first issues of the journal presented an exhaustive representation of the most advanced disciplinary positions of the time, at least in Britain and North America, with authoritative contributions from Matthew Carmona (Bartlett), John Punter (Cardiff), Peter Larkham and John Pendlebury (Birmingham), and Nigel Taylor (Bristol), as well as Michael Southworth (Berkeley), Jon Lang (New South Wales, Sydney), Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris (UCLA, Los Angeles), Ann Forsyth (Cornell University, then Harvard), and Mark Childs (New Mexico) on the other side of the ocean. The overall framework is highly significant, and recognition is confirmed over time. In fact, the most prestigious figures in the field became part of the editorial project. For some time, Southworth and Carmona acted as associate editors for their respective continents. The International Advisory Board has more than 50 members, including (in addition to the scholars cited above): T. Banerjee, J. Barnett, D. Brand, E. Ben-Joseph, A. Cuthbert, K. Dovey, N. Ellin, R. Freestone, A. Madanipour, V. Mehta, M. Roberts, B. Ryan, F. Steiner, Q. Stevens, E. Talen, T. Townshend, S. Wheeler, and J. White (few authoritative voices are missing from the call; note that a few exponents from the planning world are present). The list also includes the most active authors: over a period of 28 years, Carmona, Southworth, Talen, Lang, and Forsyth each published around ten original contributions in JUD; numerous scholarly members of the Board (around 20) published between 5 and 10 articles (all other entries — the vast majority — are more sporadic). The journal has never aimed to express a cultural line through

direct intervention by the editors, but it has always relied on the substance, topicality, and far-sightedness of the published contributions, which have multiplied over time as a result of a growing range. In fact, the number of issues published per year increased significantly (three up to 2008, four up to 2013, five up to 2015, and six starting the following year). The growth in terms of quantity is therefore indisputable: at the time of this writing, it consists of 106 dense issues, with more than 800 publications.

There is only one editorial (entrusted to Taner Oc after Tiesdell's untimely death) in 2020, on the journal's 25th anniversary. In reality, the text is disappointing because it merely replicates salient passages from the original editorial, without any opinion on the evolution of experiences over such a long time period or even on new perspectives (the omission is very surprising). However, the anniversary was an opportunity to reignite a discussion among authoritative voices, which represented the difficulties of an entire cultural and professional area (special issue, 25-1, 2020). Cuthbert's criticism is, as always, radical: the theory is inadequate and should address far more complex issues than merely physical ones. Lang shares the opinion on the uselessness of the academic reflection. Those who emphasise the importance of the challenges ('the art of shaping cities and their public realm by producing liveable urban space') must admit limits of technical capacity and political innovation, with particular reference to the demands of inclusion, participation, and integration (Gospodini, Loukaitou-Sideris, Kunzmann). The contribution by Kim Dovey (Melbourne) seems to me to be more original and incisive: urban design is not a discipline, but rather a field of research and practice, which has seen new topics and approaches emerge over time. These relate to the analysis, care, and generation of places, but above all to the aspects of tactics, what is temporary and informal (although awareness of this shift does not yet seem to be an accepted or shared fact). How did we reach a situation — a stalemate, if not rupture — that appears objectively disappointing compared to the original ambitions and expectations?

The journal offers ample room for reflection and orientation. More than half of the contributions tend to reason conceptually about the nature, meaning, purpose, and practice of the disciplinary and professional field in question. The other texts are dedicated to case studies, following a precise, rigorous format that has now become a stylistic feature of the journal. However, it remains uncertain whether the results of local surveys can be generalized; the conclusions often seem obvious or merely exhortative. Therefore, the

contributions with theoretical and methodological aims should give rise to the distinctive core of the journal. More than a hundred texts (about 1 in 8, with a frequency that does not vary significantly over time) are explicitly dedicated to the enigma of urban design. Discussing the book by Grahame Shane (Columbia), *Urban Design Since 1945* (2011), Michael Hebbert (Manchester) remarked (17-2, 2012) that the author offers a broad framework of observations, but adopts rather unusual analytical categories and an argumentative style; he would have done better to follow the solid traces of disciplinary reflection, which this journal amply documents. In truth, the frame of reference that JUD presents to the reader is not only multifaceted, but rather disordered, confused, even incoherent. The journal presents a few critical voices. They are not numerous, but tend to be destructive. This is because urban design does not seem able to address crucial issues and problems that are not morphological or physical (Cuthbert, 6-3, 2001, and 15-3, 2010; Inam, 7-1, 2002). It often seems dominated — merely as a tool — by neoliberal culture and interests (Boano and Talocci, 19-5, 2014). Objections by Hooman Foroughmand (Bartlett) are more moderate, limited to denouncing the cultural and strategic uncertainty of the area (22-5, 2017; 23-5, 2018). The uncertainty seems confirmed by the great variety of types of practices (Lang, 1-1, 1996) and professional roles that can be associated with the disciplinary area (Schurch, 4-1, 1999; Madanipour, 11-2, 2006; Childs, 15-1, 2010). In the meantime, the founding principles of the (supposed) discipline remain vague, always hovering between art and science (Taylor, 4-2, 1999; special issue, 21-4, 2016), but also unable to choose the most pertinent forms of knowledge: research is scattered between a variety of divergent or immeasurable branches (Forsyth, 12-3, 2007; Biddulph, 17-1, 2012; Cortesao, 25-3, 2020, and 27-6, 2022). The steady point from the earliest issues is the ‘incremental, adaptive, flexible’ nature of urban design practices (Hall, 2-3, 1997; Friedman, *ibid.*; Sancar, 6-1, 2001). This may be surprising, but the verdict has been confirmed over time (Fahrat, 26-1, 2021; Coppens, 26-6, 2021). Carmona tried to legitimize these requirements (19-1, 2014). The decisive challenge would be *place-shaping*, as a process of actions and interactions that develops over time if the necessary conditions and capabilities exist, and is decisive for place-making, as opposed to pure urban design. The vision should not be confused with the banal methodical procedures of rationalist planning. It is a set of multidimensional, coevolutionary practices marked by important emerging effects. Moreover, there has been no lack of objections to the possible dominance of the process; the responsibility to design cannot be underestimated (Lang, 19-1, 2014), nor can the indispensable guidance

of good design principles (which Cliff Ellis, South Carolina, in a partisan manner ascribes to new urbanism: *ibid.*). The discourse therefore seems destined to cyclically repeat well-known dilemmas that have evidently not been overcome. The state of uncertainty seems chronic, even with respect to what should be the cornerstones of the cultural project. Authoritative voices have now taken sides in favour of a behavioural, informal concept of disciplinary practices (Southworth, 17-4, 2012, and 21-5, 2016; Loukaitou-Sideris, 21-5, 2016), but nostalgia or more traditional desires have not faded.

Urban form and design control are obviously related topics, holding obvious interest, but it is not as broad or continuous as might be assumed (there is roughly 1 article out of 20 for each of the two topics). Contributions on morphological analysis mostly consist of empirical observation of the evolutionary trends in settlement forms and fabrics, with a prevailing focus on the urban layout and design of building blocks rather than on the overall form of settlements (much less on a large scale). Theoretical contributions are sporadic. I recall rare exercises in ‘space syntax’ (by Kayan Karimi, 23-1, 2018), a couple of abstract contributions on ‘complex systems analysis’ (Salingaros, 4-1, 1999; 5-3, 2000), and an occasional reference to Caniggia’s typo-morphological method (Sanders, 21-2, 2016). The impact of those theories in the context is entirely marginal; no meaningful relationships emerge among the conceptual frameworks and design work. Indeed, the design culture may express its discomfort with the delay of morphological studies compared to the increasingly widespread reality of informal settlement development (Pojani, 23-1, 2018).

The question of regulation was instead fundamental at the beginning, but dropped in strength and evidence in the following years. The mark was authoritative and promising. Carmona and Punter made very important contributions to the emerging challenges of the early 1990s: towards design-oriented codes and plans (Carmona, 1-1, 1-2, 1996; 3-2, 3-3, 1998); towards good practices of design review (Punter, 1-1, 1996; 8-2, 2003; 12-2, 2007). Over time, however, substantial developments were missing. The journal continued to make room for traditional regulatory systems. The original programmes in the first phase were not able to rely on truly new, meaningful contributions. More sophisticated experiments in master plans involving form-based codes now seem to not have a future (Tiesdell, 12-3, 2009; Hu, 18-4, 2013; Linovski, 23-2, 2018). Some perspective remains open for the most agile design review approach (Punter, 24-3, 2019; White,

ibid.; Carmona 24-4, 2019). The emerging fact is the increasingly explicit and widespread influence of the principles of simplification, flexibility, and discretion (Ben-Joseph, 9-1, 2004; Fahrat, 17-3, 2012; Garde, 22-6, 2017). Governing them is a question of policies more than design or planning. In fact, Carmona revived the issue of design governance a few years ago now (21-6, 2016; 22-1, 2017), but without much convergence (Barnett, for example, expressed some perplexity: 22-1, 2017).

Over time, interest has grown in a few other topics (with a frequency on the order of 1 contribution out of 10 or slightly less); the main ones are urbanism, public space, and the neighbourhood. The centrality of the first topic is not surprising. However, the variety of positions in play and the weak attempts to conceptually organize the subject matter are striking. Contributions in this respect are rare (Schwarzer, 5-2, 2000; Ryan, 18-2, 2013; Pojani, 20-5, 2015), and the main objective seems to be to distance oneself from the modern tradition, while the direction of change remains uncertain and little discussed. The architectural aspects of the problem are surprisingly overlooked, except for a few mentions of the post-modern drift (again, ‘learning from Las Vegas’: Barnett, 24-3, 2019) and the impact of ‘transnational urbanism’, with its authorial icons (special issue, 23-2, 2018). Others, however, form the most substantial contributions. Issues related to sustainability are the focus of numerous, but frankly unmemorable essays; no original hypotheses or conclusions emerge (the same verdict applies to the much rarer and more recent texts dedicated to the issues of resilience and urban health). The line of new urbanism is afforded a lot of room. The narrative is generally orthodox, entrusted to the voice of the protagonists themselves (Duany, Talen, Ellis: 7-3, 2002) or to benevolent observers (Garde, 11-1, 2006; Xu, 22-6, 2017; Novak, 24-3, 2019). The only critical voice I have detected is by Wheeler and Craig (University of California), who question the validity of the approach for the post-modern city (16-2, 2011). A comparison with the British urban villages (Owen, 3-3, 1998; Biddulph, 5-1, 2000) and ‘urban renaissance’ (Tiesdell, 7-2, 2002) is not very fertile. Indeed, there are substantial differences in the context and programme. On the other hand, the clash (special issue, 20-3, 2015) between supporters of what is new or landscape urbanism is memorable, clearly reflecting a strong professional rivalry. The goal was not to find a common basis (despite the good intentions of the editor, Matthew Heins, Boston), but to put the counterpart’s weaknesses in a bad light. The reader may feel embarrassed before the harshness and intolerance of the arguments, which perhaps remain all fruitless. In fact, both Robert Fish-

man (Michigan), and Karl Kullmann (Berkeley) observed that one fact is common to the two movements: the evident failure with respect to the ambitions and expectations. The emerging trend is the increasing focus in the past decade on the issue of tactical, temporary urbanism. The incremental-adaptive orientation already evident in the 1990s was, in fact, consecrated: the references multiplied (Dovey, 19-2, 2014; Mallo et al., 19-4, 2014; Campo, 21-3, 2016; Kamvasimou, *ibid.*; Lastra and Pojani, 23-5, 2018; Mikadze, 25-6, 2020; Berglund, 26-5, 2021). However, a convincing interpretation and assessment of the ongoing mutation is still missing. Should it be understood as a technical-professional variant responding to practical, perhaps opportunistic needs (even Duany legitimizes ‘tactical, lean urbanism’ today: Douglas, 2018; Kelbaugh in Arefi and Kickert, 2019), or as the mature symptom of a radical paradigm shift?

Public space is another classical topic that has frequently reproduced over time. In this case as well, the conceptual framework does not seem to be a priority. We would have to wait until 2010 (Carmona, 15-1, 15-2) to find a taxonomy of public spaces (a useful contribution though later not investigated very thoroughly) and a systematic analysis of their requirements (Schmidt and Nemeth, 15-4), which would be developed by the reflections on urban quality (Section 11.4, Point 8). The prevailing interest long fell on different types of material spaces — streets, parks, open spaces (possibly marginal or abandoned: Loukaitou-Sideris, 1-1, 1996; Madanipour, 9-2, 2004, and 13-3, 2008) — rather than on the entire public realm. Following this, attention gradually shifted from physical characteristics to social interaction in the space (Michael Southworth’s contributions were fundamental: 17-4, 2012; 19-1, 2014; 21-5, 2016; a vision confirmed by Aelbrecht, 2022). However, true discourse on the public sphere continues to be lacking, while only a few weak traces of reflections on local identity are available (Roberts, 2-1, 1997; Larco, 15-2, 2010; Rofé, 16-3, 2011). Attention to the problems of management is more considerable (compared to the expectations and perhaps needs). The public use of privately owned spaces becomes a key question. The trend raises concerns for obvious reasons that the literature generally absolves, because the potential benefits may outweigh the risks (De Magalhães and Freire Trigo, 22-6, 2017; Huang et al., 23-4, 2018; Lee and Scholten, 27-5, 2022). The journal therefore proposes a very concrete approach to the issue: it does not discuss the great principles of public space (such as public sphere or common good), but just ordinary practices of design, management, and use.

The neighbourhood is the last topic worthy of great attention for the journal. The fact was not obvious. The reality shows an impressive variety of settlement models that would require analysis, care, and innovations. JUD (but also the other two journals, as we shall see) almost exclusively addresses the suburban situation (following Southworth and Parthasarathy, 1-3, 1996; 2-1, 1997). This is a set of issues that the journal follows without ideological prejudice (the partisan narrative that new urbanism seems to favour does not prevail). The common thread is the relationship with deep-rooted traditions which need to be rethought in the present, but still arouse widespread participatory interest (Banerjee and Baer, 1984). It is therefore useful to reflect on the evolution of the neighbourhood in the long term (Brody, 18-3, 2013); re-evaluate classical American models, from Perry's neighbourhood unit to Radburn's exemplary project (Lee and Stabin-Nesmith, 6-2, 2001; Forsyth and Crewe, 14-4, 2009; Karimi, 18-1, 2013); discuss the legacy of the garden city in Europe and the period of new towns (Edwards, 6-1, 2001), as well as subsequent policies of urban regeneration (Spaans, 9-3, 2004; Jansen, 22-2, 2017); use that backdrop as a frame for the emerging projects of new urbanism (Talen, 8-3, 2003, and 11-1, 2006; Kim, 12-2, 2007) that expect to solve a variety of problems; and shed light on the ambivalences (between community and market) of the gated community (Bagaeeen and Uduku, 2015; Kim and Chung, 2023), which become more serious when the model is exported to other continents (Charmes, 17-3, 2012; several contributions — Miao, Irazabal, Lara — discuss case studies from China or Brazil). The resulting framework is broad and exhaustive within the limits of the selected context. It is a pity that similar investigation and reflection are not underway for other settlement models that are likewise or more problematic, and certainly more complex.

As a corollary, however, the focus on the neighbourhood entails a substantial commitment to analysing the topic of walkability. Contributions that were once marginal have multiplied in the last decade, reaching the notable threshold of 1 in 20. The following are available: conceptual frameworks for ordering the subject matter (most convincingly: Forsyth and Southworth, 13-1, 2008); targeted investigations into contextual factors and subjective perceptions that may favour pedestrian mobility (Schneider 20-2, 2015; Johansson, 21-2, 2016; Brookfield, 22-1, 2017; Macdonald, 23-1, 2018); and systematic attempts to quantify the phenomenon, through the invention of appropriate 'walk scores' (Lee and Forsyth, 19-3, 2014). The set of contributions confirms the concrete interest in everyday practice, in

a specific, objectively partial form, but not without usefulness. The breadth of the commitment may be surprising and should not detract from weightier responsibilities, which instead continue to be avoided.

The discourse on urban quality is less developed compared to the main topics (nevertheless, there is about 1 text in 20), but doubts similar to those already anticipated arise. It could evoke crucial questions for both the design and living experiences. However, several contributions are concerned not with further investigation, but with justifying the value and interest, not only ethical or aesthetic, but also market-based (Rowley, 3-1, 1998; Carmona, 7-2, 2002, and 24-1, 2019; Tiesdell, 9-1, 2004). Quality should therefore be a requirement desired by everyone: citizens, administrators, technicians, and developers. The interpretations, however, may diverge. Leaving aside the instrumental use of the question, with pure branding goals and market enhancement, two roads open. The most common consists of the formulation of conceptual schemes of good recommendations, along the lines traced by Kevin Lynch (1981). Contributions multiply; they are often minor variations on the theme, with a modest innovative content (John Montgomery, 3-1, 1998; Chapman and Larkham, 4-2, 1999; Ewing and Handy, 14-1, 2009; Taylor, 14-2, 2009; Varna and Tiesdell, 15-4, 2010). The alternative consists in recognizing that quality must be experienced. Only ordinary practice makes it possible to verify the meaning and impact of a conceptual scheme or project that is virtuous on paper. Despite the growing influence of everyday urbanism, the journal hesitates to take that road. In many cases it seems to be satisfied with good recommendations (exceptions include de Vasconcellos, 9-1, 2004; Southworth, 10-2, 2005; John Montgomery, 13-2, 2008; Mehta, 14-1, 2009, and 19-1, 2014).

A particular sector that raises questions about quality is the urban heritage. The topic arouses certain interest (also in this case about 1 of every 20 contributions), but the orientation has changed over time. It was still essentially regulatory in the 1990s, with the primary purpose of governing conservation, but it gradually shifted towards active regeneration policies, first as public initiative, then in search of private partnerships. Initially, the interpretation of the topic was entrusted to the British culture of built heritage preservation (Larkham, 1-3, 1996; Pendlebury, 2-3, 1997; 4-3, 1999; 10-2, 2005); references to the same issues in the United States were rarer (Galen Newman, 19-5, 2014). When attention turned towards regeneration policies and projects, contributions on conservation grew more marginal (among the few exceptions is Pendlebury, 22-4, 2017). Surprisingly, the

topic remains in the background. What contexts are these? The dilemma lies between selecting areas with clear historical and cultural value (the original object) and an extension of the field towards the everyday heritage. If this choice is to prevail, the tendency that I already noted from other points of view should be solidified. In the context the shift is only sketched out: there are few contributions in this sense and they are still exceptional events (Mosler, 24-5, 2019).

The last emerging topic (with a frequency on the same order) is place-making, which, in the early days of the journal, was a stated goal and a possible target. Contrary to expectations, the developments were not significant. The contributions became less frequent over time, without ever breaching the threshold of recommendation or methodological exercise. What was stated on urban quality should be worth something: it is the living experience that matters for generating authentic places. Unfortunately, there are few contributions (for example, Jiven and Larkham, 8-1, 2003; Knox, 10-1, 2005; Santos Cruz, 23-6, 2018) that attempt to develop this crucial point, even if only in principle. Most of the texts present results that are not very innovative: reviews of the concepts in question (Arefi, 4-2, 1999; Aravot, 7-2, 2002; Abusaada and Elshater, 26-3, 2021); methods of investigation (Sepe, 14-4, 2009); design guidelines for open spaces or street furniture (in specific cases); or mere exhortations (Roberts, 4-1, 1999; Ryan, 9-3, 2004). The result is that the discourse on place-making in JUD remains weak and not very productive.

In my opinion, these are the main topics emerging over the 28 years of the journal (every other question is treated more sporadically and fragmentarily). The cultural imprint is clear: it reflects the concept of the most influential urban design at the time in America and Britain. International cases remain secondary and contingent. The topic in question often reduces to the impact (generally problematic) of those visions on profoundly different worlds. There is no lack of problems, however, even for the main thread. As an initial, summary conclusion, my impression is that the original editorial project has essentially remained incomplete, among omissions, compromises, and revisions. From design control to everyday urbanism, the sequence of pages shows the traces of an ongoing change that is happening, but is not really discussed or legitimized. This limit concerns me more than the change in direction.

Urban Design International (UDI)

This journal was launched the same year as its predecessor (1996), again in Britain, in this case Oxford Brookes University, as an initiative by Richard Hayward and Sue McGlynn. The reasons for the concurrence of the two projects are not obvious; the promoters did not bother to clarify the differences, let alone open a frank competition. It is up to the reader to create an idea of the peculiar character and added value of the respective contributions. The first editorial (1-1, 1996) confirms a rather widespread cultural and professional need: to rediscover and legitimize a new institutional space between the worlds of architecture and planning, a space that appears to be lacking, but is indispensable according to the authors. The peculiar perspective (compared to JUD) would be the priority given to sustainability (the emerging challenge in the early 1990s), the international horizon and, above all, the assiduous search for greater interaction and cooperation between academia and the professional world (in fact, numerous contributions are signed by practitioners). Thereafter, an editorial regularly opened each issue, always entrusted to the journal's editors, who (unlike those at JUD) changed several times. We can distinguish three phases. The original one stretches from 1996 to 2006 under the leadership of Hayward and McGlynn. This was followed by a period of instability of a few years, during which the journal director changed several times (Mike Biddulph, Cardiff; Maliene and Pitt, Liverpool; Sam Griffith, Bartlett). Since 2014, the journal has been directed by Mahyar Arefi (Iranian-born, now a professor in Cincinnati), with the assistance, for many issues, of Noha Nasser (Kingston, UK) and then the joint leadership of Patricia Aelbrecht (Cardiff). The editorial committee has always been prestigious. It includes authoritative figures also partly present in other sector projects, such as Carmona, Larkham, Loukaitou-Sideris, Talen, Dovey, and Stevens (leading figures at JUD), as well as other important scholars: M. Biddulph (Cardiff), G. Butina Watson (Oxford Brookes), B. Case Scheer (Utah), J. Gehl (famous Danish professional), T. Haas (KTH, Stockholm), M. Neuman (New South Wales, Sydney), I. Samuels (Birmingham), C. Xue (Hong Kong), and a few others. Perhaps participation on the board became a representative act rather than an effective cultural commitment. As a clue: the contribution of these subjects as journal authors is not very significant (in contrast to JUD). In 28 years, only Biddulph published more than 10 articles; Xue, Larkham, Karimi, Sepe (among the authors already mentioned), together with Bill Hillier (Bartlett), Karina Landman (Pretoria), Michael Mehaffy (Sustasis Foundation, Portland) contributed between 4 and 6 times; occasional contributions largely prevail. It is also difficult

to claim that the journal editors expressed a clear cultural project through the sequence of editorials. In fact, the opening texts are limited to briefly recalling questions of general interest; then they offer a quick summary of the contents of the articles in that journal issue, whose connections with the topic are sometimes debatable. This was basically just the anticipation of a summary of the issue (attempts at elaboration can only be found in Griffith's editorials, whose direction of the journal was brief, however). As much as or perhaps more than in the case of JUD, the journal mainly seems to stem from the emerging supply of experiences and reflections, generating a continuous and consistent flow (4 issues every year; in a dozen cases, in the first phase, these were double issues; at the time of writing, there are 100 issues, which together total nearly 600 contributions). The effort to build monographs may seem greater than JUD, but in a number of cases, the collections of contribution is not very significant. Attention to international trends is more evident, as expected. In the early stages, these were still sporadic initiatives; transnational openness has become a dominant feature in the last decade, under Arefi's guidance, while a focus on more traditional Western contexts has gradually diminished. However, the cultural orientation is still strongly conditioned. The recurring theme relates to the reinterpretation and impact of typically Western issues and models in different contexts. The geography of explorations remains partial, perhaps dictated by contingent opportunities rather than intentional choices. Cases relating to China, Brazil, and South Africa stand out; monographs are dedicated to Australia, the Balkans, and the Arab world, while other references are rarer. It is difficult to claim that really new visions have emerged due to the transnational perspective. The key topics proposed by the journal do not differ significantly from those in JUD, if not due to the relative weight and some preferential variations.

In this respect, the weight of fundamental topics such as urban design and design control decrease. It is not just a question of numbers (overall, the two issues still account for around 15% of the texts), but of the originality of the contributions and the impact of the reflections. The journal presents descriptions and analyses for a repertoire of urban projects (but generalizations are difficult) and a few references to design-oriented master plans (which become rarer and more marginal over time). The discussion on the nature and meaning of the activity remains weak and not innovative. Should it be understood as art (Bentley, 7-3 and 4, 2002) or science (Stephen Marshall, 17-4, 2012; Çalışkan, *ibid.*; Dovey and Pafka, 12-1, 2016)? Should training focus on learning by doing or on the power of new tech-

nologies (special issue, 9-4, 2004)? Original theoretical contributions are reduced to a few dialogues: between Mehaffy and Christopher Alexander (12-1, 2007), between Biddulph and Cuthbert (12-4, 2007). There is no comparison with JUD.

Weak as well is the discourse on design control. While Carmona and Punter reintroduced early on the idea of master plans involving form-based codes in Great Britain (2-1, 1997), New York's Kwarter could retort that the rules should be 'limited and flexible' (3-1 and 2, 1998). While isolated voices (under the influence of morphological studies) still claimed the need for form-based codes (Gu, 19-2, 2014), it was retorted — again in New York — that 'rules must always be negotiable' (Dahl, 21-1, 2017). Punter himself had long ago recognized, based on extensive research in Europe (special issue, 4-1 and 2, 1999), that aesthetic control should be limited to good guidelines (this is not a matter of binding rules, but of shared culture). The issue of design review survives, amid some objections (Kumar and Varkki, 7-2, 2002) and authoritative consensus (Paterson, 16-2, 2011; Kim and Forester, 17-3, 2012). Many experiences (in China, for example, even beyond) present a warning: urban design should not limit itself to producing icons or large-scale projects, but above all good administration (Deng, 14-1, 2009).

In the journal (if not in society), however, attention to the morphological dimension of problems has grown (more than 10% of the texts, between 2 and 3 times the figure for JUD). The main reason, which is difficult to explain, is the vast attention given to the 'space syntax' methodology (see the updated framework by the Delft School: van Nes and Yamu, 2021), with several direct contributions from its originator, Bill Hillier (1-1, 1996; 4-3 and 4, 1999; 5-2, 2000; 7-3 and 4, 2002; 9-1, 2004) and a variety of applications (Hanson, 5-2, 2000; Hillier and Netto, 7-3 and 4, 2002; Karimi, 17-4, 2012; Ramzy, 21-1, 2016; Ye et al., 22-1, 2017). Overall, these are scholastic contributions that do not present innovative characteristics or results. More limited, albeit noteworthy, are references to the 'historico-morphological' analysis by the Birmingham school (Kropf, 1-3, 1996; Gu, 15-3, 2010; Birkhamshaw and Whitehand, 17-1, 2012) or its Portuguese version (Oliveira and Pinho, 11-3 and 4, 2006). UDI therefore proves to be sensitive to current trends of morphological studies, which it assumes to be an accomplished and unchangeable product; however, it does not seem able to document the specific reasons for the interest and quality contributions that such exercises should offer to design.

Attention to the idea of public space has also grown (nearly 10% of the texts). We find specific, well-known issues such as the design of roads, open spaces, and parks to a lesser extent, but also growing interest in the public or quasi-public availability of privately owned areas (an increasingly topical issue). The most important indication is the thematic shift from the physical and technical aspects of the problems towards the sphere of social interaction. The turning point seems clear due to three monographs. The first, *The future of public space* (24-4, 2019), was edited by Tigran Haas and Michael Mehaffy with contributions from Carmona, Madanipour, Inam, Mehta, and others, while the second, *Inclusive public space*, was coordinated by Karina Landman (25-3, 2020) and the third, *Urban identity, perception, and urban design* (27-1, 2022), by Mahyar Arefi. Not even the publications by UDI, however, seem ready to recognize and discuss the new responsibilities and notable unknowns in this possible paradigm shift.

The tendency towards a nontrivial change is confirmed by reflections on the actual strength of the journal: urbanism (about a quarter of all the texts). The reader should not seek an exhaustive framework of the variety of positions in play. The most influential approach (Murrain, 1-2, 1996; Morris and Kaufman, 3-4, 1998; Murrain, 7-3 and 4, 2002; Talen, 10-2, 2005) is still and only *new urbanism*. Perhaps the spontaneous orientation of professionals is influential; there is no trace of the intellectualism of landscape urbanism in UDI. However, the inclination is not fideistic, but rather pragmatic: there is no shortage of critical observations (Robinson, 2-1, 1997; Robbins, 3-1 and 2, 1998) and some proposals for renewal (Platwoski and Marshall, 19-3, 2014). Nevertheless, the course of experience reveals a change in progress. Informal, tactical, adaptive instances continue to grow, along with the need to build social consensus on new urban projects. Observing the latest issues (special issues, 23-1, 2018; 24-2, -3 and -4, 2019; 25-1, -2 and -4, 2020; 26-1, -2 and -3, 2021), the (now irreversible?) drift towards the situations and perspectives of *everyday urbanism* seems abundantly clear.

Other voices emerging from JUD also maintain some weight here (while every other reference remains marginal). The statistical importance of the neighbourhood is equal in the two journals (about 1 contribution out of 10). However, the geography of the phenomenon is different. Despite the obvious interest in the positions of new urbanism, UDI does not seem to be very aware of issues regarding North American neighbourhoods and the resulting lifestyle (Forsyth, 19-4, 2014); the influence of some European

models clearly prevails. In fact, interesting — and justly problematic — contributions are available on British villages (special issue, 8-1 and 2, 2003, edited by Mike Biddulph), the garden city model (Ward, 6-3 and 4, 2001; Falk, 22-1, 2017), French or English new towns (Spaans, 1-1, 1996; Williamson, 1-4, 1996; Frey, 5-1, 2000), or gated communities, which now represent a settlement model of global interest (special issue, 13-4, 2008, edited by Karina Landman). From every point of view, the crisis of the models shows through; real coevolutionary processes are always decisive in specific contexts. See, for example, the radical transfiguration towards a more permeable and diversified project of the idea of gated community that, on paper, would be realised in China (Xu and Yang, 13-4, 2008; 14-2, 2009).

Significantly lower (a few percentage points each) is the frequency of the other selected topics — urban heritage, walkability, place-making, urban quality — and the importance of the related reflections is not noteworthy. Here, the historical heritage is not the object of specialized analysis (neither descriptive nor normative), but is mostly examined in relation to the demands and programmes for urban regeneration (often with resulting tension between tradition and new interventions, a recurring issue in international case studies). It does not seem that memorable contributions emerge in this respect. Curiously, nearly all of them are concentrated in the first 10–15 years of the journal. Following this, the attention seems to have quickly dropped. At the same time, however, reflections on walkability have multiplied. They were very rare until 10–15 years ago; then gradually more widespread (with two special issues: 20-1, 2015; 28-1, 2023). Unlike JUD (and, as we shall see, JU), these contributions only partly make in-depth studies of the contextual conditions, i.e. the environmental and settlement characteristics, the perceptions and preferences of the subjects, that may favour the spread of this type of practice. There is a lot of important framework-reflection (Forsyth, 20-1, 2015), but the main interest seems to relate to developing the most appropriate metrics for quantifying and assessing the phenomenon (Al-Hagla, 14-3, 2009; Soon, 17-1, 2012; Stangl, *ibid.*; Alhajaj and Daghistani, 26-1, 2021). These are perhaps punctilious exercises, a little out of proportion to the linearity of the problem.

In the same period, i.e. in the last 10 years, the journal also dedicated minimal space (formerly almost negligible) to the idea of place and the challenges of place-making. This is nothing new with respect to the conceptual frameworks (Arefi, 9-3, 2004; Kalali, 20-3, 2015; Radfar, 21-1, 2016). On

proposals for action, the most interesting reflections (still not of common sense) were formulated by Carmona (24-4, 2019) and Larkham (25-4, 2020). Basically, it would be necessary to reconsider the issue in terms of place-shaping, because only real experiences can generate a meaningful place and shared life over time. However, this assessment contradicts the aspirations or claims of disciplinary actors and professionals with the technical capacity to create complete places (the outcome may be a design proposal or just a methodological exercise, such as various contributions published in UDI by Marichela Sepe between 2013 and 2021). This conclusion converges with the results of reflections on urban quality. Perhaps due to the widespread participation of the professionals, the journal does not concern itself with conceptually redefining the subject, as occurs in JUD (there are rare exceptions: Mulliner and Maliene, 16-3, 2011). The main interest lies in the processes of creating quality through targeted actions and social interaction. It is no coincidence that the most cited masters are still Jane Jacobs and Christopher Alexander, the former due to her interpretation and evaluation of the urban condition (special issues, 11-2, 2006, edited by Claire Parin; 26-1, 2021, edited by Arefi and Nasser) and the latter due to the evolutionary and participatory concept of project generation (Mehaffy, 12-1, 2007; Dovey and Pafka, 21-1, 2016; Park, 22-4, 2017). The most common orientation is not realistic or critical (towards the generally current conditions and obstacles to virtuous change), but rather exhortative, following the most edifying tradition of the pragmatic culture. Despite constant reminders from Cuthbert, Inam, and a few others (which have become repetitive outbursts, an end in themselves), the world of urban design seems to be satisfied with recommendations and promises.

In conclusion, my impression of the journal is controversial. On the one hand, there is no shortage of perplexity about the editorial project (vague and discontinuous), the treatment of key topics (partial, fragmentary, not very innovative), and the inability or unwillingness to compare the variety of positions (often divergent), in order to choose and support a fairly clear and coherent direction. On the other hand, I must recognize that UDI perfectly interprets an evolutionary trend that perhaps holds a general meaning: it could represent some fundamental dynamics of the entire cultural and professional area, from the (presumed) dominance of theory and technique towards the recognition of the plural, informal, adaptive, and practical dimensions of the processes. If we observe the sequence of journal issues in the last decade (under the direction of Mahyar Arefi), the thematic shift is abundantly clear. Some doubt remains, however, on the maturity of

a paradigm shift. Will this be a contingent drift or the future destiny of the area (to be legitimized)?

Journal of Urbanism (JU)

The setting in this case is North America (although the editor is still British) and a cultural orientation may seem plausible based on more than one indication. Perhaps the journal can be viewed as an organ of new urbanism, if not formal, then in fact? For a long time, the editor in chief was Emily Talen (from 2008 to 2022), a leading exponent of the movement (then at Arizona State University, now in Chicago). Matthew Hardy cooperated with her from the beginning, first as a member of INTBAU, an international architecture network that supported traditional values and models, and then on behalf of the British Prince's Foundation (inspired by Prince Charles), which represents a traditionalist tendency in architecture. (In the early years of the journal, Charles Bohl of Miami acted as a third editor in charge, with a more marginal role.) The presentation of the editorial project seems to confirm my hypothesis. The subtitle of the journal introduces a very broad field (*International Research on Place-Making and Sustainability*), but the list of key topics clearly reflects the traditional interests of new urbanism. In a loosely structured framework, there is a focus on 'the rural-urban transect, smart growth, liveable communities, transit-oriented development, walkable communities', while other items in the programme are even too general ('urban morphology, historical preservation, urban regeneration, theories of urbanism'). It is also true, however, that the opening editorial (1-1, 2008) avoided taking an explicit stance. It limited itself to denouncing the growing fragmentation of interests and expertise in the sphere of place-making (between modernism and post-modernism; new, landscape, everyday, and many other forms of urbanism), and arguing for constructive dialogue between the parties. The scope of the journal was not to support one particular thesis, but regenerate a common basis by confronting, if necessary, the tension among emerging visions. It is also worth noting that the editorial board includes about 20 prominent figures, whose positions do not always refer to Duany's movement; we find Ben-Joseph, Carmona, Ellin, Gehl, Haas, Oc, and Mehaffy, in addition to R. Fishman (Michigan), M. Thompson-Fawcett (Otago, New Zealand), A. Vernez Mouton (Washington), C. Ellis (Clemson University, South Carolina; a true militant of new urbanism!), and a few others. I have already expressed some doubt as to the importance of these contacts. The same people seem ready to support rather different, or perhaps alternative, cultural commitments, without giving too much weight to theoretical dilemmas. It should

be noted that none of these scholars seem to have made a significant mark on the journal. Only Talen and Mehaffy published at least five articles in the period; there is a very high fragmentation of contributions. Based on 16 years of publications (3 issues per year up through 2013 and 4 thereafter, for a current total of 56 issues and more than 300 articles), my impression is that pluralism was a commitment that should be declared according to the rules of politically correct discourse; however, JU revealed a prevailing orientation, which finds important roots in the culture of new urbanism, although it took a partly unexpected turn over time. In fact, upon taking leave from the journal editorship in 2022 (replaced by Susan Parham, Hertfordshire, UK), Emily Talen was unable to present an entirely coherent and clearly successful report (15-4, 2022). Creating a field of interdisciplinary studies on the built environment; developing a new regulatory concept of urbanism (better justified and more functional); redefining a unitary idea of the urban phenomenon beyond the distinctions between cities and suburbs; combining the requirements for sustainability, justice, place-making, quality of form and quality of life in the urban setting: these were the ambitious goals of the journal. In consulting the 16 volumes, it seems difficult to recognize many contributions on the level of the declared challenges.

The dominant topic, which is not surprising, is urbanism, the subject of investigations and direct reflection by about half of the contributions. There are two main lines (overwhelmingly dominant in the first five years): new urbanism (naturally), and sustainability. The first movement takes centre stage. It represents the most current perspective, but also a solid promise for the future (Talen, 2013), despite the awareness of some limits. Because public opinion continues to be wary of certain theoretical principles — higher density, more diversity, fewer cars (Grant and Bondanow, 1-2, 2008; Mayo and Ellis, 2-3, 2009; Stanley, 5-1, 2012) — some mediation seems inevitable with respect to pure models (Duany in Talen, 2013). At any rate, the balance overall is positive (Dierwechter and Coffey, 10-4, 2017) and the market continues to appreciate the proposal (Kim and Bae, 13-3, 2020). While the historical professional rival — landscape urbanism — does not exist for the journal. There are only two contributions on the subject, both critical: as heir to the modern project (in fact, an exemplary model would be the project of Lafayette Park, Detroit, by van der Rohe and Hilberseimer: Sease, 8-4, 2015); but also as pure theory, which cannot present many concrete verifications (Mehaffy et al., 12-1, 2019).

Sustainable urbanism is the other trend that since the first issues has aroused

a lot of interest. As happens in other settings, however, methodological or merely exhortative contributions prevail; it is hard to identify any noteworthy conclusions. The new fact over time was the introduction of other lines, although they are partial and perhaps late. In 2012, a monograph (5-2 and 3) was dedicated to *barrio urbanism*, a specific cultural phenomenon with endemic informal features (Diaz, 2005). The hypothesis of applying the principles of new urbanism in that context is surprising (Talen, Irazabal: *ibid.*). Only in 2013 did the journal note the multiplication of ideas of urbanism (quickly growing, according to Haas and Ollsson, 6-2). The main emerging trends were represented, but a real commitment to comparative investigation and predicting future developments was lacking. In 2014 (7-4), the phenomenon of *do-it-yourself urbanism* was examined. A second monograph on the subject was published in 2016 (9-2), again edited by Donovan Finn (State University of New York). The interpretation of the phenomenon is interesting. The salient fact is not the centrality of various social, independent, or spontaneous practices, the potential surrogate of a deficient political-administrative function, but rather the possibility of institutionalizing the trend as a contingent, incremental, or ‘tactical’ variation of public interest (Berman and Marinaro, 7-4, 2014). In 2015, the journal considered the topic of temporary urbanism; however, this was only a post-traumatic situation in New Zealand, which remained an occasional reference (Wesener, 8-4). The same limitation applies to the only mention of smart urbanism, which presented some perplexity regarding the quality of participatory processes (Mancebo, 13-2, 2020). The openness to the issues of food urbanism (already addressed by UDI, 24-2, 2019) is also extemporaneous, always poised between instances of food production in the city or pure urban conviviality (Parham, 13-1, 2020; 14-3, 2021). My conclusion is basically that new urbanism proves to be the most influential matrix (the initial hypothesis seems to be confirmed). However, a shift appears inevitable: from the complete model of settlements designed by experts (the original version) towards adaptive mediation as a tactical exercise that should reconcile the fundamental principles with the practical need for operability and effectiveness. On the other hand, this turn was legitimized by Duany himself (Douglas, 2018) as a necessary, but basically acceptable metamorphosis.

With respect to this line, the essential questions (on paper) of urban design and design control prove to be surprisingly marginal (the frequency of each does not reach 5% of total publications). Nor are specific contributions very meaningful. With respect to the first topic, the most original

idea in the journal comes from Michael Mehaffy (1-1, 2008; 2-1, 2009): urban design should be understood as a ‘generative process’, as taught by theories on complexity, cognitive psychology, space syntax, but above all as taught by Christopher Alexander (1977, 1987), whose vision, according to Mehaffy, would be worth reviving and redeveloping in light of new urbanism. The track was followed by Toker and Pontikis (4-1, 2011), but then the discourse faded. Only one other contribution presents original aspects: Hooman Foroughmand’s (12-2, 2019) attempt to rethink urban design experiences as an assemblage process, along the lines of Deleuze and Latour (DeLanda, 2006, 2016; Buchanan, 2020). The perspective had already been anticipated by Kim Dovey to explain the formation of urban places (Dovey, 2009; with Mrjiana Ristic, JU, 10-1, 2017). This is a reasonable hypothesis, but it remains academic, without concrete developments in the journal. Nor are reflections on the issues of design control more abundant or innovative. In an unoriginal article, Carmona even reintroduced the need for design governance (11-1, 2018). The internal debate at the journal was limited to reiterating certain requirements that are now evident and widely shared: regulatory codes must be flexible (Trabalzi, 3-2, 2010; Hulme, 4-3, 2011; Alvaz, 5-1, 2012); they must allow for a certain degree of functional and spatial diversity (Yunda and Jiao, 12-2, 2019); and they must respect and enhance the evolutionary nature of types of contexts and forms (Gu, 12-4, 2019; Papaiologou, 14-4, 2021), thus reviving the utopia of a ‘generative code’ capable of virtuously evolving over time (Mehaffy, 1-1, 2008). This perspective was already outlined by scholars such as Ben-Joseph (2005) and Carmona (et al., 2006). The journal does not present any further developments on the topic, although it was possibly seeking some complementary contributions in the field of urban morphology (more than 5% of texts), with goals that were more analytical than design-oriented. The varied framework does not reveal a clear sense and even less a unifying vision. A ‘metric’ interpretation of the topic stands out (since the debut review by Clifton, Ewing et al., 1-1, 2008) related to measuring the connectivity of roads, differences in types of blocks, and the interface between distinct spaces. Contributions on the environmental consequences of the forms — emissions, climate conditions, carrying capacity — are more occasional. Even rarer are reflections on the connections between existing forms and types of intervention (infill, retrofitting, or redevelopment). Some attempt to investigate the forces and generative processes of urban forms is made, although the contributions are curiously spread around the world (Vietnam, Malaysia, South Africa). References to schools of morphological studies are discontinuous, with a surprising

concentration (delayed?) in more recent years. Aside from a singular mention of the ‘space syntax’ method (an application in Kuala Lumpur, 2019), the most influential source is the Porto school led by Vitor Oliveira, which offers both comparative studies (Pinho and Oliveira, 2-2, 2009; Monteiro and Pinho, 15-4, 2022) and a preferential path to Jeremy Whitehand’s ‘historico-geographical’ approach (Oliveira, 12-4, 2019; Gu, *ibid.*). The specific reasons and current nature of the documentation, as well as the added value of the applications are not clear. In particular, the connection with the perspectives of design are dormant.

Place-making should underlie the identity of the journal. Instead, it is only treated summarily (less than 5% of texts) and in a partial perspective. The main contributions concern the sense of place: Leyden et al. (4-1, 2011); Beidler and Morrison (9-3, 2016); Nelson et al. (13-2, 2020). They are correct, although not very innovative reviews. Other texts focus on experiences in space, following the path introduced by Jane Jacobs (Parham, 5-1, 2012). The most important references concern ethnic communities, in particular ‘Latino urbanism’ (special issue, 5-2 and 3, 2012; Garfinkel-Castro, 16-2, 2023). The physical aspect of the problems, however, remains outside the horizon. The weak exception is a methodological contribution by Marichela Sepe (3-1, 2010), similar to other works already seen in UDI. Environmental aspects are also largely overlooked, except in relation to some trauma, such as Hurricane Katrina (Fields et al., 8-1, 2015) or the issue of climate change (Santos and Costa, 10-3, 2017). The picture is therefore meagre and disappointing. The discourse on places emerges from the background of investigations and reflections on urban quality, as shown by two exemplary themes selected by the journal in the book review section: the idea of the happy city (Charles Montgomery, a Canadian writer and activist, 2013); and Nan Ellin’s (University of Utah, 2013) recap in favour of good urbanism, which should create places that are ‘vital, vibrant, safe, comfortable, legible, accessible, equitable, efficient, elegant, convenient, walkable, sustainable, beautiful, distinctive, dynamic’. In contrast to the other two journals, JU does not discuss the conceptual frameworks of quality requirements. It prefers to phenomenologically explore the types of dwellings and streets that could best contribute to the quality of urban conditions, operating as ‘generators of urbanity’ (Rofé, 2-1, 2009), although generalizations of cases are often questionable. One orientation seems to prevail: favouring the subjects’ point of view — the way they perceive urban quality, the material factors that lead to positive evaluations, the way the city is experienced, day after day. The result is that these contributions

only hold systematic value with difficulty. Therefore, not even this aspect is decisive in the journal.

Similar considerations hold for other arguments of evident interest, such as public space or the urban heritage. References are not lacking (about 5% of contributions for each topic), but their importance is modest. With respect to public space, the most important contribution is by Matthew Carmona (8-4, 2015), who expands upon topics already published by the other two journals (but are marginalised here). It is an accurate classification according to conditions and modes of use ('space neglected, invaded, exclusionary, consumption, privatised, segregated, insular, invented, scary, homogenised'), suggesting diverse hypotheses and tools for intervention. In addition, Carmona (15-2, 2022) assesses the consequences of the increasing privatization of spaces for public use and, while noting some problems, does not formulate severe criticism of the trend (Leclerc and Pojani's opinion is less forgiving, 16-1, 2023). Other texts occasionally recall widely debated issues in a fragmentary way: the design of certain types of spaces (particularly parks); the security of uses; or, more rarely, nonexclusion requirements typical of common goods (Mehta and Mahato, 14-4, 2021). Likewise fragmentary are contributions on the built heritage. Compared to other journals, there is less attention to regulatory problems. Some urban effects of preservation policies are more interesting: the economic asset valorization (Gilderbloom et al., 2-2, 2009; Bowen et al., 4-3, 2011); the contribution to revitalizing urban centres (Sernes, 11-4, 2018); or the preservation/development dilemma, which is also very strong outside the Western world (case studies from China, Iran, and Syria are available; international references in the journal remain occasional). Nevertheless, the added value with respect to the state of knowledge is modest.

The main topic of the journal is the reality of the neighbourhood, with the usual corollary of walkability (together, the two themes account for more than a quarter of JU). The image that is outlined is a faithful reflection of the principles of new urbanism. The most important contributions illustrate (once again) the essential nature of the model (Mehaffy, 8-2, 2015), its roots (Brody, 9-4, 2016), the main refinements in time and space (Trudeau, 6-2, 2013; Talen, 11-4, 2018), a positive balance of outcomes (Dierwechter and Coffey, 10-4, 2017, cited above), the troubled relationship with sprawl (Garde, 3-1, 2010), and the problems of retrofitting existing suburbs (the most comprehensive view of the problem can be found in the book edited by Emily Talen, 2015). A number of more specific contributions inves-

tigate the details of individual, well-known issues: density and the ideal spatial grid, social and functional diversity, affordable housing, vehicular and pedestrian mobility, transit-oriented development, smart growth, security, inhabitants' preferences and experience, and the possibility of exporting the model (there are occasional examples from China, Israel, and the Arabian Gulf). The overall framework represents the now-consolidated tradition, although without important innovations. The local and everyday dimensions come to play a dominant role, although it is perhaps excessive compared to the variety and complexity of today's settlement problems. Interest in the issues of walkability is perfectly consistent with the approach, representing an internal variation. We can distinguish three lines of argument (more refined with respect to UDI): what the phenomenon represents and how it is measured (notable contributions include Lo Hutabarat, 2-2, 2009; Riggs, 10-1, 2017; the extensive review by Shields et al., 16-1, 2023); the subjects' preferences, perceptions, and behaviours (for example, Mehta, 1-3, 2008); and the conditions and policies needing activation, because the transition from walkability to walking is not a given, but rather must be guided and supported (Girling et al., 12-4, 2019). These are diligent reflections, although perhaps a bit overrated.

Overall, my impression is that the official intentions of the editorial project have not been respected, because the journal does not present a solid, original identity. An underlying thread is left to intuition: the influential matrix of the cultural and professional movement inspired by Duany. The matrix, however, is not stated transparently. Any other reference remains secondary, contingent, *déjà vu*. As Emily Talen (15-4, 2022) argues, the journal continues to be a favoured setting for research and discussion on topics relating to urbanism, with broad knowledge and design goals. It is a pity that the image is always weak and confused. The premise was an ideal model: the positions that, according to the 'Charter of New Urbanism', would have solved a variety of pressing problems (Talen, 1999 and 2013). What remains is a contingent, adaptive trace, in the now-accepted sense of tactical urbanism. The shift is not trivial, but the elements of discontinuity, critical connections, and emerging potential are investigated only a little.

11.4. 'Urban Design in Ten Words or Less': The Agenda Emerging from the Literature

Does the survey of the three journals allow for some overall assessment? Some topics of interest are certainly shared (the documentation leaves no doubts). These are addressed, however, in different, sometimes diverging

ways. Can we see a focus, a common perspective of sense and form for an area that seems to be complicated and fleeting? The journals provide a considerable base of big data (nearly 1800 contributions), which should enable the construction of some meaningful representation of the manifestos, programmes, and major events in the last 30 years. The most relevant metaphor, however, is perhaps that of a kaleidoscope, which displays iridescent images that are multiple and changeable according to the circumstances (each resulting form has obvious limits of precariousness). The steady point may be the selection of a dictionary of fundamental entries (already identified in Section 11.3), as a set of salient themes and issues to browse according to partial and contingent interests, because the possibility of developing an integrated vision based on particular contributions does not seem to be an issue on the agenda for the editorial projects of the three journals. We briefly examine the main entries in this virtual dictionary. There are no more than 10 and in fact, some are clearly related (the title of this section echoes a similar exercise by Michael Gunder and Jean Hillier, 2009, in the field of planning; moreover from Lacan's perspective, from which I distance myself!). These are the key topics — and no others (because there are important omissions) — that emerge from the literature examined here. I present a summary of the documents and opinions drawn separately from the three journals in Section 11.3, relying on the contribution of a few recent books that offer an exhaustive review of the positions in play.

(1) *Urban Morphology*

That this is an important topic of interest for the urban design literature may seem to be obvious. In effect, there is no shortage of references, but the weight and impact prove to be short of expectations. In part, these are empirical observations on the evolution of urban forms or, more frequently, urban fabrics (general settlement patterns or, in greater detail, the urban layout and specific design of building blocks come into play, respectively). These are descriptive contributions that play a regulatory role. In general, they express radical criticism of the so-called 'modern project' and its degeneration, but they do not offer immediate indications for building an alternative. Another part of the texts on the issue instead act as a separate section of the literature dedicated to the morphological analysis of settlement systems. I am thinking of the most important journal in the sector (since 1997), which, indeed, is entitled *Urban Morphology*. It is currently directed by Peter Larkham (Birmingham) with the support of Karl Kropf (from the same school) and Vitor Oliveira (Porto), three authors I have

already mentioned because they have long collaborated with urban design journals. What strikes me in these contributions is the orthodoxy. These are scholastic references following dated research, reintroduced without any innovation, or capacity for synthesis. According to the most authoritative reviews (Oliveira, 2016; Kropf, 2017), there are four main lines of urban morphology studies: the typo-morphological approach dating to the original contribution by Muratori and Caniggia in Italy in the 1950s; the historico-geographical analysis inspired by the German geographer Michael R. Conzen in the 1950s–1960s and developed in Great Britain (where the author had moved because of Nazism) by Jeremy Whitehand (in the Birmingham school, where Larkham, Samuels and other scholars quoted here were trained); the ‘space syntax’ method developed in the 1980s at the Bartlett School by Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson (1984), also developed there in a dedicated laboratory, and currently directed by Kayan Karimi (another author cited here); and finally, a family of mathematical models (D’Acci, 2019) that tend to formally simulate the evolution of urban systems based on hypothetical schematizations of structure and form. (I pointed out some conceptual contributions in JUD by Nico Salin-garos, who long cooperated with Christopher Alexander). These positions are faithfully represented by the three journals (particularly the second and third, with greater interest in UDI and JU). And yet the analytical limitations of these approaches have long been clear and it is difficult to maintain that the contribution to design practices is relevant. The construction of simulations primarily remains an exercise in abstraction. The evolutionary study of building types is a fine-grained analysis, especially relevant in certain historical contexts. Whitehand’s school recognizes spatial areas with common morphological features. This is an important result (which could also be achieved using different methods), but it is only preliminary to design experiences. Frankly, it seems to me that Bill Hillier’s hypothesis is reductive, assuming that the possibility of movement in the city using the network of material connections is a decisive factor in developing urban settlements (Hillier, 1996). The investigation may explain some emerging urban effects with respect to complex organic forms (generally in smaller historical cities with a limited set of urban functions). In other contexts, the claim of drawing general conclusions on urban movements not specified by types and functions seems unlikely (as noted in some critical, although rare, contributions: Ratti, 2004; Netto, UDI, 21-1, 2016). And yet the ‘space syntax’ method has become an algorithm that is applied mechanically, even in inappropriate contexts such as orthogonal urban grids (!), that represent the antithesis of an organic form. The results, of course, were

insignificant (Haq and Behrie, JUD, 23-1, 2018). The fact that these, and only these are still today the main frame of reference of studies in this field of research make me uncomfortable. As a whole, I find such immobile, repetitive thought exercises disappointing. Innovation cannot be reserved only for the technologies in current use (which actually mark notable progress, but they are not guided by more suitable conceptual strategies). Under these conditions, I am not surprised by the substantial marginality of morphological studies in urban design (although scholars in the sector continue to claim a more central, influential role: Oliveira, 2016, 2019).

(2) Design Control

There is no doubt about the need to improve the morphological quality of planning regulations (Punter, UDI, special issue, 4-1 and 2, 1999), given the clear limitations of traditional zoning in this respect. This was one of the primary motivations of the reintroduction of urban design in the second half of the 1900s. The journals document the main lines of investigation, innovation, and experimentation (with the decisive contribution of authors such as Punter and Carmona in Great Britain, but also significant developments in America). We can recognize at least four lines of research: the concept of form-based urban codes, i.e. systems of rules sensitive to the morphological nature of the context; the integration of and attention to the morphological dimension when formulating master plans (with innovative effects not only on regulation, but also on investigation, visioning, and implementation); the institutionalized reliance on the design review method, i.e. the systematic assessment of the quality and morphological impact of an urban project awaiting approval and realization; and the development of guidelines on the morphological and physical requirements of urban actions and transformations, adopted as an indicative framework and guidance in planning and design processes. It is evident that the ambitions are not equivalent. The first two lines express a clear desire for public control in systematic, a priori processes. As is known, they have encountered notable difficulty and resistance. The technical complexity is questioned, as it is certainly greater than traditional regulation. At a time of crisis, this becomes an easy alibi to avoid the trouble of innovation. The substantial objections, however, are ideological and political. The tentative design of form-based codes developed as a critique of modern planning, but revives regulatory aspirations, the ideal concept of a public function to control urban transformations that is mandatory, legitimate, and effective. This ideal contradicts the actual dynamics of society and politics, where the weight of contingency, flexibility, and discretion continues to grow. This also throws

the hypothesis of master plans equipped with a richer repertoire of form-based codes into crisis. This is why the results did not match expectations. Today, in fact, the two lines have lost the original enthusiasm. The perspectives do not seem comforting, although a critical balance is largely avoided. In this framework, design review represents a dignified remedial strategy. If a priori control does not work in the expected way, let there at least be verification during the process or, at worst, after the project has been defined, in order to highlight and avert any ‘untoward’ effects. The hypothesis is not new, but rather broadly tested in the last 30 years (Palermo, 2022, Chapter 6). The limits are clear: the difficulties of pure technique in counteracting a well-developed project supported by dominant interests; doubts as to the legitimacy and discretion of expert assessments; or the widespread intolerance of choices or recommendations that seem to invade the realm of individual preferences, in the name of ‘publicness’ that is often neither recognized nor shared by many. The fact is that even this period seems to have mostly passed. Or better yet, the design review method tends to follow logic that is no longer public, but market-based (Carmona, *Marketing the governance of design*, JUD, 24-4, 2019). Today, developers are the ones that willingly resort to product quality assessments (conducted by private agencies) to enhance the reputation and promote sales. The conclusion is that after much ambitious talk about design control, the most current form nowadays is (only) the formulation of guidelines, entrusted to the good use of practitioners and public opinion. This is evidently the weakest strategy, which likely does not represent a choice, but rather the most concrete outcome, perhaps the only possible one (in fact, the strategic and indicative variation is an emerging feature of the latest master plans). The intrinsic weakness does not lead to the formulation of predictions regarding the impact, which depend on the local conditions. It is no coincidence that Carmona felt the need to reintroduce design governance in the last phase. Such weak tools only work if politics and civil society have an adequate system of checks and balances (Carmona, JUD, 21-6, 2016). The technical aspect of design control moves to the background with respect to the social and political process, which opens the way to transformations.

(3) *Urbanisms*

The plurality, or even the proliferation of disciplinary references is a fact, although it has not been investigated much, nor well-ordered conceptually. Labels continue to multiply and overlap in a field that remains mobile and indistinct, for example (with reference to a single source, for the sake of brevity, and following the order of the times): *new* (Duany and Plater-Zy-

berg, 1991), *post-modern* (Ellin, 1996), *everyday* (Chase et al., 1999), *post-* (Kelbaugh, 2002), *landscape* (Waldheim, 2006 and 2016), *integral* (Ellin, 2006), *insurgent* (Hou, 2010), *ecological* (Mostafavi and Doherty, 2010), *sustainable* (Haas, 2011), *worlding* (Roy, 2011), *emergent* (Haas and Olsson, 2014), *tactical* (Lydon and Garcia, 2015), *plural* (Ryan, 2017), *do-it-yourself* (Douglas, 2018), *regenerative* (Ercan, 2019), *bottom-up* (Arefi and Kickert, 2019), *temporary* (Stevens and Dovey, 2023)... *urbanism*. Without following the individual traces, which are partly occasional and of secondary interest, I limit myself to two considerations. The pure sequence of topics over time already expresses the general sense of the announced change. Initially, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the challenge was (still) to account for the modern tradition, overcome it, perhaps replace it following a variety of tracks (Duany, Ellin, Kelbaugh, Waldheim). The contribution by Chase et al., *Everyday Urbanism* is a partial exception because it tended to shift the focus from the sphere of technical and professional expertise to the current practices of city use. Following this, in the last 10–15 years, three lines of interest emerged, clearer and more widespread than in the past. The first (the most trivial) is the sense of the irreducible plurality of the discipline. Because meanings and intentions must change according to the context (they may be different worlds: Roy), the processes at play mobilise a complex of institutions, actors, interests, and instruments whose composition cannot be taken for granted (Ryan). It is therefore difficult to predict the future evolution of urbanism, which will be the emerging effect of actions and interactions with respect to the variety of positions and experiences currently in progress (*emergent urbanism*, Haas and Olsson). The complexity is therefore contemplated without suggesting reassuring solutions. The second (not unexpected) line is ecological awareness, which leads the commitments to sustainability and regeneration to be favoured (Mostafavi and Doherty, Haas, Ercan). The third (the real sign of discontinuity) emphasizes the leading role of citizens (through direct experience of urban life, the subjective perception of problems and forms of active citizenship: Hou, Douglas, Arefi and Kickert). At the same time, there is an (inevitable) revision of planning and design ideas according to flexibility and adaptation (*tactical, temporary urbanism*: Lydon and Garcia, Stevens and Dovey). It is clear that a long road was followed with respect to the modern tradition; today, the break, or gap, is displayed clearly.

The second observation tends to see a fundamental distinction in the variety of references. On the one hand, the concepts of urbanism still suggest a technical-professional vision of urban design, choosing nonequivalent

matrices and perspectives. On the other hand, there are calls for a variety of everyday practices, in which participation and social learning should play an essential role in design processes, alongside or instead of experts. As I have just noted, this trend has assumed increasing weight over time, perhaps beyond all expectations. Professional orientations are all marked by the radical criticism of any model or project with a modernist inspiration, which becomes the easy target (a sort of scapegoat) to blame for many pressing problems. New urbanism and landscape urbanism are certainly the most solid and competitive professional movements. The former is clearly a leading aspect in the three journals (albeit edited in Europe). There is no shortage of critical references (Robinson, UDI, 2-1, 1997; Robbins, UDI, 3-1 and 2, 1998; Biddulph, JUD, 5-1, 2000; Grant and Bondanow, JU, 1-2, 2008; Stanley, JU, 5-1, 2012) with respect to a cultural orientation that can be considered neo-traditionalist and a disciplinary programme that expects to extend its influence even in unrelated contexts and with respect to irrelevant problems. However, the approach to movement is generally positive, and expectations for future developments still seem high (Morris and Kaufman, UDI, 3-4, 1998; Platowski and Marshall, UDI, 19-3, 2014; Dierwechter and Coffey, JU, 10-4, 2017). I do not agree with these assessments. I maintain that new urbanism is a niche trend. Its natural context is the suburbs (American peripheries above all, in the grip of the degenerative effects of sprawl: Passell, 2013). The suggested attention is reasonable: human-scaled settlements, with an internal network that guarantees accessibility to services and facilitates walking (without forcing systematic use of cars); an efficient connection to large public transport networks (as an alternative to cars for long-distance trips); an adequate density (to support the location of basic services); a good provision and distribution of green areas according to the principles of sustainability and environmental quality; a certain degree of diversity (social, functional, of building types: Talen, 2008), respecting the principles of the ‘just city’ (Fainstein, 2010; Medved, 2018); and a unified spatial form, following criteria of consistency and quality. In principle, it is difficult to object. However, if we observe the reality of Seaside (Florida), one of the symbolic experiences of the movement, some doubts may arise. In effect, the virtuous vision is always in balance due to contrasting interests and preferences. Potential users do not seem ready to share significant increases in density. Limiting car use is not always accepted favourably. Social diversity and the diversification of living environments in limited spaces do not correspond to market expectations. It is therefore possible, even easy, to jump from the ideal model to a built environment that is socially uniform and conventional in its layout

and form. New urbanists should confront this latent contradiction. In contrast, for 30 years (the 31st conference was held in 2023) they have lamented the inadequate spread of their good ideas, on any scale and for any problem (as if the goal was to find a full alternative to the CIAMs: Eugénie Birch, *From CIAM to CNU*, in Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2011). The effects are sometimes paradoxical: as an extreme example, see the intent to apply the principles of new urbanism to Hong Kong ! (Ganesan and Lau, UDI, 5-1, 2000). On the other hand, I maintain that the contribution is circumscribed to a suburban context and that the approach is at risk due to a traditionalist trend. As Ajay Garde (University of California; JUD, 11-1, 2006) observed, this is Duany's imprint on the movement, while the environmentalist and reformist vision of Peter Calthorpe (a brilliant practitioner and scholar from San Francisco) remained more marginal, despite his commitment to renewing ideas and practices (Calthorpe, 1993, 2011).

The vision of landscape urbanism, which took shape between the late 1990s and early 2000s, seems to me to be less narrow but also more vague, finding a comprehensive frame of reference in 2016 under Charles Waldheim (Harvard). The point of view is interesting. The design of open spaces constitutes the background of any complex settlement (the reasoning is valid not only for the neighbourhood, as in the previous thread). This leads to reconsidering the key issue of the urban landscape, placing it at the centre of planning developments (instead of individual buildings). Some doubts are legitimate, however. Maybe the main topic should be identified (and limited) to the design of parks and green areas? Are landscape urbanists destined to retrace the architects' experiences with the landscape with some added value (Wall and Waterman, 2010; Wall, 2020)? Is there a risk of rehabilitating the modern model of 'towers in the park'? Such objections were formulated with unusual vehemence by the new urbanists, who mercilessly criticized the emerging movement (Duany and Talen, 2013; see also JUD, 20-3, 2015, the special issue, cited above, devoted to a comparison of the two movements). The impression is one of witnessing an inelegant dispute between competing professional interests. One critique is objectively well-founded: the interesting intellectual reflection was not corroborated by concrete or extensive experience. Indeed, as I mentioned in Section 11.3, one of the emblematic case studies — Lafayette Park, Detroit, an urban renewal project from the 1950s — can be accused of still belonging to modern town planning. However, the intellectual value of the movement remains, expressing reasoned criticism of both modernist culture and the (false) neo-traditionalist alternative, in the name of envi-

ronmental and (on paper) progressive values. Indeed, landscape urbanists themselves have built a bridge between landscape issues and an ecological vision of the city (Mostafavi and Doherty, 2003), inspired by reformist principles. It remains to verify the concrete impact of such ideas, hanging in the balance between authorial experiments in urban architecture and transformation projects with a clear civic value.

The civic dimension is certainly the focus of the most recent trends in everyday urbanism, which push beyond professional traditions (of any orientation). The experience of the city aside from its inhabitants is decisive for understanding the problems, discovering the reasons for the necessary change, and building and assessing the resulting projects. The need has long been recognized by innovative (but individual) figures such as Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, and Kevin Lynch; however, it was underestimated by ordinary professional and administrative practice. It seems necessary to rehabilitate a concept of urbanism based on experience, which recalls the original vision of Louis Wirth: ‘urbanism as a way of life’ (1939). This was the thesis expounded by Chase et al. at the dawn of the century: a perspective that was then marginal for the disciplinary culture. Consequently, it seemed necessary to revive the idea of urban design as ‘public policy’ (already anticipated by Barnett, 1974), where technical design plays a secondary role to the process to collectively construct the intervention. In the next 20 years, that vision achieved important developments on two fronts. As for citizens, questions and (to some extent) opportunities for listening, learning, active participation, and — in some cases — ‘insurgence’ have grown, i.e. the possibilities for bottom-up urbanism (Hou, 2010; Arefi and Kickert, 2019). With respect to institutions, the need emerged to renew the ordinary means of planning and design. Informal, temporary, or tactical aspects (‘the art of the weak’, said Henri Lefebvre) are no longer marginal or exceptional conditions; they become typical features of normal practice following an incremental, adaptive, pragmatic, pluralist logic (Lydon and Garcia, 2015; Madanipour, 2017; Stevens and Dovey, 2023; Dovey et al., 2023). A metamorphosis is thus taking place before our eyes, even if it does not yet seem to have found an advanced echo in disciplinary reflections, where informal urbanism remains a side matter (Mukhija and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014).

(4) *Public Space, Publicness*

The interest in the public space is a legacy of modern town planning, but it has been partially reinterpreted over time. It is traditionally seen in special

iconic spaces loaded with symbolic value and as the grid-like structure that constitutes the physical matrix of the urban phenomenon. The focus thereafter gradually shifted towards abandoned or fragile residual areas (testifying to the incompleteness of the ‘modern project’) awaiting regeneration, but also towards the social interactions hosted in urban spaces as forms of life, becoming an essential requirement of quality (in the sense presented by Jane Jacobs long ago). Unsettling dualisms thus arise: between representative places and marginal areas; between the material network (which Bill Hillier attributed to a social meaning that I find misleading because it would be a purely mechanical effect of urban mobility) and spaces of (effective!) social interaction. The reflection in urban design on these topics seems to remain in balance among the different perspectives, without the desire or courage to choose. In the meantime, when the various forms of ‘public’ are multiplying (as Dewey intuited), it becomes difficult to appeal to the values of publicness to lend strength to projects in the works. In fact, reference to the public sphere are always weaker in the literature. The discourse on public space produces taxonomies that are useful for distinguishing the nature of problems and, consequently, guiding targeted strategies of intervention (Carmona, JUD, 15-1 and 15-2, 2010; JU, 8-4, 2015). This may take a specific technical aspect (as we saw in the three journals in relation to roads, parks, or open spaces), or favour the realm of social interaction. This gradually becomes the central topic of interest (Haas and Mehaffy, UDI, special issue, 24-1, 2019), while technique is limited to facilitating the relationships, as far as materially possible. The trend is clear in the latest books published on the topic by scholars from the University of Cincinnati (Mehta and Palazzo, 2020; Mehta, 2023). The most important requirements of public space relate to its nature as a ‘common good’: accessibility, inclusiveness, shared meaning, safe and comfortable use, and remedies for the erosion of consumption (Landman, UDI, special issue, 25-3, 2020). The function of physical planning is instrumental with respect to these objectives. However, this means that the discourse on urban design risks losing its technical specifics to come together in the vast crucible of daily practice.

(5) Neighbourhood

If the three journals matter, the most important settlement form should be the suburban neighbourhood, or any other ‘human-scale’ settlement in general, be it a village, new town, or gated community. In fact, there is entirely marginal attention to other forms that also represent complex, widespread, possibly crucial situations, such as downtowns or edge cities, metropolis-

es or megacities, infrastructure or the landscape. The orientation reveals sentiments and concerns strongly rooted in the local scale, with a perhaps nostalgic (neo-traditionalist?) or ideological attitude (due to the influence of community myths), even if there is an awareness that open problems exist in these contexts. This is because ‘villages don’t make a city’ (Biddulph, JUD, 5-1, 2000), i.e. offering an objectively limited urban experience. The dream of public-initiated new towns seems to be declining in Europe (Wakeman, 2016; Fée et al., 2021) due not only to a lack of resources, but also because the balance of complete experiences is only partially satisfactory (after a quarter of a century, the exemplary case of Milton Keynes confirmed that many objectives had been missed: Williamson, UDI, 1-4, 1996; Edwards, JUD, 6-1, 2001; Clapson, 2005). The model of the gated community (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Atkinson and Blandy, 2006; Bagaeen and Uduku, 2010) cannot work as a surrogate because it expresses private interests, denies certain qualities of urban life, and produces adverse effects (data confirmed by its exportation to other countries, such as China or Brazil: see the overview by Xu and Yang, UDI, 13-4, 2008; 14-2, 2009; Pow, 2009). These perplexities, however, do not seem decisive, because according to these journals, the actual key aspect in the technical-professional discourse is the suburban neighbourhood and the consequent lifestyle (Johnson, 2002; Beauregard, 2006). The most common rhetoric takes the typical form of the ‘urban narrative’, in the sense intended by Bernardo Secchi (1984): once upon a time, there was a neighbourhood model that ensured a good life, but urban development and sprawl undermined that reality. Through the generous and enlightened commitment of experts and activists (with obvious allusions to the new urbanism movement), we can glimpse the way to reverse course. The key issues are the crisis of the traditional neighbourhood, the degenerative tendencies of urban sprawl, and the challenge or possibility of recreating a neighbourhood environment and life that ensures not only new functionality, but also a higher degree of cohesion and quality (Friedman, 2001, 2015). The solution would lie in the recipes of new urbanism that I have already commented on (Section 11.4, Point 3). The vision of the problems is therefore closely related to a particular built environment, that is limitless and well-rooted in the centre of the world (Rothblatt and Garr, 2021; Abbott, 2023). Much of the literature is limited to reflecting on a few diffuse and influential interests, without the capacity or desire to reconsider the variety of settlement structures, investigate their mutual relationships, or anticipate future critical problems. This is a dated and essential provincial vision (Fishman, 1987). It is based on a largely invented tradition and deludes itself (or observers) about the possi-

bility of regenerating it with simplifying recipes (where being too simple is not a technical solution, but the idea of community and quality of urban life that underlies it: Neal, 2003). Emily Talen's book, *Neighborhood*, 2018, offers the perfect representation of the situation. In this sense, urban design becomes an ideological tool as well as professional enhancement. A critical perspective is more evident in Europe, where some studies view a post-suburban scenario as inevitable, implying a significant revision of traditional settlement forms (see Alan Mace, LSE London, 2013; Nicholas Phelps, Bartlett School, 2015, 2017; with Andrew Wood, 2011; with Fulong Wu, 2011). Even in the United States, however, some observers are willing to acknowledge that significant changes are emerging in many suburbs (Mukhija, 2022; Mallach and Swantrom, 2023; Nicolaidis, 2023).

(6) *Walkability*

Orientations in the literature on this front also seem reductive to me. Observers will find few references to alternative modes of mobility, even less to the infrastructure aspect of the problems. Instead, a special focus on walking emerges (at an increasing rate in the last 10 years) (Speck, 2013, 2018). This choice certainly relates to interest in neighbourhoods as a human-scale settlement type, but also to the American obsession with certain issues related to health and the good life (walking is good for health, people do not walk enough; popular reluctance still seems very strong and widespread). This is also essentially a provincial choice that reflects problems peculiar to the context of proximity, while other major questions related to infrastructure and mobility are overlooked, although they also have an important impact in space and time. A large part of the contributions are limited to reasoning about the most appropriate way to measure the phenomenon: the most significant descriptive indicators; the material and behavioural factors that encourage openness to walking; and subjects' perceptions of the suitability of spaces for walking. Some authors have ventured along the road of the 'philosophy of walking': *What is a walkable place? The walkability debate in urban design* (Forsyth, UDI, 20-4, 2015). A simple, natural practice becomes an influential indicator of living quality (Forsyth and Southworth, JUD, 13-1, 2008). We therefore see a dilation of the topic, beginning as a complementary interest of investigations on the human scale of urban settlements and becoming a potential pillar of the quality of the urban form. In both cases, I frankly find the waste of energy excessive, if we consider the triviality of the conclusions of vast research.

(7) *Urban (Design) Quality*

It is assumed that the quality of the urban project and urban life are key topics for the legitimization and success of urban design. The discourse proceeds in the wake of Kevin Lynch's pioneering work, without being able to rely on equal creativity and a capacity for innovation in most contributions. The hypothesis is always to trace a pertinent and convincing conceptual scheme that can define a set of requirements for good form and urban design assigned a regulatory value for direction and assessment if not exactly prescriptive, given the most up-to-date trends in design control (Section 11.4, Point 2). One point of difference with Lynch's original contribution concerns the selection of requirements: the 'image of the city' that Lynch conceived drew on the subjects' perceptions and experiences, but still represented an expert synthesis. Today, everyday urbanism seems to be increasingly conditioned by the desire to give a voice to the people, while the relationship with professional expertise becomes more uncertain or ambiguous. At any rate, different conceptual schemes have been proposed in recent years to update Lynch's vision (an exhaustive framework is found in Mehta, 2023). These are mostly equivalent contributions that differ only in marginal choices or investigations. In my opinion, one of the most complete is the proposal by Ewing and Clemente (2013), which we could use as evidence of the entire family. The outline introduces seven requirements. A quality place should offer an image for the observer that is distinct (recognizable, capable of drawing the attention and calling up memory) and equipped with meaning (*imageability*). It should guarantee a well-outlined, well-proportioned visual by suitably playing with widths, heights, and volumes (*enclosure*). The dimensions, structure, and arrangement of physical components must be human-sized, i.e. within the range of human senses (*human scale*). The edges of the physical space must not constitute a closed, unbridgeable border, but allow people to see or imagine things beyond (*transparency*). The variety of available elements and relationships becomes a strength (*complexity*). However, an adequate degree of visual order, which depends on the compatibility or complementarity of the elements should not be missing (*coherence*). The underlying spatial structure should be understandable and favour the use of places, also due to the availability of suitable landmarks and the potential for subjects to build their cognitive maps (*legibility*). Finally, movements in the space should be facilitated by human-sized distances and adequate material and visual connections between the elements (*linkage*). A quality project must respect these requirements. These are reasonable recommendations that follow in Lynch's footsteps (*imageability, legibility*) and then introduce some com-

positional and functional criteria to organize space and mobility, without apparently worrying about the potential tension between some principles (*enclosure vs transparency, complexity vs coherence*). A general limit to the recommendations remains, which should always be interpreted in the specific cultural and social context. Even if they were followed according to the best intentions, the outcome would not be a given, because quality is not determined (only) by the design and decision. As the poet says, ‘*al andar se hace camino*’ [we make our path by walking] (Antonio Machado, 1912). This perspective is not without its consequences. The role of behavioural studies and environmental psychology is growing while the technical contribution of urban design is becoming less decisive. In fact, the most recent manuals note the growing weakness in the presumed discipline: partial, not very innovative skills, more modest ambitions (see, for example, Avi Friedman, 2021). In addition, the conceptual outlines adopted to represent and assess the quality of public space tend to assign an increasingly marginal role to issues of the physical configuration (even with respect to the limits that were already clear in Ewing and Clement) to favour urban behaviour and experiences (Varna, 2014; Mitrašinovic and Mehta, 2021). The trend is clear: the technique needs robust complements that only practices can generate.

(8) *Placelessness, Place-Making*

The reference to Machado above may explain the substantial (resounding) failure of the idea of place-making. It was supposed to be the main topic and natural scope of the new urban design (the perspective seems obvious at the outset of the three journals, as I have documented). Thirty years have passed and the results are disappointing. A quantitative indication: contributions expressly dedicated to the topic in the long term have become surprisingly rare in the specialized literature. In addition, many cases are limited to resuming the sociological or geographical debate on the concept of the place and differences between space and place in popular terms. That background is useful for reasoning about the widespread ‘placelessness’ of many current urban settlements and (unfortunately) also of some new urban transformation projects (Relph, 1976; Freestone and Liu, 2016). The shift from the analysis of places to effective place-making remains uncertain or indeterminate. In the past, two brief paths were explored. The first understood the generation of places as a simple exercise in urban furniture. This simplified view (Kathy Madden, *Place-making in urban design*, in Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2011) was not able to provide an adequate answer. In fact, it has basically been abandoned (there are now very few

contributions on the subject). The second path is entrusted to methodology (Thomas, 2016); it would be possible to conceive and apply some procedure to guide in the discovery or regeneration of places. The ‘place-maker’ method proposed and used for many years by Marichela Sepe (CNR, Naples) may serve as an example. This is a laborious procedure that highlights typical features of an urban settlement, combining topographical analysis with inhabitants’ perceptions (Sepe, 2013). This produces what Lynch would have called an ‘image of the city’ (or place), but which the author unduly overloads with meaning as (presumed) local identity (where, as often happens, the concept of identity is used inappropriately). That this can be understood as a contribution to place-making is a symptom of the confusion that reigns in the field. In reality, we now have sufficient experience to reconsider the concept very carefully. In ‘insurgent’ conditions, situations of *place-taking* by active subjects can sometimes occur (Hou, 2010; Arefi and Kickert, 2019). It is normal, indeed necessary, for politics and design to give rise to *place-shaping* processes (Carmona demonstrated the importance of the commitment, but also underlined that the social and evolutionary dimensions of the process can become more important than the strictly technical ones: JUD, 19-1, 2014; 21-1, 2016). Less plausible are place-making operations, if they are understood as accomplished and self-sufficient projects (Carmona, UDI, 24-4, 2019; Larkham, UDI, 25-4, 2020). In fact, generating a place cannot overlook the effective experience of life, which occurs over time, just as Machado explained so poetically. This may be why the topic has become marginalized in the urban design literature, while it still arouses the enthusiasm of ‘creative professionals’ in the world of art and communication (see the vast *Handbook of Place-Making* edited by Cara Courage, 2021, in which contributions from urban design figures are almost irrelevant). Once again, the result is the awareness of slipping interests: from pure physical design of urban forms to the practices of everyday life.

(9) *Urban Heritage (Urban Identity, Urban Regeneration)*

The historical urban heritage may represent a typical place that has withstood the course of time or needs to be regenerated. From the perspective of urban design, the issue introduces some dilemmas. The first regards the subject. Should it deal (only) with icons with a high symbolic and architectural value or the everyday heritage as an ordinary living environment worthy of respect and care? Some cultures of conservation prefer great subjects. A concept of design that adopts a behavioural orientation cannot but give greater attention to the treatment of ordinary urban settlements

inherited from the past. The literature seems to be poised between the two visions, at least in the initial stages (see the essential contributions by Larkham and Pendlebury, JUD, in the 1990s). Over time, the importance of the everyday heritage has become more evident and shared. The second dilemma regards regulatory tools. In the early 1990s, binding regulations on historical areas and buildings in Great Britain was standard (Section 11.3). Following this, the need for more flexible, proactive governance emerged in the field, initiating the season of urban regeneration projects. These raised a variety of problems balanced between public interest and private enhancement, between demands to protect what exists and innovative transformation. One stable point quickly solidified: the scope of these projects could not be the conservation of a physical form, but care for a form of life that evolves over time. Often, the spirit of conservation has (unduly) affected not only the forms, but also presumed local identity (an issue anticipated in Section 11.4, Point 8). It is regrettable to note that part of the literature adopts this notion superficially and deceptively, as occurs with certain political actors that ideologically abuse appeals to identity: reflection on the ‘identity obsession’ (Remotti, 2007, 2010), the ‘frenzy of identity’ (Bettini, 2020), or the ‘nonexistent identity’ (Jullien, 2018) would be useful for everyone. More prudence and sobriety on this front would be a mark of professional maturity (and social responsibility). Nevertheless, we can conclude that even the issues of the heritage tend to lose their original specifics in this framework, merging in the vast field of urban experiences and connections between forms and ways of life.

(10) *Urban Design (Conclusion)*

Ultimately, after a long path, how should this label be understood? ‘Shaping the cities and their public realm’ may be the shared commitment, according to Aspa Gospodini (University of Thessaly; JUD, 25-1, 2020). Some sources, however, seem to want to circumscribe the field. ‘Shaping the public space’ this is the priority (Dovey, *ibid.*) in the hypothesis that the design of public spaces should generate the formation or transformation of the city. This does not mean that the issue of urban architecture (or ‘architecture of the city’) should play a decisive role. On the contrary, I have documented with some surprise that the literature dedicates only marginal attention to large urban projects. The justification (as Alex Krieger, Harvard, observes in Krieger and Saunders, 2009, Chapter 8) would be that urban design, as a field of experience and reflexivity, does not necessarily have to deal with the formalization and implementation of concrete projects. It could limit itself to preparing the technical and procedural condi-

tions used to realize the final projects (in this sense, the function would not be different from that of strategic planning, except for the specific nature of certain problems, tools, and topics). According to others (see the picture represented by Krieger, *ibid.*), the view could be even more reductive: nothing more than a ‘frame of mind’ useful for adequately configuring real urban design problems (there is a risk of falling into pure methodology, as happened to certain trends in planning). One fact does not seem to be questioned (in fact, it is generally avoided or left in the shadows): there is no reason to understand urban design as a ‘discipline’ (Krieger, *ibid.*; Dovey, JUD, 25-1, 2020). If it were, it could not afford to leave certain dilemmas on the paradigmatic foundations unresolved: art or science? Even today, there is no shortage of confused reasoning on the possible nature of science or pseudoscience: vain discourse, as I have argued several times (Palermo, 2022, Section 3.1), because in this family of practices, the verdict of truth is never decisive. The idea of art is more appropriate (Kirkman, 2024), although many scholars in the field are concerned with distancing themselves from more playful and self-referential concepts, instead emphasizing ethical and social responsibilities (Stephen Marshall, Bartlett School, JUD, 21-4, 2016). In my opinion, the perspective is entirely relevant and certainly not reductive, provided it is not separated from the essential sphere of crafting (Palermo 2022, Section 3.6). While I find the temptation to give strength to the approach by aiming at the ‘art and science of place-making’ appalling (Cidre, Bartlett School, JUD, 21-5, 2016); the formula lacks justification and sense. Instead, it is a form of ‘arts and crafts’ that should be developed in the most appropriate ways in relation to the topic and specific context. The classification of different types of urban spaces (Carmona, JUD, 15-1, 15-2, 2010) and design practices (Lang, JUD, 1-1, 1996) is an essential component of the (indispensably) deepening of the discourse. Any attempt to identify a single, general frame of reference leads to empty or useless formulations. Such is the definition — which it is impossible not to share — that Stefano Cozzolino et al. (Dortmund) developed through a series of comparisons and simplifications. It is correct, but substantially insignificant: ‘urban design is a purposeful activity with collective and public concerns that deals with the production and adaptation of the built environment at scales larger than a single plot or building...’ (JUD, 25-1, 2020). The problem is how this general intent is conceived and realized in practice. A paradox thus emerges: it seems impossible to clarify and share, in general and unified terms, what it is, actually. When a plausible solution is outlined, it risks being too trivial or indeterminate. There is no alternative to the actual comparison of practices, with necessary attention for

the contextual differences, but also responsible choices with respect to the priorities and possibilities in question. In my opinion, the same conclusion applies to the (likewise ambiguous and elusive) field of planning. As Ernst Alexander (2015) argues, ‘there is not planning, only planning practices’. The course of practice shows us that a substantial drift is underway: the celebration of technique, design, and control has given way to the illusions of place-making, but the unknowns in tactical, temporary, informal (messy) urbanism are thickening.

11.5 A Tacit Drift

The literature that I have considered reveals unexpected gaps and perhaps surprising, but certainly not trivial omissions; the implications and consequences seem important and negative. How can we interpret and govern the evolution of urban forms in ongoing development processes on a large scale in certain contexts? How can we interpret design-oriented work when faced with the commitments and responsibilities of large urban transformations by means of area projects, which is the most common, influential responsibility in many spatial contexts? How can we evaluate and develop the possible fusion of planning regulations with morphological principles and design requirements? How can we avoid the merely communicative drift in spatial and strategic visions, while ensuring an effective contribution to the form and organization of the territory? How can we design landscape projects that are more sensitive to the experiences of the places, not just of the presumed reasons of identity or form? How can we deepen the morphogenetic impact and effective contribution to the socio-spatial development of large infrastructure projects? These are not original questions, not even in Italy, which even plays a marginal role in the debate that I have depicted here. Whatever the context, there are evident difficulties in producing original, meaningful arguments on the topic. The problem is that on substantial questions of this order, not only is there a lack of relevant contributions on the most recent literature, but an objective lack of attention becomes clear. These issues now seem to be on the margins of the agenda. Nor does it seem possible to argue that the prevalent orientation today is to offer detailed contributions, related to specific functions and spaces, but still consistent with an overall vision that may seem plausible, legitimate, and shared. In most cases, however, these are fragments, essentially independent and lacking a common reference, as if the recomposition of the parts were not a priority, and the need to make some gradual progress on particular issues were a justified objective, at least in the short

term. It is no coincidence that there are increasingly frequent references to the logic of tactical urbanism. ‘Small steps, but a long view’: this was Patrick Geddes’ desire and programme. Today, the obvious fact is that the horizon of problems is limited in space and time, while the need for flexibility, contingency, and adaptation become irresistible (even if they theoretically remain in the background). This is certainly an emerging change of professional models, but probably also the recognition that the role of social practice is decisive. Is this a modest perspective, which nevertheless deserves respect compared to the often arbitrary digressions of Utopians or the imperious (but weakly justified) claims of modern town planning? While some partial progress is possible, it would be unreasonable to forego the opportunities, neglecting the necessary developments of concepts, techniques, and experiments. The fact remains that urban design has been animated by civic ambitions that have often taken the form of a great urban project or master plan, where the attribute does not recall the irredeemably dated grandeur of City Beautiful movement, but the capacity to positively affect the substance and quality of transformation processes in the given context.

Must we conclude that those aspirations were in vane and lacking measures? The question seems uncertain, but I do not believe it can be eluded all of a sudden. A partial, incremental vision is not necessarily a limit or a problem. However, possibly changing course with respect to the ambitions of the past should be justified with good arguments. My impression is that the literature limits itself to noting an actual drift, without a true critical reflection on the reasons for the ongoing change. Not only that: it risks failing in the requirement of the specifics of the contributions. The ‘behavioural’ orientation that seems to prevail in the world of urban design today is a fact that also emerges from the literature on the urban phenomenon (if we consider the most recent publishing trends of journals such as *City*, the more solid *Cities*, or even the classic *Urban Studies*) and from planning itself (as I showed in Chapter 10, by analysing a selection of sources; the verdict would also be confirmed by examining other authoritative sources such as the glorious *Journal of Planning Education and Research*). A variety of traditions therefore seems to converge towards a common end, which also appears somewhat reductive. The instances of *tactical, informal, provisional* urban phenomena, which seemed typical of the Global South, today play an explicit and influential role even in the heart of the West (not in Italy, in reality, where the question remains in the shadows; perhaps it continues to be — either guiltily or hypocritical-

ly — underestimated). If this is the trend, some doubt is justified. It is not enough to act on fragments, without asking what is, or could be, the fate of the good intentions that have enlivened disciplinary developments in the long run, albeit with very controversial outcomes. If (urban) planning and design still aspire to a better reputation and social importance, they cannot avoid this family of problems. Perhaps it is not enough to deal locally with walkability, main streets, gardens or shopping malls. A sense of place, the public sphere, environmental and social sustainability, material conditions of living are decisive issues, whose calling is not enough; they require a capacity for effective action with respect to specific themes and contexts.

11.6 In Search of Stable Points: Hypotheses, Responsibilities

Amid a nonuniform, fluid, fleeting framework, the orientation I hope for in Italian urban planning may rely on two stable points. Giving form and organization to the urban space (to borrow Giancarlo De Carlo's meaningful formula) is still the main mission not only of design, but of planning itself. The result is that excessive, let alone exclusive, enthusiasm for the latest form of plans would not be justified: nothing more than a strategic scenario that can only be specified through targeted policies and projects (Palermo, 2023b). The arrival at this weak version of disciplinary instrumentation (which is also shared by the design literature, as I have documented) was not a conquest, but the result of a slow drift marked by the failure of other, more ambitious and prescriptive visions. Not only the orthodox visions of modern town planning, but also design-oriented planning tools developed in the 1990s, whose failure should serve as a warning; the solution to problems is not at hand. It would be misleading, however, that the exit can be indicated by rediscovering a merely strategic approach. We should not forget that the current trends have long been contrasted in Italy by a large part of the discipline, not only by the exponents of the maximalist movement, but also by the best interpreters of urban reformism. In fact, they severely criticized the vision and experiences of Gigi Mazza at the turn of the century, while today he represents one of the few significant and potentially influential references (Chapter 5). In addition, it would be naive to forget that a strategic orientation was tested in other countries for nearly half a century: no illusion is permitted. The limits are clear and cannot be ignored.

In my opinion, this leads to the need for a paradigm shift (Palermo, 2022 and Chapter 10). City planning today cannot only deal with the precondi-

tions of urban facts (in the form of rules or visions), but must assume direct responsibility in the field of actual actions, i.e. the production of concrete and specific policies and projects, consistent (one hopes) with a shared vision. I believe the conclusion applies to the current interpretation of urban planning as well as that of design, which in this sense could be understood as converging practices. It is not enough to appeal to the ‘frame of mind’ as a premise and guide for actions or future events. The topicality of the profile of the architect-planner (a largely unfulfilled challenge) re-emerges and there is reason to ask whether and how the planning culture can contribute to the quality of urban design and transformation in original and influential ways. It would be a mistake, however, to focus exclusively on the physical and formal aspects of the design commitment — as the last phase of that oscillation between the physical and social that, with alternating incidents, has tended to reproduce for more than a century. From experience, we should have learned that the development of important urban projects always introduces sensitive policy issues. Today, planners should have learned to profit from the now extensive familiarity with questions of consensus-building, decision-making, and process management. Awareness of and expertise with these issues are indispensable requirements, which should accompany design capabilities in the strict sense. Some voices in the world of urban design have long since grasped this need, from Jonathan Barnett, who 50 years ago — based on direct experience in New York — conceived that field of practice as public policy (Barnett, 1974), to Matthew Carmona, who recently (despite the now obvious difficulties with implementing form-based codes in plan-making) wanted to revive the topic of design governance in the UK (Carmona, JUD, 19-1, 2014). This means not avoiding professional responsibilities to surrender to the flow of social practices according to current trends, but trying to renew the technique in more relevant and effective forms. The framework that is outlined — I do not ignore this limit — may cause certain embarrassment. While the most recent literature seems to favour increasingly detailed and circumscribed (sometimes ephemeral) partial issues, the substance of the problems continues to refer to the (not unprecedented) challenges of complexity. This seems to be nothing new. Perhaps an eternal return to dated demands and unmet aspirations is the likeliest fate? Any discontinuity with a generally disappointing past will depend only on the effective capability of urban planners to draw some lessons from extensive and often troubled experience. Should we accept a substantial resizing of roles and responsibilities or content ourselves with the rhetorical celebration of a purely stated complexity? Or should we glimpse the conditions for more respon-

sible, mature choices and actions that are effectively capable of affecting the course of events?

Knowing how to rethink and practise urban projects and policies — together — as social constructs (as taught by De Carlo and Wildavsky, to mention just two exemplary, evidently independent sources) seems to be the key step, the essential requirement. The hypothesis has been taking shape for several decades, but progress has been very partial in planning, even in contexts such as France and Spain, where this orientation has taken a complete form and been able to rely on important experiments. In Italy, Bernardo Secchi's experience should be cause for concern; he had all the conceptual tools to work on the two traditions together, but achieved results that did not always match expectations. With respect to 'policy analysis', a disciplinary sector now devotes due attention to the issues of policy design, i.e. the substantive (not just procedural) problems that the construction and implementation of a policy creates in a specific context (Howlett, 2019; van Buuren, Lewis and Peters, 2023); however, the effort generally stops at the threshold of physical planning. For urban planners, the recent rediscovery of the strategic aspect of the problems does not seem to entail the 'return of the political' (Mouffe, 1993), but only to some methodological and communicative exercises. Concepts anticipated by Pier Luigi Crosta (1984) and Gigi Mazza (1987), which go back a long way, have remained without original or important developments in planning, and not only in Italy. Some issues seem to be addressed by today's widespread trends towards tactical urbanism, but references to everyday practice are often more banal or opportunistic. While the results seem uncertain, however, the perspective seems to lack any alternatives. In my opinion, a meaningful future for urban design (as with planning) will depend on the ability to respect the two conditions mentioned in this section. Even though the course of experience does not feed great illusions.

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Part III

12. Perspectives (or Suggestions) for the Future

A survey on the ways in which urban planning is perceived in Italy (at a time when there is clear abuse or misuse of sampling surveys) would probably confirm that, following common sense, the discipline evokes apparently abstruse but very concrete technical parameters (such as building volumes), or a current set of rules whose reasons may seem uncertain or obsolete. At any rate, they are perceived as a limit to freedom and personal interests. More rarely, in contexts affected by urban transformations of some importance, urban planning is also understood as an active tool for change. For example, in Milan, there is a widespread opinion that urban planning has been able to create ‘new skyscrapers’ in the last 15 years. Nevertheless, the vision seems poor and outdated, not unlike more traditional images, incapable of intercepting contemporary questions and challenges. At the same time, public discourse on the issue is greatly impoverished. The vision and justification of land use and development plans (when they are renewed, with decreasing commitment and clamour) are reduced to trivial rhetoric about goals and strategies that could apply to any context. In fact, the impression is that arguments in this field are now delegated to the real estate operators and urban developers themselves who, in ritualistic and sometimes impudent ways, introduce fanciful but repetitive narratives about the new way of living, excellent urban quality, uptowns, and so on, while the media and even disciplinary culture no longer act as critical filters. Public opinion cannot help but be disoriented. There are probably many people who, in good faith, are convinced that the most recent urban transformations in Milan are proof of the vitality of the metropolis, whereas I believe they are occasional and objectively modest operations, all the more so if we reflect on the available opportunities, which have largely been lost.

In the mid-1900s, George Orwell (2021) was concerned about a potentially

looming threat: the formation (by a totalitarian power that could potentially take over) of a new political language that risked stifling free thought and conditioning individual behaviour. And yet it seems to me that his concerns could be echoed today in discourse on the city and its transformations, although in this case only normal market interests and the ordinary functions of communication come into play (which Mario Perniola harshly criticised, 2004). The city has always been the cradle of questionable rhetoric (Amendola, 2016) representing different ideological visions (Rossi and Vanolo, 2024), but it now adopts striking forms in terms of triviality and a lack of measure. The most common media language is becoming celebratory and shamelessly commercial, without any care for the real condition of ‘urban humanities’ (Cuff et al., 2020). It boasts of great progress and benefits, while recounting an artificial truth that does not correspond to reality and will struggle to be fulfilled (Vanolo, 2017). The district of Cascina Merlata in Milan seems emblematic to me. Presented as an ideal type of *smart* neighbourhood, sustainable and easily accessible, thousands of families have now lived for years as pioneers in a neighbourhood under construction without any urban services, where public spaces represent a residual, unfinished element. Some services became available towards the end of 2023, but within a giant shopping centre that has brought traffic, crowding, and further pollution. It seems difficult to assess the role of the public administration in what should have been an urban regeneration programme. However, the official narrative continues to tell an entirely different story. We are no longer in the times of ‘disorder in planning discourse’ (Chapter 4). In fact, the main problem today seems to be the monotony of the language and conformism of common sense. However, Secchi’s intuition (1984) seems up-to-date once again: it is necessary to question discursive formations to be able to reconsider and renew territorial realities. Language remains a problem that should not be underestimated. I offer one small example, once again from Milan. I have never liked the ‘vertical forest’ in Porta Nuova. Setting aside questions of merit (Palermo, 2022, Section 4.2), I would just like to note the coarseness of the title. It has nothing to do with Alvar Aalto’s *forest town*, nor with the elegant reflections on the connection between *forest* and *city* by some ‘great figures’ (such as Rilke, Baudelaire, Benjamin: see Franco Rella’s afterword to Carlo Formenti, *La foresta intelligente*, 1981). An image with an easy media effect was adopted — albeit unjustified and misleading (compared to ordinary vertical gardening) — which unfortunately seems worthy of ‘Open to Meraviglia’, an initiative by the Italian government to promote tourism that, luckily, we have not heard about for some time. I do not think it is useful for anyone

to accept that the urban planning discourse reduces to building volumes, bureaucratic rules, or pure publicity slogans. In the final chapters, I aim to establish a few (minimum) conditions for truth. While the 'urban project' has become a key element of the desired change, what is the effective meaning and what are the critical points of these experiences (Chapter 13)? After the reflections made up to this point, what is the potential and what are the essential requirements I suggest to give planning a more dignified future (Chapter 14)?

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13. Challenges of the 'Urban Project'

13.1 '*Dernier avatar de l'urbanisme*'?

This is the question Gabriel Dupuis asks (2002) in his brief review of a book by Patrizia Ingallina (2001), which offered one of the first overviews of the French (but also Italian) *projets urbains* in the late 20th century. 'Avatar' is an unusual image in the context. It may appear emphatic compared to a routine review (which does not introduce novel problems or original reflections). Perhaps the author aimed to express a more ironic and critical view of the announced change? Examining the text, some doubts may seem legitimate, but we must recognize that the conclusions are positive overall, despite some objections. It is true: at the dawn of the new century, urban conditions had changed compared to the modern idea of the city, and planning (not only in France) needed a regeneration, a new identity (literally, a reincarnation), through its ability to renew functions and tools, rhetoric and representations. By then it had been established that the prescriptive and (possibly) scientific tradition of planning, which had raised considerable hopes in the 1900s, could only lead to failure. In that framework, the urban project came to represent a promising alternative. Christian Devillers, the influential French architect-planner, had no doubts: there is no future for traditional *planification*; the *projet urbain* is a strategy, a practice worth testing (1994). On the other hand, similar opinions had already been formulated in other contexts. In Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, Doglio, Samonà, and De Carlo denounced what they considered the irreversible crisis of 'planning drunkenness' (a bit crude but effective expression: De Carlo et al., 1976, p. 80). At the same time at Harvard, Luis Sert proclaimed the failure of urban planning (certified symbolically in 1956 with the closure of the Chicago school of 'rational planning', founded after the Second World War by Tugwell and Perloff) and considered the revival of urban design as an indispensable alternative (Krieger and Saunders, 2009, Chapter 1). The experiences commented on by Ingallina could be understood some decades later as an objective confirmation of those opinions and orientations. However, the process was not linear or could even be considered obvious. As I documented in Chapter 11, the field of urban design remains uncertain and confused. It is still a 'mongrel discipline' (Carmona, 2014); perhaps the very hypothesis of a disciplinary foundation now seems inappropriate for what is merely a field of practices (Dovey, 2020). The evolution of training experiences shows a sequence of unfinished projects and unconvincing experiments. The integration of planning and design remains a chimera, but nor has the presumption of

independence on behalf of either of the two traditions ever worked (Ceccarelli, 1983; Palermo, 2022, Section 5.3). The urban project also remains an ambiguous notion (Gasparrini, 1999). It should represent a turning point with respect to the tradition of general and prescriptive planning, although in many cases it only expresses an additional and contingent, more flexible and adaptive opportunity that continues to coexist with the more orthodox visions and tools (this is the main limitation denounced by Dupuy in his review). The initial question therefore still seems up to date. Can we really maintain that the urban project is a new guiding principle of contemporary planning? What are the reasons and salient characteristics of the announced change? What is the potential and what are the critical points? Does this possible regeneration represent a truly developed, widespread, and shared change? We cannot limit ourselves to acknowledging the trend without discussing some emerging dilemmas.

13.2 An Interstitial Space

The first consideration is that the urban project arises at the margins of institutional and disciplinary areas traditionally assigned to dealing with the problems of territorial transformations: planning, architecture, and politics itself. It tends to occupy a landlocked space that belongs to everyone and no one; it is not clearly delimited, independent, or distinctive. Interest arises because the main disciplinary traditions struggle to achieve the expected results. While the perspective is still general and prescriptive, urban planning reveals uncertainties and embarrassing difficulties with respect to organizing and managing area transformations that are conspicuous, innovative, and long-term. Architecture risks becoming confused when the scale of problems expands and the issues that need to be addressed multiply. Political visions and programmes are always looking for the necessary consensus and the conditions for feasibility of interventions, which often require compromises or opportunism with respect to declared intentions. Amid missed opportunities, unstable intentions, and uncertain prospects, an interstitial space for experimentation opens, seemingly destined for permanent transition because it arises from the limits and unresolved difficulties of the most solid and accredited traditions, but without finding a reliable composition. After more than a century of experimentation, we should probably conclude that the hypothesis of building a new and peculiar disciplinary field does not hold up. Recurring references to the issues and experiences of 'urban design' only allude to a set of practices that remain heterogeneous and often contingent, where power relations risk becoming

decisive in the context, while technical-professional expertise in the field is neither given nor shared. To try to overcome this stalled situation, I believe it is useful to distinguish the main lines of development in this vast family of experiences. In my opinion, there are at least four tracks of emerging interest. One line of thought and action tends to conceive the ‘urban project as a method’, a simple and seemingly comforting way out. Unfortunately, it is generic, only preliminary, and not always generative (‘nothing comes from method’ is the admonition by Michel Serres, 2016, whom I have already referenced). The second perspective points to the search for good models with a possible *normative value* (in the sense explored by Kevin Lynch, between the 1960s and 1980s). Today, the hypothesis of designing ‘*progetti-norma*’ [urban projects involving prescriptive form-based codes], with a binding function with respect to future transformations, has lost credence; however, the search for guidelines, recommendations, and potential requirements useful for guiding concrete design work remains topical. The third trace highlights some constitutional limits of the technical concepts of urban design. The intention to bring about authentic experiences of place-making through pure design and consistent realization of an area project generally proved to be in vain. The actual sense of physical transformation will only develop over time, through practices of living and use that will occur in the context: ‘the people make the place’ (Smith, 2008). This is a complex and gradual process of *place-shaping* (Adams and Tiesdell, 2013), where social and environmental conditions have a significant impact on the development of the design experience. Underestimating the connections between urban project and everyday practices may be an elusive or instrumental simplification. In developing this outline, it may also seem reasonable to consider the sense and impact of the area project with respect to urban politics, i.e. to the range of divisive interests introduced by every major urban transformation, which require at least partial composition (the fourth line of interest). The representation of these processes in the media tend to take on exhortative, seemingly ‘win-win’ forms. It might be necessary to revive other images that were once influential: the metaphor of the city as a growth-machine (Molotch, 1976; Jonas and Wilson, 1999); the idea of the just city, because it is reasonable to doubt the equitable distribution of economic benefits and social costs resulting from urban development (Fainstein, 2010; Goh *et al.*, 2022; Kellogg, 2022). My hypothesis is that it would be a mistake to favour a technical concept of ‘urban project’, as the pure design of physical transformations, a method of conduct or a potential guide that should assume normative value for future actions. These paths have been widely explored over the long term, but

the results did not meet expectations. Why should the perspectives seem more promising today? In contrast, I believe it would be appropriate to recognize the radical incompleteness of any vision of the purely technical, methodical, or programmatic problem. The sense and quality of an urban project depend on the concrete work of design, but they only take shape through implementation and use, in the specific local politics, which requires adequate analytical contributions on the interests and strategies in question, and the construction of the most appropriate modes of policy-making. These are topics that seem difficult to avoid, and yet they are often marginal compared to the dominance of design, method, or models. The paradox of this field of experiences is that it is formed in the empty void left uncultivated by official traditions. That void, however, is 'filled with interests' (as Quaroni lucidly anticipated in *Torre di Babele*, 1967, p. 214): to underestimate this reality is to risk irrelevance. Therefore, I will discuss all four questions at the same time, after quickly reconstructing an essential genealogy of the idea of urban design, following the traces of the main experiments. The goal is to verify the peculiar characteristics and actual relevance of a design-based concept of planning practice, which is often recited (Palermo, 2017), but does not seem to have found clear, convincing, and shared empirical confirmation.

13.3 The Surprising French Experience

In my opinion, the most effective introduction to the topic is found in French experiences and reflections in the 1990s. In that context, two fundamental dimensions of the urban project emerged with great clarity: the rediscovery of the physical city and necessary innovation in the mechanisms for governing spatial transformations. These two tendencies expressed substantial discontinuity from the more influential tradition of *planification urbaine*, which in France had long taken centralist, prescriptive forms relating to an often schematic and merely functional representation of the territory. In fact, only in 1983 was a town planning act passed that introduced principles of territorial decentralization, giving the local government important responsibilities in matters of planning. This dealt not only with the transfer of some originally centralized powers, but also significant renewal in the vision and tools that may have been quicker and more intense because they followed a long period of immobilism. In the 1980s and 1990s, we saw the proliferation of original devices of urban governance, such as '*projets urbains*' (Devillers, 1994; Panerai and Mangin, 1999), the '*politique de la ville*' (Chaline, 1997), and '*gouverner par contrat*' (Gaudin, 1993 and

1999). However, the planning tradition continued to exert widespread influence (the ambiguous coexistence of old and new tools was Dupuis' main criticism, 2002). A large part of the discipline and profession has continued to be inspired by more orthodox values and models as the only authentic basis of legitimacy, although unfortunately destined for imperfect applications. A hybrid model thus formed, including various tools from traditional plans to various innovative forms of urban projects and policies. The perception of a real paradigm shift remained vague or marginal; the most common impression was simply that the repertoire of opportunities had expanded; the political system would occasionally be able to choose the rhetoric, strategy, or tools most convenient at that stage and in that context according to the well-known logic of 'contingent planning' (Alexander, 1996), made more powerful and effective by the development of techniques (analytical, legal, planning). In contrast, the need, the desire to question that traditional planning system was missing. Authoritative planners such as Pierre Merlin (1991) and Gilles Novarina (2003) continued to express outright respect or nostalgia for directive forms of public planning, still considered as a potentially virtuous model, although unfortunately only under rare conditions do they succeed in guaranteeing results that meet expectations. In a recent book that presents an overview of the evolution of the planning culture, Novarina (2023) devotes little attention to the frontiers of innovation. He prefers to reread of the classics (or precursors) of the discipline for the umpteenth time, tracing a sequence of varied figures and episodes that follow one another without a historical-critical framework or a vision of the future (the same repetitive and inconclusive strategy was revived in Italy by Gaeta, 2024). Moreover, the arguments in favour of the 'general and prescriptive' tradition remain weak. As Xavier Desjardins confirms (2020, Introduction), the main strategy reduces to a rhetorical appeal to citizens' conscience and sense of responsibility. Can urban society do without a shared vision of future development, the capacity to coordinate partial actions, or the fair and efficient regulation of land uses? In these terms, the answer seems obvious. However, it overlooks the actual ability of traditional tools to ensure an adequate response to impending problems, which has too often been lacking in the long term. As a result, the planning discourse continues to remain in balance between aspirations, desires, and failures, a vicious cycle that seems to have no solution.

On the other hand, a desire for a break and radical innovation with respect to tradition arose in France in the world of architecture, or rather architecture-planning, thanks to a few eminent figures who were active and influ-

ential. Bernard Huet was one of the most authoritative interpreters of the desired shift, seriously revising the planning discourse, which distanced itself from bureaucratic and functionalist models to focus once again on the physical city, the historical evolution of urban forms and conditions, and the 'architecture of the city' (Pommier, 2021). With Huet, Christian Devillers shared a radical criticism of traditional *planification*: the sector view of problems, imposing logic, the rigidity of rules and modes of intervention; however, he aimed to show the concrete possibility of rethinking urban space and its transformations using the tools of urban design according to more participatory and more legitimized processes of consensus-building (Devillers, 1994). Philippe Panerai was also concerned with renewing the disciplinary statute, reorganizing technical knowledge and current practices according to new manuals on morphological analysis (1999, with Depaule and Demorgon) and urban design (1999, with David Mangin). On the institutional front, Ariella Masboungi directed an important line of analysis and evaluation of the innovative *projets urbains* promoted in France under public policies (2002, 2012). These figures represent an active and influential elite, although they were unable to change the broader orientation of the discipline and profession. This fact seems interesting. Each author correctly acknowledged the influence of certain analysis and urban design developed in Italy after the Second World War (thanks to the theories and experiences of figures such as Muratori, Samonà, Quaroni, Aldo Rossi, Aymonino, De Carlo, Gregotti, and Cervellati). Events in France also quickly surpassed the original references. The new and important fact that was substantially missing in Italy was the development of innovative positions on urban governance. François Ascher (2001) showed the way, outlining a radical turn from the more traditional positions of Merlin and Novarina. In short, I could observe that the author proposed a 'weak, but responsible' concept of planning similar to the vision developed at the same time in Italy by Gigi Mazza. Alain Bourdin (2010) later moved along the same lines. To tackle the crisis and problems posed by the new settlement conditions, pragmatic, flexible planning is needed, planning that is aware of its limits but also ready to assume its responsibilities with respect to the *ville néolibérale*. An interesting and peculiar fact in France was the convergence between such reflections on planning and a branch of 'policy analysis' based on the principle of *policy tools* (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004). As is known (Palermo, 2009, Chapter 7), this is a branch of implementation studies that was originally developed in the pragmatic English-speaking world (Hood, 1983; Salamon, 2002). The most common message is that the definition and assessment of operational tools is an

essential step in verifying the feasibility of a policy or specific project. The most innovative perspective was the recognition of the plurality of tools available to public administration bodies. These are responsible for choosing and implementing the strategy that appears best justified in the context, where the predefined theme may be regulation, redistribution, public communication leading to official formulation of the problem, the enactment of a variety of players, and the integration or at least coordination of their actions. The political and strategic aspect of choosing the tools therefore emerges, which may even be decisive. The developments in this approach in France were perhaps the most timely and consistent in Europe. In the intersection between *nouvel urbanisme* and policy analysis, the original and exhaustive contributions by Gilles Pinson stand out, as he sought to ensure that emerging trends were ensured worthy cultural justification and clear political legitimacy. The rediscovery of the physical city remains a fundamental assumption for public action, but it should be integrated with an innovative concept of spatial governance. There seem to be two essential requirements. The basic principle is ‘*gouverner par projets*’ (Pinson, 2004 and 2009), i.e. through partial transformations capable of producing important strategic and morphological effects on various spatial scales. To avoid the risks of ‘disjointed incrementalism’ (Lindblom, 1959), it would be necessary to frame local actions within a coherent overall view as a ‘strategic spatial framework’ or ‘*politique de la ville*’ (Pinson, 2006). This is a wise, suggestive perspective in principle, but its fulfilment is certainly not taken for granted.

Are this vision and the resulting experiences capable of configuring a true paradigm shift for the planning discipline (not just in France)? Some doubt is reasonable. Perhaps this is just a set of experiments worthy of interest because they attempt to respond to difficulties that are now clear and widespread; however, they do not represent a well-developed or truly legitimate trend in the eyes of disciplinary culture, politics, and common sense. This is also because the concept of *projet urbain* in France has remained poised between three unequal interpretations and perspectives (the notion seems destined to remain ‘*floue*’, as Patrizia Ingallina observed in 2001). The first line is, of course, the rediscovery of the physical design of parts of the city as an essential means of urban transformation. Ultimately, this could involve a few ‘exploratory projects’ useful for creating knowledge and orienting future action (contributions by Huet, Devillers, and Panerai between the 1980s and 1990s were exemplary). The second line is the necessary change of governance models for a post-Fordist and post-modern socie-

ty, which requires a transparent and responsible use of inevitably partial, flexible, adaptive tools. A new line of experience opened on the threshold of the new century in the intersection that was being created between the Ascher and Bourdin's *nouvel urbanisme*, and Le Galès, Lascoumes, and Pinson's policy tools. The third and perhaps most ephemeral line concerns the coeval suggestion of 'urban strategies' as a potential — public — guide to the social, economic, and spatial development of the city (Ascher, 2001; Pinson, 2005 and 2006). That path risks representing an ideological simplification amid the difficulties of change, if we share Mazza's criticism of *strategic spatial planning* (here, Chapter 5), which I developed broadly in Palermo, 2022 (Chapter 7). This is the family of meanings that I consider the most weak and illusory. It probably represented the attempt — too thin and precarious — to ensure a reform-oriented result of the neoliberal drive long underway, opposing the improbable idea of the 'city as a collective actor' to partisan interests (Le Galès, 2002; Healey, 2002). For some time, the rhetoric of strategic thinking (which, as Mintzberg teaches, 1994, should not be confused with actual strategy-making activities) pervaded the disciplinary discourse; however, the concrete effects were objectively modest and the trend became more marginal (today it seems to be cultivated mainly by private practitioners). This was an ideological period with little importance compared to looming problems. Gilles Pinson himself seems to have overrated the phenomenon at the beginning of the century (2005, 2006). There is no doubt, however, that in more recent years, the author's orientation has changed. The key topics are now the powers and processes that determine actual developments in the neo-liberal city (Pinson, 2020; 2017, with Morel Journal; 2020, with Lefèvre), with respect to which the rhetoric of public urban strategy is either struggling or marginal.

Despite these limitations, I believe there is no doubt as to the interest and importance of this line of experience. In Italy, we cannot rely on a similar movement; in fact, we should recognize that the capacity for influence has changed direction over time. French architecture-planning was inspired by the typo-morphological studies devised in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s; later, however, it was the Italians who, towards the end of the century, drew inspiration from the new French experiences of urban governance. Curiously, the trend arose in architecture-planning circles (see Falini, ed., 2003) or in certain sectors of public administration aimed at renewing a traditional bureaucratic approach and its technocratic variants (thanks to leading figures such as Gaetano Fontana in public works or Fabrizio Barca on issues of economic-territorial development). The attention expressed

by official circles of Italian planning was much more marginal. Therefore, even in Italy, even more than in France, the urban project remained a polysemous suggestion and empirically undefined. Before discussing the sense and quality of the experiences, a quick survey of the field of action that was formed would be useful.

13.4 Three Families of Topics

We can distinguish three fields of practice that originally had at least partially independent characteristics, but which gave rise over time to multiple processes of blending, assuming new centrality in different stages. Not unambiguously, the very sequence of references gives an idea of the ongoing evolution of disciplinary interests. An initial, significant line regards the issues of urban regeneration, an ambivalent category (Lanzani, 2024; Cucinella and Uccello, 2024, Chapter 1) that can allude to different interpretations of the intervention on the existing state. The polysemy is clearly confirmed in the disciplinary languages, which seem to hesitate between unequal options: *renewal*, *revitalization*, *renaissance*, or *regeneration* in English; *réhabilitation*, *renouvellement*, *rénovation*, or *régénération* in French; *recupero*, *rinnovo*, *riqualificazione*, or *rigenerazione* in Italian. Perhaps it is necessary to (try to) give the subject a more ordered and shared conceptual framework once again. One of the key issues is the scope and means of intervention. Should the priority be the physical redevelopment of the existing city, or should the process of renewal also invest society, the economy, the urban environment, i.e. the quality of life and development potential of the area in question? While the first family of interventions mainly belonged to the sphere of physical planning, a second group of interests emerged in the 1990s, aimed at protecting the social conditions of such areas or, in more general terms, fostering local development in all respects (social, economic, environmental), through spatial transformation processes that address not only the physical forms of the settlement, but also urban functions and practices. That thread found significant support and new opportunities due European Union policies on spatial development and social cohesion. In the new century, another line of development has solidified progressively, apparently taking centre stage. The interest in urban (re)development has been reiterated, but variations on the theme have changed significantly: *smartness* and the capacity for urban innovation have become the salient requirements ('the smartness mandate': Halpern and Mitchell, 2022). The first traces of the shift were seen when a focus on the 'creative city' emerged. Following this, the line

of 'smart urbanism' quickly developed, which is now investigated in endless literature. From *physical redevelopment* to *socio-spatial development*, then to *urban innovation*: these are the three emerging phases, although each tends to rework the inherited topics of interest. A reconsideration of the object and scope has also led to a substantial change in governance models and tools. The doubts on prescriptive planning, already widespread among the lines of planners themselves, were enhanced by the progressive revision of the issues and scope of the intervention. The shift towards more flexible and adaptive tools now seems to be an irrevocable trend. We consider some essential characteristics of the three lines of experience.

Regenerating the Physical City

The paradox of this area of urban practice is that it holds features that seem unified according to initial evidence, but a less cursory investigation soon reveals ambiguities and substantial distinctions that are reproduced in space and time. The first impression is that this is the ideal laboratory for testing the concept of urban project. It is a question of: intervening on the existing city, where problems of structure or use emerge; identifying a critical area (which is usually not formally defined); developing a project for recovery or renovation which usually makes use of ad-hoc tools that are more agile and targeted than general regulations; and implementing the project while overcoming various difficulties that may arise due to resources, consensus, regulations, and long time frames (Somhegyi and Giombini, 2024). Well-defined technical knowledge has now solidified on these practices, extending from the analysis of the physical city to the economics and management of the urban project, and it applies regardless of the ideological and practical orientation of the experience (Couch, 1990; Karrer et al., 1998; Remesar, 2016). According to Tigran Haas (2018, with Locke), a single *re-urbanism* paradigm may guide all interventions in the existing city. The official rhetoric also seems to converge. In a variety of times and contexts, the definitions of this family of interventions prove to be substantially equal. The aim is to remedy the critical aspects of certain physical structures without neglecting to care for the social needs in the context, through a 'comprehensive and integrated vision and action that leads to the resolution of urban problems and seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of an area that has been subject to change' (Robert and Sykes, 2000, p. 17). The same virtuous principles were confirmed at different times and in different contexts: the United States, Europe (Couch et al., 2003; Jones and Evans, 2008; Tallon, 2010), but also the Global South (Leary and McCa-

rthy, 2013). This unified image dissolves quickly if we observe the actual practices. The impressive fact is the divide between operations that follow market logic (most of them) and those that would respond to community demands. The literature shows a clear imbalance in favour of the first group (exceptions include: Pierson and Smith, 2001; Colantonio and Dixon, 2011; Matthews and O'Brien, 2016). It may be an intentional objective or side effect, but the phenomenon of gentrification is normally associated with urban renewal or regeneration (Dennis Gale, 2021, confirmed the trend over a century). Moreover, in a variety of contexts and possibly with some shift in time, the same sequence of stages (at least four, in general) is reproduced, each of which marks a significant change in public policy and intervention in the field. The first is the period that we could call *renewal*, *réhabilitation*, *recupero*, whose main object is the physical city. The second (represented by the French notion of *renouveau*: Chaline, 1999) notes the undesirable social effects of previous urban policies and requires a public commitment more oriented around revitalizing the economy and society of urban areas in crisis. The growing difficulties of the welfare state, however, condition the extent and effectiveness of those programmes; the activation and partnership of private interests willing to cooperate in the field becomes indispensable (McCarthy, 2007; Horita and Koizumi, 2009; Shand, 2013). This opens the most current period of urban regeneration, which objectively seems more sensitive to the neo-liberal drive of the urban market (Kinsella, 2021) — or the will of the autocratic state, where it exists (Romano, 2020) — rather than virtuous demands for reform. The cycle therefore seems to close with a return to the difficulties of the first phase. The limits and risks of the experiences are plausible; they must be verified case by case. The official narrative now refuses to distinguish the topics of *rénovation* from those of *(re)development*. The ambivalent image of urban regeneration may cover (or confuse) the two families of questions. Perhaps it expresses the desire to better pose the problem; perhaps it is just a rhetorical revision that risks deceiving and (therefore) confusing. Only the effective experience can clarify the dilemma.

Socio-Spatial Development

On the verge of the new century, this line of experiences represented the peak of innovation and hope, resulting from an evolutionary process that was very promising on paper. The first step was to recognize the opportunity to act (govern) by projects (Section 13.3). Initially, the content of the projects was very sector-based, such as the topic of *réhabilitation* for a building heritage or degraded area (Backouche, 2016). To overcome the

limitations of 'disjointed incrementalism', it seemed reasonable to extend the field of intervention. Why not integrate those programmes with measures for social support for residents and economic revitalization of the area (Stone and Stoker, 2015)? Indeed, since the 1990s, the paradigm of sustainability has presumed joint action on environmental, economic, and social problems (Beatley 1995; Jepson, 2001), as well as the ability to reconcile protection and development (Wheeler, 2004; Mancebo, 2008; Baudin, 2009). The main 'complex programmes' tested in Italy at the time (INTERREG, PRUSST, Patti Territoriali, Programmi Integrati di Intervento, and others) followed that road. The desired integration should have limited the possible negative effects of sector policies, such as the 'gentrification' that often follows 'urban renewal' (Lees et al., 2008 and 2016; Semi, 2015; Kern, 2022). *Sustainability* and *integration* have thus become the new totems of urban and spatial design, also due to the strong impetus of European Union policies for development and cohesion. This perspective has been explored from every point of view: analytical, methodological, regulatory, design-oriented, operational, evaluative. I have nothing to add or modify compared to what I wrote at the time (Palermo, 2004, Chapters 11 and 13; 2009, Chapter 4), nor do I find it necessary to offer another summary of the argument. Two questions could probably be asked: What account can be made based on the experiences? Why does interest in the topic today seem increasingly weak? In principle, the approach is irrefutable. It is a complex version of the idea of *projet urbain* which does not merely outline a strategic vision, but defines a network of operational, complementary, or rather, integrated interventions. The difficulties arise in the course of experience for reasons that are not only technical, but also political, social, and administrative. Indeed, major problems of political will and responsibility, consensus building, and operational management may arise, as normally occurs with the implementation of any complex project. The hope of overcoming obstacles by technocratic means was illusory (the meaning and the experiment of the 'new programming' in Italy approaching the year 2000: see Chapter 7). It is not enough to stiffen the method and controls. Indeed, this could even become an alibi that detracts from crucial responsibilities: finding a way out of problems that may seem intractable and building the necessary consensus. What also seems to be missing is the critical realism that Wildavsky rightly recommended (1979): there must always be a clear perception of the concrete interests and plausible behaviour of the actors involved. When a new law or programme is ratified, the most common orientation of the players is to transfer pre-existing interests to the new format. It should therefore not be surprising that in many cases,

the sophisticated procedures and needs for the ‘new programming’ have legitimized occasional interventions that have long been on the waiting list. The assessment must be cautious: interesting results in given local contexts are available, but the original ambitions were certainly disappointing. We should have learned that we should not rely too much on the method and project guidelines; the capacity for developing and managing practices becomes the essential requirement in the field. The fact should be cause for concern. The pedagogical commitment was clear and demanding 20 to 30 years ago. The goal was to create the conditions for substantial, long-term progress in the quality and efficiency of public administration, not only for ongoing management, but also as an innovative design capability. The goal was not achieved. Today it sadly seems to have been abandoned, as seen in the embarrassing events of the NRRP. The edifying discourse of the 1990s on socio-spatial development remained in limbo. The resulting difficulties, which do not admit easy solutions, are not addressed. The easiest move is to shift attention to some new frontier of innovation, which may seem suggestive and attractive (but not immune to similar problems in the near future). The current crisis of the ‘virtuous development’ narrative therefore stems from embarrassment situations and opportunistic urges: the sense of powerlessness vis-à-vis difficulties that have proved to be nearly intractable; the instrumental and deceptive attempt to shift attention towards new objectives that are attractive today, but are destined to generate new disappointments.

Urban Innovation

Is smart urbanism the new frontier? Interest in it has exploded in recent decades, in public communication and disciplinary reflections. In this case as well, it results from an evolutionary process. The ‘creative city’ was probably the original image; it opened discourse on the potential of tying initiatives for urban revitalization and care for the settlement quality. Charles Landry (2000 and 2006) developed an early doctrine on the subject, which was then extensively developed by place-making professionals (Landry, 2019; Hesse Hernandez-Santin, 2020; Carriere and Schalliol, 2021). These are generally positive visions (Miao and Yigitcanlar, 2024). The possibility that innovation may cause problems with respect to the pre-existing framework is not a real issue of interest (among the few exceptions, Oli Mould, 2015, who focuses on the phenomena of ‘urban subversion’, which may accompany attempts at creative transformation; Ruth Fincher et al., 2016, who warn against the possible mystifications of place-making; Marianna D’Ovidio, 2016, and Robert Hollands, 2023,

who invite us to look «beyond the neoliberal creative city»). Later developments took the opposite direction with respect to the change observed in the field of urban regeneration in the late 1900s. In that case, the material complexity of the intervention grew, initially only physically and then also socially. In contrast, the most current trend in the last 20 years reveals an advanced process of dematerialization/deterritorialization (Berry, 2014). It is now clear that the focus of smart urbanism is the 'digital city' (Laguerre, 2006). Contributions by Carlo Ratti are exemplary. The author reasons about the 'city of tomorrow' (Ratti and Claudel, 2017), but only represents it as a 'senseable city' (Picon and Ratti, 2023). It is concerned with the quality of urban life in our cities, but conceives of them as if the *urbs* did not exist (Ratti, 2022), repeating the mistake made by some circles of planning, in the heart of the 20th century. The promise of the city as a 'network of sensors' should be assessed rigorously, but also with a bit of irony. An unthinkable mass of data becomes available (Offenhuber and Ratti, 2014): For which uses? The utility for commercial ends is a certainty, as is the possibility of multiplying the infantile games of social networks, but will it change the quality, the substance of urban services? This is an unknown, because the crucial problem is not the availability of information and its technical management, but rather — materially — the provision and organization of services. It is useless to present the '15-minute city' as an objective (Moreno, 2020; Manzini, 2022) if the current provisions involve 15-month waiting lists. Some conspiracy circles glimpse in this slogan the perverse desire of the deep state to limit and repress individual freedoms. I believe these are just rhetorical simplifications by the political system and the media. In this framework, I find the excessive emphasis on innovation technologies superficial and bothersome, as if the goal were only to create a 'computable city'. Even Michael Batty, recently (2024) recognized the limits of that vision, after long having celebrated the potential of big data and smart urbanism (Batty, 2005 and 2013; published by the prestigious MIT Press, which I find unconvincing).

The disciplinary debate on these issues remains uncertain and divided. The prevalent orientation is positive (I have traced an outline in Palermo, 2022, Section 4.7). There is no shortage of critical voices that express alarming prejudice 'against the Smart City' (Greenfield, 2013). The most interesting contributions are those that aim to better clarify the conditions of sustainability and the importance of innovation (Marvin et al., 2016; Karvonen et al., 2018; Green, 2019). Federico Cugurullo (2021) wanted to evoke an unusual image — 'Frankenstein urbanism' — to metaphorically allude to

the risks of technological innovation and the consequent responsibilities of politics and techniques. Caution, irony, and criticism seem justified when faced with the pretensions of technocrats or industry entrepreneurs (investigated in a few exemplary situations, such as Masdar City and Hong Kong); the (rather arduous) alternative would be greater social control over technological applications. The author also seems to look with some trust at the future developments of artificial intelligence (Cugurullo, 2020; Cugurullo et al., 2024), which could provide urban practices with unprecedented operational potential (Ratti's guiding idea), to the point of configuring a sort of new 'AI urbanism' (but the social, ethical, and cognitive implications of the impact of technological innovations remain a marginal theme). In my opinion, the framework that emerges cannot but confirm the radical incompleteness of the techniques. The sense and actual consequences are largely conditioned by the social, but also the material context. One point seems indisputable. This line of experience tends to diverge substantially from the issues of the *projet urbain* (including urban regeneration); indeed, it belongs to another world. The dominance of the digital city winds up erasing the physical city, a result that urban planning culture should not accept (Allmendinger, 2021). Without a change of course, the current discourse on the smart city has little to do with planning. It would be an illusion to assume that a surrogate has been found to endemic difficulties in the discipline.

13.5. Changes in Scale and Topic

Policy analysis discovered long ago that scale is a strategic variable in the design and understanding of spatial governance (Brenner, 2000 and 2019). This sensibility still seems to lack respect for the interpretations of the urban project. In fact, the scale of experience can vary radically, from local projects that fit like a tile in an established mosaic, to 'large scale development projects' aimed at transforming complex urban areas, often under critical conditions, and requiring substantial investment, regulatory expertise, and advanced management skills. Is it legitimate to underestimate the differences between these fields of action? Christian Devillers seemed ready to run the risk, offering to face problems at any scale (2003, p. 47 and 54). Like Bernardo Secchi in the 2000s, he probably tended to overestimate the role of the architect-planners' vision and design in relation to socio-spatial processes with a high degree of complexity. In the discipline, however, there is a clear tendency to specialize the topics. There has long been a proliferation of contributions on so-called *megaprojects*,

which often refer to complicated contexts such as the metropolis or megalopolis, another world compared to the neighbourhood projects typical of new urbanism (despite that movement's claims to offer relevant contributions on any scale).

Indeed, it does not seem possible to confuse a limited intervention of urban infill, which can often be addressed with the traditional tools of architectural projects, with the experiences of neighbourhood projects, or the urban redevelopment of urban suburbs, even less so with the large-scale transformations of strategic areas. Not only the object, but also the context of the intervention are incomparable: on the one hand, a traditional model of suburban living and on the other the looming and somewhat disturbing prospects of the *megacity*. In such different contexts, the urban project carries particular characteristics and raises distinct problems. The differences are technical, but also affect the political sense of the intervention. We can recognize at least two major lines. On the one hand, these may be large public works programmes whose goal is to directly renew the territorial infrastructure, but they also leverage the goals of future economic development. Such programmes have assumed an important role in periods of reconstruction after serious trauma such as the World Wars or the crisis of the 1930s. In general, they represent a strength of Keynesian economic policies. Altshuler and Luberoff (2003) documented how the most intense phase of development in that sense was verified in the 1950s and 1960s in the West ('the great megaprojects era'). The reasons for the relative later decline fall along two major lines. The reduced capacity for public investment weighed heavily, as the crisis of the welfare state worsened, but there was also vast and active social opposition, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, to transformation projects that tended to colonize local space and society, as impositions from above, dictated by functional or instrumental reasons, without any real care for the history, sense, or form of the territory or the ways in which it is inhabited. The controversy after the Second World War between Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses on the urban transformations in New York comes to mind (Larson, 2013). It is entirely clear that such a concept of megaprojects is incompatible with the guiding principle of the *projet urbain*. In fact, Altshuler and Luberoff observe that the revival of territorial infrastructure/transformation programmes in the late 1900s had to respect a more advanced culture of sustainability. Or better yet, this is the trend that was seen in the West. 'Hard' experiences of spatial mega-transformations are still widespread today where autocratic regimes prevail. For example, vast documentation is available on Chinese experiences, both in the motherland and in the outer territories that have become

destinations for economic colonization (Schindler et al., 2021; Jang, 2022).

Where the state is no longer capable of intervening on its own, it is the market that supports megaproject programmes, either in partnership with the public or independently, with the consent of the public authorities. This is the second major line of emerging experience, which effectively represents the most recent interpretation of the topic, as Susan Fainstein has documented (2009). The reference to public interest becomes secondary or ambiguous. These are generally operations to enhance land and real estate, openly oriented at profit. The city (urban society) is usually promised future benefits in terms of image, with such projects becoming ‘drivers of change’ (Lecroart and Palisse, 2007; Salet and Gualini, 2007; Oosterlynck et al., 2011). It is easy for critical geography to highlight the weaknesses and risks of the trend (Moulaert et al., 2001; Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Less ideologically aligned observers (e.g. Del Cerro, 2013) tend to make more cautious judgements; such initiatives can create negative effects, but also new opportunities. The public capacity to direct processes towards a reform-oriented result will be decisive, as will the foresight of private operators, if they are prepared not to abuse their dominant position and avoid creating too many risks for the market and society. Nevertheless, this family of experiences is entirely extraneous to *projets urbains*. The distance is extreme with respect to principles, because a sort of ‘transnational urbanism’ (Ponzini, 2020) forms, operating according to predetermined models (Bourdin and Idt, 2016), as the result of competitive selection processes, without much care for the values and needs of the context. The distance also applies to techniques, since the realization of megaprojects introduces advanced expertise (financial, technological and managerial) (Flyvbjerg, 2003; Priemus et al., 2008), although it is only complementary in the specific field of *projets urbains*, where questions as to the local area, space, or the spatial form carry a decisive weight. Therefore, I see no reason to confuse types of practices that are radically different.

13.6 Architecture, but Even More

The set of references I have just presented shows that the polysemous notion of ‘urban projet’ recalls aspirations and requirements of different signs. On the one hand, it assigns a new important role to the architect, even on the scale of urban transformations, thus reintroducing an idea of ‘architecture of the city’. At the same time, however, there is clear awareness that *projets urbains* cannot be reduced to ordinary architecture pro-

jects. The situations I described in the last two sections raise problems and questions that transcend architects' traditional expertise and responsibility. Could we conclude that a range of opportunities for planning open up, provided that they are understood as analysis and design of the physical city? In reality, the hypothesis seems clear and convincing until the scope is to criticize bureaucratic planning, which is still based on notions of standards and zoning. The limits of that approach seem clear; criticism from architects-planners is now dated, unmerciful, and justified. The discourse is more uncertain, however, if the task is to develop a concept of planning that is effectively more sensitive in theory and practice to issues of the urban form and project. This is the challenge that has long seemed open yet incomplete.

The judgement seems irrefutable in Italy, where some key figures have been able to anticipate critical connections in the international debate. Starting in the 1950s, Giuseppe Samonà drew attention to fundamental topics such as the 'architecture-planning unity', the historical-evolutionary aspect of urban transformation processes, and the design orientation — considered indispensable — of the planning description (Infussi, 1992). However, this did not resolve certain ambiguities on the relationship between master plan and urban project, for example, reintroducing (in the new 1971 edition of *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città*) a rather vague and illusory concept of 'district planning', which in fact did not have any relevant developments. Moreover, some perplexity would be reasonable if the 'plan-programme for the historic centre of Palermo' (developed with Giancarlo De Carlo and others, 1979–1982; materials published in 1994) is understood as one of the most mature and sustainable contributions that the culture of architects-planners has been able to offer to the governance of urban transformations. In fact, it was only a set of recommendations prepared by a loose working group, which developed the predetermined convictions of its leaders in the context (Samonà and De Carlo, precisely), also because the public administration in this case remained substantially absent, indifferent to the course of the process. Not only were the programme proposals not followed up on, the same administration entrusted a new assignment to other consultants a few years later (Benevolo, Cervellati and Insolera), who adopted the typological approach that Samonà considered untenable (Bonfantini, 2002): a truly paradoxical outcome.

The weakness of a merely programmatic concept of planning was also confirmed by Ludovico Quaroni's authoritative experiences. In the 1960s,

his vision of the physical city as an arrangement of distinct parts, fabrics and emergencies, and his design-oriented interpretation of planning practice represented an original and potentially fruitful turn from the disciplinary orthodoxy that was dominant at the time (Quaroni, 1981). Equally interesting was the intuition that different parts of the city needed different intervention tools: systems of rules, in the case of homogeneous fabrics; urban projects when transforming areas of strategic interest (Quaroni, 1967). However, the technical formulation of the 'piano-idea' as a spatial reference framework with structural and strategic value, which ought to anticipate the essential vision of the future city as an influential guide to the entire process was weaker and vaguer. Quaroni himself was tenaciously dedicated to the topic, albeit without finding convincing solutions. Nor do the architects inspired by his teachings seem to have made any significant progress with respect to the challenges that have long been on the agenda (Balbo, 1992): the idea of the project as the potential evolution of the context, the relationships between urban plan and architectural design, between urban forms and urban regulations, between physical forms and living practices. Some edifying principles are not up for discussion, but the experimentation remains open. On the other hand, other lines of typo-morphological studies in Italy did not even try to theoretically develop the connections between analysis and design. Carlo Aymonino investigated the relationships between building types and urban forms. He was well aware, however, that these were only partial dimensions of the urban phenomenon (1977); he refused to draw general or binding planning choices from typo-morphological analysis (in fact, he reproached Saverio Muratori for an overly deterministic approach, for wanting to deduce certain essential design-oriented elements from urban analysis). I still have some doubt, however, as to the possibility of gathering the 'meaning of the city' (Aymonino, 1975) only through an investigation whose objective limits were recognized by the author himself. Some perplexity also seems justified vis-à-vis Aldo Rossi's vision. He had the merit of reviving the idea of the 'architecture of the city', but continued to favour the singularity of monuments over the more opaque and controversial relationships between eminent places and ordinary urban fabrics (Rossi, 1966). These are well-known problems, which Giancarlo De Carlo dealt with in an exemplary way in a few special cases, where the contextual conditions allowed for free and intense experimentation (in Urbino as in Terni); however, he did not really attempt to construct a general theory on such delicate and contingent matters. One question therefore remains open (in Italy as well as in France, but even beyond): How should the effective contribution of plan-

ning to this family of problems be understood? Why and to what extent can it be considered relevant?

13. 7 The Banality of the Method

With the enthusiasm of neophytes, the first road explored in Italy on the verge of the century was the 'urban project as method' (exemplary documentation can be found in the plan for Rome: Campos, 2001). It is important to note that the methodical contribution did not really focus on the design or implementation of good urban transformations, but above all on the concept of the process: Which procedures should be followed; which actors were involved depending on the specific stage and role; and which requirements should be met to ensure effective integration and governance of the entire process. The contribution could be reduced to a set of recommendations, which in some case reflected common sense. Relevance could be measured in two main ways: as the capacity to guide the actual project based on a specific set of rules or preliminary guidelines; or to improve the understanding of problems and possibilities for action through the development of exploratory projects. The idea of *progetto-norma* and the cognitive function of the *progetto-guida* come into play, respectively. The two perspectives may have seemed innovative and promising half a century ago. Based on the experiences, expectations today have been drastically resized. The anticipation of a rather detailed 'form-based code' with binding value was generally revealed to be a gamble, except in the case of circumscribed, well-developed building projects. The only plausible alternative is to limit it to formulating merely indicative guidelines whose effective relevance depends on the contingent conditions. The idea of using explorations in design to better understand the critical aspects and evolutionary possibilities of an area in transformation (a hypothesis masterfully conceived and interpreted by Giancarlo De Carlo) risks becoming an illuminated demand that is too complicated and laborious in the eyes of contemporary culture, in a phase when the myth of inductive analysis is re-emerging.

The current trend disowns the most basic principles of *constructivism*, such as the idea that any empirical representation is mediated by a set of assumptions, sometimes intentional, often tacit (i.e. inherited from the context). This does not mean falling into relativism (the accusation levelled by some orthodox sources at Bruno Latour, for example), but recognizing that the representations of what is real, which we use as potential frames for

understanding and action, are generally multifaceted because they are at least partly constructed. The critical aspect is clarifying the most influential factors or choices and assuming responsibility for them. The fashionable ideology today, however, is quite distant from that tradition, which was a conquest in the second half of the 1900s, compared to the more dogmatic versions of positivist culture. Topicality marks the return of an ‘absolutely inductive’ vision: give me a large set of big data and the necessary computing power (readily available today), and I can use pure induction to discover relationships and evidence capable of producing knowledge and orienting actions. This could therefore give rise to that ‘science of the city’ that has always been so (vainly) coveted, and ‘smart urbanism’ could keep its promises (such is the case of being cautious, as Rob Kitchin admits, 2014, 2021). In Section 13.4, I reiterated the simplistic and illusory nature of these positions, which nevertheless make the concept of the urban project as a cognitive contribution abstract and out of date. In another respect, the regulatory function is increasingly weak. At most, it merely provides recommendations, entrusted to the benevolence of the administration and public opinion (with all the risks that were highlighted in the Palermo programme-plan). Is this the only result of the ambitious discourse on the method to design and realize important projects for urban transformation? The most important conclusion seems to be legitimization of flexibility and contingency. It is no coincidence that the idea of the *projet urbain* generalizes a series of planning experiments as an exception (compared to the logic of the traditional plan) completed in various contexts, such as the *zones d’aménagement concerté* (ZACs) in France; the *urban development corporations* (UDCs) in Great Britain, the *programmes for urban recovery and redevelopment* (PRUs) in Italy. The controversial relationship between principles of certainty and flexibility is the reality to be addressed with a critical spirit and capacity for proposals, instead of indulging some methodological trend that proves to be superfluous or trivial.

13.8 The Incompleteness of Models

Could we try to better clarify the meaning and essential requirements of ‘good’ urban transformations? There is no lack of authoritative tradition in this sense, starting from the ‘theory of city form’ developed by Kevin Lynch (1981), who points out a curious inconsistency. He dedicated an entire chapter to good reasons that could lead us to doubt the possibility of building a normative theory with general validity (*ibid.*, Chapter 5), but he ultimately did not reject an attempt to formulate a ‘great theory’, drawing

a framework of performance principles that should be valid in every place and time. The selection, as always occurred in Lynch's work, was based on a dense and original empirical investigation in which the author developed an audacious process of abstraction. It does not seem interesting to discuss, once again, the completeness and adequacy of the theory (which is based on seven principles: 'vitality, sense, fit, accessibility, control, justice, efficiency'). I would just like to observe that the proposal does not escape the paradox pointed out by Karl Popper: the more general a theoretical hypothesis, the less accurate the argumentation and the weaker the possible deductions (Pera, 1982). The problem is not only the possible incompleteness of the list, but the lack of a hierarchy between the criteria (which likely emerges in each specific context); nor is there any indication in the plausible case of local tension among different principles. What happens if the vitality risks the consistency, or if openness due to accessibility puts in doubt the most traditional meanings? The 'great theory' is silent on these connections; the claim to generality precludes a meaningful reflection and this is an objective limit.

However, the model established by Lynch was broadly adopted and developed over time. Contributions have multiplied in recent decades with a special focus on the topic of *public space* (Mehta and Palazzo, 2020; Mehta, 2023). The approach has not changed and endless variety of hypotheses available today risk creating a disorienting effect. Should the normative representation of the public space follow the STAR model (Varna, 2014), which adopts five basic principles ('physical configuration, ownership, control, civility, animation')? Or should we deem the conceptual scheme proposed by Ewing and Clemente (2013), illustrated in Chapter 11, which introduces criteria of 'imageability, enclosure, human scale, transparency, complexity, coherence, legibility, linkage' to be more fertile? In reality, the different proposals are essentially equivalent. They do not represent distinct, mature, well-justified theories, but rather the provisional results of *attention-shaping*, which only has the merit of focusing on essential aspects of the problem. This is also true only in preliminary terms, if there is no reflection on the lexicographic ordering and mutual and collateral effects of the highlighted criteria. My conclusion is that this work serves purely as inquiry. The main contribution is the selection of a set of issues that seem impossible to ignore. The development, however, does not reveal any significant progress with respect to certain well-established assumptions, such as the widely shared conviction that the practice of urban design must address fundamental issues of a 'morphological, perceptual, social, visual,

functional' nature (the conceptual framework adopted by Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007). Reiterating similar needs is not a great discovery. Attempts to build a general theoretical and influential model once more take us back to the sphere of good recommendations. This is not a great result.

13.9 Practicing Urban Project

'Il n'y a que des pratiques' [There is only practice], as Crosta reminds us, following Foucault (Chapter 6). 'There is no planning, only planning practices,' Ernst Alexander confirms (2015), politely distancing himself from an inexhaustible flow of theoretical-methodological chatter that has actually failed to provide new strength or legitimacy to the discipline of city planning. These judgements (already noted in the book) also seem pertinent in relation to urban projects, given the weakness or inconclusiveness of attempts to define/establish the concept, which I have quickly outlined up to this point. What conclusions should we draw from these positions? It would be a mistake to assume that planners have no choice but to acknowledge the course of events, reducing their task to some adjustment during progress, within the limits of what is possible (following the most reductive interpretation of the emerging trend of everyday urbanism: Chapter 9). The objective influence of actual practices cannot serve as an alibi with respect to disciplinary responsibilities; it cannot justify the praise of pure contingency (anything is valid as long as something happens?) and much less resign itself to a perpetual 'muddling through' (in the sense intended by Lindblom, 1959 and 1979) as the only possible form of rationality in the context. The essential point is that the planning discipline should recognize that a substantial change is now complete. The modern project was based on necessary principles of regulation and control. The course of experience has shown the inexorable dominance of tactical urbanism: flexible, adaptive, transient. The change is radical and makes any nostalgia for the past useless, which is why it requires justifications and the assumption of responsibility. Attention to everyday practices does not mean just recognize that the meaning and quality of an urban project will develop over time through the proof of experience. It should also lead us to reconsider the principles guiding knowledge and disciplinary action.

The planning culture has always struggled to coexist with the traditions of pragmatism and practical reason (Chapter 6). Perhaps it has not really understood them. It has certainly underestimated them while it followed other suggestions: norms, science, authorial designs. Recognizing the im-

portance of project practices means being open to reconsidering some conceptual premises. In the best texts on planning theory the space set aside for the traditions of pragmatism is scant and marginal. Philip Allmendinger (2017) dedicated a chapter to the topic, as an exhaustive recognition of the impact of the fundamental principles and leading figures in that cultural area of planning (Chapter 6). However, his primary scope is to discuss the trends, problems, possibilities of post-modern planning (Chapters 8 and 10). To this end, he calls on various disciplinary movements of emerging interest (radical trends, post-structuralism, complexity theories). In the resulting framework, there is no trace of references to questions of pragmatism, and this is perhaps a lost opportunity. Robert Beauregard (2020) recognizes a pragmatic dimension in the main tasks of planning ('knowing, engaging, prescribing, executing'), but does not consider pragmatism as an influential tradition on disciplinary thought or action, and even less so as the preferred framework. Charles Hoch's (1984) or John Forester's (1993) interest in critical pragmatism has quickly lost its original inclination towards change and emancipation, becoming a professional style that tends to respond to criteria of functionality and effectiveness. Only in 2009 did Patsy Healey explicitly address the topic, but her interpretation was ambiguous or misleading. In fact, she tended to recognize traces of pragmatism in planning concepts that are incommensurable or antithetical: the schools of 'rational planning', the 'systems view', attempts at a scientific foundation à la Faludi, but also Charles Lindblom's incrementalism or critical theories inspired by Habermas or Foucault! If everything is pragmatism (Greeve and Frisina, 2006), we no longer understand what the unique contribution is.

Instead, I believe (Palermo, 2022, Section 9.2) that the influential lines in this field are specific and relevant (but incompatible with some of Healey's references): a planning idea of knowledge and action that is necessarily *experimental, interactive, coevolutionary*; the cognitive function of the project and action, but also the design orientation of the investigation; the possibilities of learning and progress through experience; the individual responsibilities of choice and action among the possibilities offered by the context; care for the effects emerging from interactions between actors and the system; the interactive and experimental construction of an inevitable, but 'not disjointed' incrementalism. These are principles that planning practice leads us to consider as fundamental. They are not so relevant according to the interpretations of the discipline as a system of rules, scientific project, or authorial design. The idea of rationality is also peculiar.

The main challenge does not regard the rigorous application of rules, the capacity for instrumental calculation, or the generation of an exemplary form, but rather finding a way out and gaining thoughtful consensus on a ‘wicked problem’ that cannot be addressed using ordinary techniques and means. Many planning problems have these emerging features and seem to require a capacity for phronesis. Bent Flyvbjerg raised the issue some time ago (Flyvbjerg, 2004; et al., 2012), but the discourse later lost vigour and interest (like so many other theoretical digressions, which remained unsuccessful and unremarkable). In contrast, I believe that pragmatic culture and practical reason should be regarded as essential prerequisites for socially relevant urban planning action (including urban projects). This is also true if the disciplinary culture still seems uncertain or reluctant before these hypotheses.

13.10 The Question of Politics and the Urban Project

There is little room for ‘politics’ in current discourse on planning and the urban project. There are two common situations with extreme characteristics on opposite sides. On the one hand, the edifying narrative of the *politique de la ville* is recurring: the city moves as a collective actor and it is able to develop and share a strategic vision of future development, to be implemented consistently, step by step, project by project. It is clear that in reality, this scenario does not imply any political content; in fact, it negates politics. Partisan interests and resulting tension are nullified within a presumed consensual framework representing a preconception lacking any concrete verification. It is difficult to explain (and justify) the growing spread and enthusiasm that this ideological narrative aroused around the turn of the century, even in planning circles, as an attempt to give new meaning and a reformist outlet to the partisan interests emerging in the neoliberal city. That phase left us with a large amount of repetitive and superficial talk, but few significant facts. Today the interest in strategic plans has lost its credit in the eyes of politics and public opinion. Paradoxically, some developers seem to want to revive a strategic vision for the city, but it is clear that this is just a rhetorical move in many cases that tends to favour some private interests. At the same time, the planning culture is grappling with a problem that is not easy to solve: decently interpreting the latest version of the disciplinary tools, which now tend to take a strategic orientation, but wind up being much weaker than canonical models.

At the other end, ‘politics’ re-emerges in rather rare situations in which

territorial transformations mobilize an insurgent movement. The city is designed as a potential matrix of resistance and social reactions to strategies and tension in neoliberal society. This is Henry Lefebvre's hypothesis: 'The revolution will be urban' (1970). David Harvey moved along the same lines when he evoked the image of the 'rebel city' (2012). Following this, the position was reiterated by Eric Swyngedouw (2014, 2018) and a few other exponents of critical thinking (see Beissinger, 2022). This orientation involves two risks. The first is overestimating the capacity of local movements and contingent conflicts, which are destined to die out before long, without having produced important transformations (the mistake was made once again with respect to urban movements that occurred in various contexts in the early 2000s). The second risk is perhaps more serious: this antagonist concept of politics (Mouffe, 2013) could divert attention from the ordinary political dimensions that normally affect urban transformations. The risk is that a set of nearly empty idealized situations are highlighted, while ignoring problems that afflict most real processes (Jayne and Ward, 2017). Yet there has long been a solid tradition of studies in urban politics focused on certain crucial problems (Judge et al., 1995; Davidson and Martin, 2014): the representation of the city as a growth machine (which I have already referred to); the role of the urban regime as a power structure that effectively 'determines great urban transformations' (Fainstein, 1995; Lauria, 1997; Stoker and Mossberger, 2001); the intertwining of public and private spheres in the production and management of urban development; and market and political effects on the social conditions of inequality and solidarity (Harding and Blokland, 2014); the new forms of 'post-political politics' (MacLeod, 2011; MacLeod and Jones, 2011). All of these are issues pertaining to the 'political' sphere. They seem to arouse surprisingly little attention in the world of planning (not just in Italy).

However, I do not believe that it is possible to discuss the urban project while ignoring this set of questions. We risk having to regret relying on somewhat crude analyses that have had some success in the past, such as SWOT analysis for new projects (Medeiros, 2020) or the 'balance sheet of development' developed by a professional such as Nathaniel Lichfield (et al., 1975; 1996), which at least attempted to assess the potential impact of the developing project with respect to different objectives, actors, and areas of intervention (an experience that Gigi Mazza wished to replicate in Italy, 2002). In other words, the development of an urban project today is in many cases not even accompanied by such elementary verifications, as if self-justification or the promoters' imaginative narrative were sufficient.

The ‘return to politics’ does not allude just to some great social transformation (presumed or expected: Mouffe, 1993), but it should at least involve an essential assessment of the impact of a new project on the variety of interests. This is a necessary premise for being able to reason about the political nature of the project: a commitment that only a few authors seem to adopt as a priority (e.g. Magnaghi, 2000 and 2020; Trapitzine, 2018).

13.11 Between Rhetoric and Practice: Minimum Requirements

We could conclude that practice counts in urban projects, but the weight of rhetoric is very (or too) influential. There is no doubt: the room for rhetoric must be considered legitimate. Barbara Czarniawska (2004) shows that the narrative could play an important ancillary function in the development of social science. Starting in the 1980s, Bernardo Secchi (Chapter 4) highlighted the specific functions of the ‘planning narrative’. A few years later, Fischer and Forester (1993) noted the disciplinary urgency of an ‘argumentative turn’ to ensure more solid, convincing arguments regarding social and planning choices. That commitment (which Fischer forcefully reiterated years later: 2007, with Gottweis) would have fostered undistorted communication and cooperation, paving the way for new disciplinary successes (the conviction or hope always cultivated by Patsy Healey and Judith Innes). In all these cases, the appeal to rhetoric was inspired by substantial values and ends, with the desire of recreating fertile connections with renewed practice. In recent decades, the scenario has changed considerably, as I have tried to document. Renewed attention for practices has not led to a revision of the principles (objectively necessary), but rather in many cases to a resizing of ambitions and disciplinary responsibility. Planning acknowledges emerging processes; it accompanies them, legitimizes them, but is not always (or rarely) able to play an influential role of public guidance, much less control: these are the most common trends in everyday urbanism. At the same time, urban rhetoric becomes increasingly invasive and self-referential. This is the case of the newspeak of urban development, which reflects market interests (Fitoussi, 2019). Or resigned or provocative realism is growing, such as references to junkspace and the generic city by Rem Koolhaas, who, in the wake of cynical tradition, loves to overturn common sense (even if Biraghi, 2024, does not share this opinion). Amid celebrations or desecrations, however, public argumentation proves to be increasingly weak or inert. It is difficult to deny the triviality, the marginality of the discourse that has long been sketched out on the urban project as a method, as a frame of reference and guidance, as a

strategic programme. The search for further recommendations on the topic are not a comforting perspective if the argumentation continues to be so generic or vague. On the other hand, it might be appropriate to admit that normative theories à la Lynch represent a poorly arranged exercise without meaningful outlets. If this is the framework, is nothing left but to busy ourselves in concrete situations on a case-by-case basis?

I believe it may be useful to call on some unavoidable requests for design experience. It should not be a normative theory (which remains an unfinished goal), but nor is it just a list of almost obvious recommendations (such as Carmona and Tiesdell's call to care for the morphological, perceptual, etc., dimensions: 2007, cited above). Perhaps we could identify a selective set of priority commitments for any urban project worthy of consideration, as topics and responsibilities that must inescapably be addressed as being destined to orient, indeed to condition any design experience of real interest. I have four large questions in mind. The first is open space design. Landscape urbanism and Bernardo Secchi are right. An urban project cannot be understood as a set (perhaps a jumble) of building interventions spread arbitrarily in space. The design and care for open spaces is not a residual fact, but a decisive assumption. However, it is indecorously ignored by many current experiences (as some recent transformations in Milan prove negatively). The second topic is the urban landscape. No formalistic aesthetic nostalgia, but a lack of care for the relationships between development projects and historical-morphological characteristics of the context can lead to embarrassment and regret. Commenting on *City Life in Milan*, some have evoked the image of the 'cruise ship in the Grand Canal'. I find it incredible that the architecture and planning culture remains indifferent and inert with respect to this trend (despite the good intentions of landscape urbanism). However, a little care and responsibility vis-à-vis the subject would be sufficient to ensure less dissonant design results. The third great question is sustainability. Is this topic now dated and no longer innovative, or not ambitious enough ('sustainability is not enough', Peter Marcuse proclaimed, 1998)? Is it destined to falling into the shadows with respect to fascinating developments of smart urbanism and artificial intelligence (Section 13.4)? In contrast, I believe (Palermo, 2022, Section 4.7) that it remains the crucial challenge. The decisive questions are the way in which the (inevitable) compromise between potentially contradictory demands (Swyngedouw, 2010) — economic development, environmental protection, and social equity — is actually interpreted, but also how the (inevitable) social costs of the desired ecological transition are distribut-

ed. In the newspeak of urban development, references to sustainability are a profusion of promises and suggestions, with a primarily technological basis; I would prefer some clarity on socially relevant commitments. The fourth and final topic concerns the sphere of collateral effects, a set of issues that are largely ignored today, either due to insensitivity or serious embarrassment (although we should remember that Baumol and Oates, 1975, understood environmental sustainability precisely as the search for and care of the ‘externalities’ of a policy or project). The question is simple and serious: each urban project of some importance produces noticeable effects (not always intentional but also indirect and unexpected) on urban organization, functions, and behaviour. Can we entirely ignore these consequences? This is what happens in most experiences. It is not enough to resort to some standard procedure after the fact (such as environmental impact analysis or similar tools), which paradoxically risks losing strength and effectiveness precisely because it was institutionalized and applied bureaucratically. Attention to collateral effects should be a guiding principle that accompanies the entire project development. In practice, this seems to be vain exhortation, largely extraneous to the current culture in the discipline and profession, but also to common sense. Nevertheless, I continue to be convinced of the decisive importance of these issues. Open space design, the landscape, sustainability, externality: if an urban project accepts these challenges, the chances of achieving more comforting results increase. Attention to these requirements seem to be the most concrete and influential recommendation that the intellectual analysis may suggest.

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14. Urban Planning, Politics, and Design

14.1 Disciplinary Profiles are Still Diverging

When a social practice is in the nascent stage, it is reasonable to imagine that there may be different, if not alternative paths traced by its forerunners. More surprising is the fact that a century later, in a shared environment, the positions are still very differentiated. This is the clear message that reaches us from the experiences and reflections made by Campos, Secchi, Mazza, and Crosta, starting in the 1980s and 1990s. I do not mean that these references carried the same weight for the effective evolution of the discipline. Campos represented the main line (with a large majority) in reformist planning culture in Italy. Bernardo Secchi interpreted an intellectual path that was so original that it seemed elitist compared to common sense. Mazza and Crosta took positions bordering on heresy, which have provoked mistrust or rejection (although Gigi Mazza was always committed to a rebirth of city planning, in renewed, legitimate, and more effective forms). Thus, the degree of consensus and representativeness that each vision conquered cannot be compared. However, I believe that each profile may be understood as an emerging ideal type, useful for highlighting the variety of possible interpretations of the roles and disciplinary expertise, reminding us that the unity and consistency of the area, if not a mirage, is at least at great risk. Later generations of Italian planners have generally avoided the problem (perhaps figures at the level of ‘fathers’ were lacking). Alberto Clementi’s experience, which I take as the testimony of a generation, shows an attempt to mend the demands that led to the (conceptual) rupture of the area in search of new fertile links among regulation, design, space, and politics. We have to acknowledge that the results were only partial. Most importantly, these orientations did not arouse any interest for a large part of the discipline.

If we extend our inquiry internationally, in particular at the English-speaking world — the most active and influential with respect to the media — the framework is not significantly different. The profiles of not only the pioneers, but also the most authoritative figures in the later 1900s, have distinctive characteristics and introduce divergent perspectives (as I believe I have documented in Palermo, 2022). In that case as well, the new generations seem to express obvious embarrassment in the face of the diversification and competition of possible visions. Like in Italy, they may reveal some limitations of personality and initiative in the face of the ‘great figures’. Or perhaps the times have changed. This is the planning ques-

tion that has lost weight in the collective imagination and daily practice. I have already observed that Italian experiences leave almost no trace in the international literature, which nevertheless presents the same problems: multiple profiles, a divergence among programmes, a framework that remains opaque and confused. For a long time, the only way out seemed to be the certification of eclecticism on behalf of planning theory (Chapters 5 and 10). More recently, something may have changed on the international scene, but the shift towards various forms of tactical urbanism has not been clearly confirmed in Italy. It certainly does not belong to the authors I have adopted for reflection (except for some connection with the unique profile of Pier Luigi Crosta; Bernardo Secchi recognized the importance of problems of everyday life, but conceived of them within a vision that was vastly more complex compared to the emerging lines internationally).

14.2 The Emerging Trend: Everyday Urbanism?

Should we view *everyday urbanism* as the disciplinary orientation destined to prevail? The question seems controversial (Chapter 9). On the one hand, it is right to appreciate the willingness of the discipline to measure itself against concrete problems that affect the conditions and quality of urban life on a daily basis. On the other hand, one risk is clear: improving the current performance with respect to a set of specific, limited problems while shirking the responsibility of an extended vision and action capable of producing important innovative, long-term effects. This is the responsibility that Secchi did not wish to relinquish, while Crosta shared the values, but was sceptical about the possibilities; Campos, on the other hand, always interpreted a positive vision, but had to note the difficulties in achieving more ambitious goals over time; Mazza made a decisive contribution to critical diagnosis, but failed to build consensus around an alternative vision. Later generations have not really tackled the problem, mostly limiting themselves to reiterating academic positions, regardless of the chosen teacher (in truth, the most common one is Campos, but an active group supports Secchi's theses, with an attitude that is perhaps fideistic rather than critical or innovative). The international literature seems to be relatively disengaged. There is never a shortage of virtuous statements of principle (JAPA is an exemplary case), but reflections on planning are often abstract and self-referential; the literature is much less interesting than actual practice! At the same time, the world of urban design has re-defined responsibilities and objectives. It once aimed to create a sustainable, high-quality urban context, leveraging the factors in the crisis of the

modern and contemporary city. Now it is satisfied to solve concrete but circumscribed problems with respect to the ordinary practices of daily life, with significant but clearly marginal effects compared to the original ambitions and responsibilities. Urban planning aspired to change the world; now it has to worry about guaranteeing a few minimal functions. This is a pragmatic shift that should not be underestimated, but it could become reductive. The main risk would be the rejection of the reform-oriented functions of civic interest in favour of ordinary market demands. The tendency would therefore be adopted with interest, but also with critical prudence (Hariman, 2003; Hörcher, 2020), as Abercrombe would have recommended. The paradox is that a discipline that originated according to strict principles of regulation and control now seems willing to coexist with informality and contingency, in ways that are not only tacit and opportunistic, but now also clear and apparently legitimized (Gouverner, 2018; Marinic and Meninato, 2022; Deuskar, 2022; Lombard and Horn, 2024). If this were indeed the prevailing trend, we would have to note a substantial discontinuity with more ambitious traditions, as a movement proceeding in a direction opposite to the commitment to long timescales always reiterated by Bernardo Secchi (2000, p. 42).

14.3 The Difficulties of the Reformist Programme

In this framework, the period of the reformist planning programme generally seems to lie in the past. It represented a nascent hope based on a variety of tentative programmes that emerged almost everywhere in the West in the second half of the 20th century due to an awareness that the conditions and problems had changed (as Secchi masterfully demonstrated); the discipline would therefore have to renew its paradigms and tools. While the prescriptive master plan represented the ideal type of modern town planning, the challenges at the end of the century highlighted a core of common needs: reconciling transparent rules and margins of flexibility, local actions and overall visions, physical transformations and social dynamics (increasingly changeable and diversified); in short, rethinking spatial governance in the fluid world of the ‘risk society’. The hypotheses were basically the same in various contexts (with some phase shifts or the objective delay in Italy): distinguishing different parts of the urban settlement — such as consolidated fabrics or transformation areas — that require different strategies of intervention, regulation, or design because the relative features and problems cannot be compared; distinguishing programmatic frames of reference for orientation and evaluation and targeted and binding operational

actions in circumscribed areas of spatial modification or transformation; evaluating the consistency and legitimacy of particular actions with respect to an overall vision in space and time; and managing and legitimizing the growing demand for flexibility and discretion, which the official discipline has always execrated on paper but largely practised on the fringes. A series of experiments has been tested over the last half-century along a number of lines: the evolution of regulatory techniques (where the fate of zoning and its variants stands out); the development of spatial frames of reference, in subsequent forms of structure planning, spatial planning, or more recently strategic spatial planning; the question of the urban project as a qualifying element or surrogate of the master plan; and of course, the set of both changeable and uncertain relationships among these different elements. Innumerable experiments in this sense have not yielded comforting results. It is difficult to argue that any innovation has been well developed or found consensus in the sphere of regulation. Preliminary norms have generally lost their prescriptive power in areas of transformation, taking the form of guidance or assessment criteria until the actual choices mature; a fundamental device such as zoning has not been able to conquer more sophisticated and better justified technical content; today it plays a more marginal role in current practices or falls back on the most elementary formulations (such as single-family exclusionary zoning in the United States). The experience of structure plans has generally proved inconclusive. In fact, the tool has been discontinued without regret in many contexts (with some delay also in the Emilia-Romagna Region, due to the 2017 reform). It has now given way to vaguer strategic views that lend themselves to adaptive uses over time. The development of urban projects mostly occurs with considerable margins of autonomy (Palermo, 1998) with respect to indications in the master plan (which are also increasingly open and flexible). In many cases, it is entrusted to market operators, while the public aspect is more marginal (bureaucratic and procedural), accompanying nascent projects instead of determining or guiding them. While these considerations have some basis, it seems clear that the reform-oriented programmes of the late 1900s have not led to the expected results; the main objectives were lacking. Renewal of the tools has remained incomplete or has led to disappointing results, if not failure. A question therefore arises: If the modern project is clearly outdated, if the reformist programme has not yielded the expected results, what future can be outlined for the planning culture and institution? The horizon can be none other than *post-reformist*, as I maintained in a recent book (Palermo, 2022).

14.4 Three Scenarios

I believe I can distinguish three scenarios. According to a rather widespread orientation, what is happening is entirely normal. The gap between principles and practice is a constant for the discipline in the long term. Urban planners' intentions and ambitions may be accepted with respect, but they also justify a certain irony. In reality, contingent, informal, adaptive factors have always been influential in urban transformations, perhaps more so than the virtuous principles declaimed by the experts and sometimes evoked by politics (Roy, 2005). This is normal if, following Crosta, we recognize that urban forms are result from a *social process of production* rather than the intentionality of some specific actor in politics or technique. In this sense, the current situation should not arouse particular concern, even if it reveals the clear crisis of the umpteenth — reform-oriented — attempt to rebuild an influential public intentionality. The machine that built the city continues to function. Planners are required to have a good capacity for mediation and adaptation to the course of the processes, requirements that some experts, such as Susskind or Forester, have long assumed as guidelines for professional practice, even if Secchi would not agree. Nothing prevents the discipline from also cultivating other, subjectively more comforting and suggestive rhetoric in institutional spaces (just browse the training manuals). The reality, however, is the one briefly outlined here.

This scenario allows for a variation. For the same actual conditions, the supplementary fact may still be the tendency for self-celebration by the discipline. Despite the objective limits of normal practice, planners do not reject a good impression of themselves, their public roles, or technical knowledge. There may be different reasons. Astengo and then Campos were convinced that an excess of self-criticism would have been damaging because it risked weakening the planner's reputation before politics and public opinion. In the general interest, it was more appropriate that the image of the discipline was always positive. Less instrumental was Bernardo Secchi's attitude, as he never doubted the value of expertise and its cumulative growth over time. In fact, he reconsidered the contributions of the masters of modern town planning with great respect, subjected as they were to hurried criticism (Secchi, 2005, Chapter 3). He recognised its utopian value as an attempt to imagine a new and possible future (but are good intentions enough to justify the results?). He was also convinced that the skills of the city designers had been consolidated through experience, considering them a heritage worthy of political attention because they were able to make important contributions to the generation of positive solu-

tions. From other points of view, however, such know-how and proposals may seem partial, to be integrated at least with complex processes of social interaction. Significant consideration of the role also accompanies more ordinary figures of the discipline. Planning associations and journals perform their rites. The discourse becomes self-referential and tends to be hagiographic. The legitimacy and solidity of the discipline are never questioned. Comparison with reality is avoided or self-absolving. There is no trace of the discomfort that Gigi Mazza showed before the gap between proposals and results, nor of Bernardo Secchi's call to disciplinary responsibility in the new century when faced with the objective insufficiency of the results obtained with respect to great social and environmental problems. In the realm of planners, one seems to live in the best of all possible worlds; it is a pity that the suggestion is valid only within the walls.

We can recognize a third scenario, albeit much less common: a given condition may become normal, but this does not mean it is justified. The gap between intentions and results, historical ambitions and contingent adaptation is too serious to be ignored. Today, city planning is an institution that few are ready to question, but its function is often only bureaucratic and used to support market initiatives. There remain few traces of the republican values that animated Giovanni Astengo's and Gigi Mazza's actions. Nor is it possible to claim that the results were anyway satisfactory. In Italy, for example, the urban landscape is sprinkled with unfinished projects and missed opportunities. The question is whether this fate is a given destination for urban planning or if there are margins for a change in route, even a partial one. In this case, what would be the first steps? Fortunately, there are still some actors in the area that ask these types of questions.

14.5 Urban Planning as a Political Practice

Commenting on *Le origini dell'urbanistica moderna* by Leonardo Benevolo (in Paola Di Biagi, ed., 2002), Bernardo Secchi criticized the rigidity and determinism of some hypotheses, such as the causal relationship between industrial revolution and formation of the 'modern project', the strongly dependent relationship between planning and politics. Secchi's vision was more open and fluid. He recognized the multiple roots and oldest origins, and claimed greater independence in the role and disciplinary expertise. However, the genealogy risks being indeterminate and the desire for independence becomes a declaration of principle that may underlie undue exaltation of expert figures. Nevertheless, Secchi's objection was

not ground-breaking. The masters of the modern project proclaimed their independence of any political affiliation, as if expertise and foresight guaranteed a contribution beyond parties, which the public authority would have to acknowledge and realize. The relationship of dependence outlined by Benevolo (criticised by Secchi) therefore seemed to be reformulated in the opposite sense, where technique was presented as a guide to politics (the dream of some planners). I do not believe that these abstractions help to understand the political sense of disciplinary practice. Urban planning is a political practice because it introduces a variety of partisan interests and strategies. The problem lies in finding a synthesis of good principles: democratic, ethical, efficient, and high-impact. The result will emerge from social interaction, which activates multiple interests, intentions, and projects that are sometimes conflicting, until a provisional point of equilibrium is achieved. Such a state is not an ideal configuration, much less final, as some disciplinary ideologies desired (which Gigi Mazza promptly questioned: Chapter 5). Rather, it is just a transition phase that will give life to new movements and possible tension according to an unending process (in this sense, planning can only be continuous). Even more so according to the most up-to-date formulations, the master plan is just a nondecisive element in the entire process, which covers a variety of public policies that have some territorial impact. The technical contribution of planners is limited and specific, but it is important that each subject be aware of the real context of operations. It would be difficult to not distance oneself from the modern idea of the master plan, which is pure myth today. It would be necessary to reconsider urban planning as one public policy among others (as Pier Luigi Crosta suggested more than 30 years ago). It seems clear that the glorious (but now distant) tradition of the ‘economic and social analysis of the territory’ should be revived, because the representation of the urban area cannot only be entrusted to the press offices of urban developers or real estate operators. However, we must note that these issues are not particularly prominent in the more recent literature on urban planning. There are few contributions on urban or regional political and social aspects and references to planning policy on the same scales are rare. A demanding code of ethics is proudly proclaimed, but the reflection is scattered among a variety of lines that remain partial or secondary. They do not hold exceptional interest in actual practice amid academic digressions and very specific technicalities (Chapter 10).

A change in route — ‘the return of the political’ — would be essential. This should not necessarily be understood as evoking an insurgent or ag-

onistic approach (in the sense used by Chantal Mouffe, 1993, 2005, 2013; adopted in the world of architecture by Lahiji, 2014, and Bedford, 2024), but as a normal requirement of any planning representation, whatever the ideology that inspires the players (Chapter 13). The political aspect arises because there are multiple, generally divisive situations (McCarthy, 2013); coexistence is a problem (Segre, 2024). ‘Design can help us to reimagine the forms of political representations and reinvent the sites of political action... The political is the ontological condition of politics and of being together in general’ (Yaneva, 2017, p. 15). There may be many means of addressing the problem, among conflict, governance, and attempts at cooperation. The scope and result of the planning project are not just social control by the dominant powers (the main scenario explored by Mazza). ‘Design matters politically as it holds the unfolding capacity to propose and open the possibility of novel forms of action and thought’ (Yaneva, *ivi*). A shift is therefore underway: from a desire for order according to pre-constructed principles towards the culture of possibilism and perhaps critical pragmatism. However, we cannot ignore that some currently influential ideologies (Palermo, 2022, par. 4.10 and related references) create major obstacles to an inevitable turning point (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Kimball, 2017; Jones, 2020). *Sovereignism* turns appeals for a presumed (or invented) identifying tradition into an instrument of self-referentiality and conservatism (Section 11.4); *populism* does not represent the democratic intention of giving a voice to the people, but evokes authoritarian and intolerant inclinations (Moffitt, 2018; Caiani and Graziano, 2021; Elliott Johnson, 2022); and a blatant lack of ‘peoplehood’ could promote a further denial of politics (Smith, 2020; Payne *et al.*, 2023; Rostbøll, 2023).

14.6 Urban Planning as a Design Practice

The affirmation may seem obvious for Italian culture, but it is not reflected significantly in the international urban planning literature. In Italy, at least five families of references can be easily identified and distinguished: *designing master plans* (in the sense intended by Campos Venuti and the main reformist school); *city design* (in the sense of the design-oriented plans of the 1990s); the *urban vision* (in the sense intended by Bernardo Secchi or the more trivial strategic visions of the latest generation); *integrated development spatial projects* (as a planning interpretation, according to Alberto Clementi and others, of ‘integrated development programmes’ that became an axis of reformist policies at the turn of the new century); and *urban architecture projects* (if the issue appears too relevant to be delegat-

ed only to the whims and interests of market operators). The surprising, perhaps unsettling fact is that none of these issues has found significant attention in the international literature; the gap that emerges requires some explanation. The urban planning literature fills thousands of pages without speaking of design. The reasons for this persistence should be investigated. The focus still lies on regulation (in generally traditional forms, among other things), the decision-making process, management problems, guiding values, cognitive questions — all topics explored long ago that have revealed limits that are now endemic. It is incredible how a future can be imagined for the discipline if these are just shared traces. These topics of interest have been confirmed since the early 1900s, first in North America, in search of a more solid and convincing alternative to the constituent limits of physical planning in the European tradition. We must acknowledge multiple diverging interests that have confused the connections with the original responsibilities. However, the results seemed incomplete and disappointing, such that they justified some nostalgic, back to the future, orientation aimed at readopting the physical aspect of the problems. In effect, the urban design literature (re-)emerged to face questions of city architecture and design, but the selected topics were often partial and not very innovative, as I have documented (Chapter 11). There are few traces of more complex questions that I referenced at the beginning of the section (the most important references are still found today in Europe: Wolfrum and Janson, 2019; Smets, 2022). It is also true, however, that these project ideas, despite expectations have not achieved convincing results even in Italy. This is also a point worth reflection.

The reformist idea of the master plan seems to have worn out its purpose. The prevalent model today is weak in the sense intended by Gigi Mazza, i.e. largely incomplete until the operational opportunities have found a well-developed, shared formulation. In the meantime, planning practice is reduced to an ‘art of the weak’, to use an effective formula by Henri Lefebvre (in which the conditions of weakness do not exclude the possibility of emancipation: Chapter 5). In practice, the master plan today takes the form of a vague strategic vision, which, due to its constitution, cannot shape the urban space. The deviation with Campos’ latest experimental models is clear. Planning tools have undergone a substantial metamorphosis, even if the resulting discontinuity does not seem to be perceived by common sense. When we speak of the master plan, perhaps the imagery again refers to the traditional ideal types, as general and prescriptive schemes of the spatial layout. Instead, it is just a weak trace that could be developed in

unequal ways according to the prevalent circumstances and desires. In this sense, the design-oriented content of planning tools reveals a clear regression with respect to the reformist tradition.

Similar considerations hold for the concept of the master plan as ‘city design’, in the sense tested in Italy by Gregotti and Secchi in the 1990s. That model of the plan suggested a unitary design for the entire urban territory that could reorganize emerging places (to subject to transformation projects) and consolidated fabrics (subject only to planning rules). The objective was interpreted with wisdom and experience by Gregotti and Cagnardi, who selected a few topics and areas of strategic interest that could shape the new city. Secchi’s vision was less selective and prudent, as he probably formalized an excessive number of area projects involving prescriptive norms (several dozen among Pesaro, Bergamo, Brescia, and Prato), with a twofold negative effect: local norms and choices were generally not respected and the preconceived idea of urban form failed. The possibilities of taking a similar approach are actually very scarce, like a period that ‘has really ended’ (Bianchetti, 2011).

Secchi himself (Chapter 4) was aware of the situation, suggesting a clear route correction: from the ‘city design’ view to an essential image (‘vision’) of the future city, as a framework of consistency, guidance, and legitimization for subsequent area operations. Secchi constructed satisfying rhetoric around this shift, but it was just rhetoric. In the best of cases, experts would be able to reveal some nonintuitive properties of existing structures and note some evolutionary possibilities worthy of being developed in the interest of urban society. Moreover, these are formal hypotheses that should be tested and investigated from various points of view. The investigation must be multidimensional and may become technically complicated. Instead, the most common reality is that the ‘strength of imagination’ is reduced to a trivial exercise in strategic thinking, ritual discourse on the objectives and strategies of planning action, which often follows patterns that are repetitive and indifferent to the context. The result is an array of idle talk that may be valid in any situation. It is an abyss compared to the intentions and ambitions enunciated by Secchi, but this is the most common reality.

The other two perspectives are more interesting. The first recalls the French tradition of the *projet urbain* (Pinson, 2004, 2009) and the European tradition of *integrated development programmes* that played an important role

in the late 1900s and early 2000s (Cremaschi, 2001, 2003, 2005). The basic idea (Chapter 13) is that the city and territory are transformed by means of area projects. It is necessary to develop mechanisms suitable for managing development processes, but especially handling the variety and integration of content for every project. Being rooted in the context and being able to shape space are two requirements often underestimated by management culture, although planners should not ignore them. Indeed, we could say that attention to these two issues is the particular contribution that the planning culture can make to the quality of such projects (Palermo, 2003). The ‘integrated programme’, conceived by the European bureaucracy as a laborious and demanding method, should become a true ‘*projet du territoire*’ [integrated spatial development tool] capable of developing the best evolutionary potential in the morphological, physical, and environmental (as well as economic and social) context. In Chapter 13, I documented how an important line of experiences in France combined a renewed focus on the physical city (Devillers, 1994; Panerai and Mangin, 1999) with a substantial change in urban governance models (Pinson, 2005, 2006). This is similar to the perspective that Alberto Clementi tried to focus on in Italy at the same time (1996, 1999) and which I personally tried to develop by participating in a series of ministerial programmes on economic/territorial and infrastructure issues (my field of practice: Palermo, 2004, 2006, 2009). This is a partial view compared to the more ambitious frameworks that I have indicated in the previous passages; however, it is significant and influential, as Arturo Lanzani confirms (2024, Section 8.3) in re-examining the vast and ambiguous field of ‘urban regeneration programmes’ that have seen important developments in Europe (Couch et al., 2003; Colantuono and Dixon, 2011), particularly in Great Britain (Jones and Evans, 2008; Tallon, 2010; Punter, 2010; Lehmann, 2019), although they represent a global trend (Leary and McCarthy, 2013). These experiences help us to understand the minimum requirements that spatial transformations should meet (Chapter 13). It is, however, necessary to recognize that attention to the issue has decreased in recent years. The drive towards integrated programming has long been exhausted in Italy. Today, the most urgent appeal regards the capacity of public spending, which is still incredibly at risk. The requirements for the quality of the intervention now seem to be secondary, and it is no longer possible to address them carefully. Referencing the minimum responsibilities of politics and technique should be a step that cannot be legitimately avoided.

Similar considerations seem absolutely justified in the case of the most

current projects in urban architecture. I am referring to local transformations that occur today according to a partial and specific logic — as purely area projects — without the need even to evoke the rhetoric of integrated development. They are simply architectural projects capable of generating urban effects of some importance. The creation of icons that may be valid as new ‘images of the city’ become one of the most desired requirements, but the public discussion that should justify the project is always meagre. Types, forms, relationships, materials, and impacts become secondary issues. The publicity of great environmental and economic values (by the developers rather than the public administration) seems sufficient. The author’s reputation — all the better if he or she is a starchitect — should become the main guarantee, at least for supporting the market value of the operation. I have already observed (Chapter 12) that this line does not encounter any obstacles in public opinion or the media, which mostly join the chorus of appreciation for the vitality of city development. The surprising — and unsettling — fact is the silence from the discipline. How is it possible that no voice is raised as to the lost opportunity of the most recent spatial transformations with great strategic importance? The case of Milan seems glaring. What would Gregotti, Secchi, or Mazza think of well-developed operations such as City Life or Porta Nuova (momentarily setting aside important projects currently underway, which are still in the balance in several respects)? Does anyone see traces of a ‘critical modification of the existing form’, an ‘open space design’, a check on the ‘consistency and legitimacy’ of local interventions with respect to a ‘clear and shared overall vision’? Certain sectors of the discipline are ready to hurl abuse at the negative effects of the neo-liberal city (Hackworth, 2007; Tasan-Kok and Baeten, 2012; Le Galès, 2016; Pinson and Morel Journal, 2017; Pinson, 2020). Do they intend to explicitly challenge even concrete operations such as those I have mentioned? The associations would seem logical, but they remain hidden. And yet, these are situations that cannot help but gradually improve over time, as often happens with complex urban transformations whose development was necessarily incremental. Instead, with City Life, the second residential block designed by Libeskind worsened the urban landscape (already debatable within the context) and local density. Meanwhile, for Porta Nuova, the latest tower designed by Cucinella is suffocated in a site that is clearly inappropriate in terms of size and location, while the pretentious ‘library of trees’ still awaits a summarily relevant interpretation. Thus, there seems to be no progress on certain operations that were already trivial in terms of the constituent functions and weak in terms of the treatment of open spaces, where individual, in-

cidental buildings of varying quality, are juxtaposed according to a purely jumbled effect. I would be surprised if the planning culture had nothing to object to in this respect. Just browse the album of good principles to find some essential argument for criticism and (different) direction. Perhaps the claim to a more influential disciplinary role with respect to these processes may be based on references to the minimum requirements of a good ‘urban project’ (Section 13.11). It is not enough to rely on some traditional planning parameter that now lacks any sense or effective influence (if it was ever capable of supporting some legal disagreement, which proves to be formalistic or instrumental with respect to the substance of the problems). Nor is the pedagogy of a good vision enough, as it is easily reduced to generic, vain rhetoric. Maybe planning experts should once again assume responsibility for the effective design, as seemed normal for the original figure of the town planner.

The conclusions of this reasoning are not very predictable. The design aspect of planning is not an obvious requirement, not even for Italian culture or Mediterranean culture in general, although they have always shown a clear propensity in this sense. The most complex and ambitious interpretations do not seem to be verified empirically in this phase (but the trend has always been clear since the 2000s). The conditions do not seem to exist to effectively reintroduce the idea of ‘city design’, in the sense intended by Vittorio Gregotti at the end of the 20th century. Nor is it true of Bernardo Secchi’s vision in the early years of the new century, which unfortunately and easily lends itself to merely rhetorical or instrumental uses (on the other hand, it is easier today to question the reasons that may have led people like Sarkozy or Medvedev to promote such initiatives). Nor do the perspectives of the traditional ‘master plan’ according to the reformist tradition seem well-founded, because the gap introduced by a law such as the one in Emilia-Romagna (2017) is deeper than what the disciplinary debate seems willing to admit. A weak idea of the plan (in the sense used by Mazza since the 1990s) develops and the sense and quality of the tool will only become clear when an actual transformation is completed. In this framework, the design responsibilities of urban planning seem to take on increasingly limited, specific forms. Priority commitments should first focus on compliance with the essential requirements of a ‘*projet du territoire*’ and the claim and strengthening of a planning-based concept of the ‘urban architecture project’ (the two perspectives tend to converge). Attention to the ‘open space project’, the relationships between project and context, and the actual collateral principles (unintended but relevant) are

responsibilities that cannot be avoided (Chapter 13).

Is this a minimalist perspective? Bernardo Secchi would probably denounce the *incrementalist* limits of this vision. Gigi Mazza would acknowledge the realism of some of his anticipations. He long fought for a more rigorous and effective concept of planning regulation based on well-developed technical knowledge and more comprehensive social justifications. Subjectively (lucidly), however, he had to realise that the only possible outcome was a ‘weak idea of urban planning’ to interpret according to an ethics of responsibility and republican idea of citizenship. Paradoxically, however, some disciples would still like to revive an untenable scholasticism based on his original idea of regulation, or they limit themselves to evoking a variety of dated, nonuniform, and often incomparable situations and experiences, without any care for a paradigmatic or critical framework (Gaeta, 2024). Pragmatically, Campos Venuti would note the current conditions and strive to interpret them in the most responsible and effective way, although without renouncing the search for a unifying perspective. There is a real demand in this sense that should not remain marginal or unmet. Ironically, Pier Luigi Crosta could confirm this: ‘I warned you; the actual results were mandatory and we cannot delude ourselves: the future will not be very different.’ Alberto Clementi could reiterate this: ‘I tried to do it, but the situation is complicated.’ Most of the international literature could answer: ‘So many complications! There are innumerable, more limited and specific problems, ideologies, and practices that the discipline can continue to handle: the fate and sense of planning were never in question.’ On the other hand, I maintain that it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the political and design issues that I have summarized here (these are questions that cross the entire book). In my opinion, avoiding these responsibilities means condemning ourselves to a post-planning future in the sense I have underlined many times. Does it seem to be an acceptable perspective?

The instrumental concept of urban planning that seems to prevail in Italy today may arouse some indignant objections (Granata et al., 2024). Such is the case with the Italian Legislative Decree known as ‘Save Milan’, which obtained broad political consensus in the Italian parliament in November 2024. It was meant to restore legality to numerous urban redevelopments in Milan, but could potentially open the way everywhere to regeneration projects inconsistent with the needs of public interest and the principles of urban sustainability. The real scandal is not the specific event. This is just

the flip side of an unacceptable concept of urban planning that has been established for some time, without any notable objections. The resulting practices are nonreformist, more consistent with a «neo-Haussmannian programme», as Merrifield would say (2014), or simply neo-liberal ideology.

14.7 Responsibility, Justification, Capability

In conclusion, there are three cornerstones on which I could imagine a future for the culture and discipline of urban planning. I do not consider them to be obvious, but rather at risk. The first is the *sense of responsibility*: I continue to view this point as decisive for the same reasons and needs that I glimpsed more than 30 years ago (Palermo, 1993). ‘From normativity to responsibility’ (Raz, 2011): the disciplinary commitment cannot be reduced to producing regulations. Urban planners must investigate the consequences of their actions, not only unintended effects, but also undesired ones. Whatever the technical means of intervention — regulation, visioning, or design — it is necessary to investigate real impacts and outcomes under the given conditions, asking whether the results are consistent with intentions and what effects they have on society, politics, and the city. It is not right to rely on just some a priori ideal types conceived at other times and contexts, or to decline every responsibility for the actual consequences. Giuseppe Campos Venuti’s rigorous pragmatism and Gigi Mazza’s critical intelligence offer encouraging suggestions. Pier Luigi Crosta’s disarming lucidity should be valued as a warning and stimulus against any consolatory or obliging reassurance, but I hope it does not become an alibi to reject the enterprise. Bernardo Secchi’s proud claim of expertise and authoritative vision may create effects contrary to expectations.

The second cornerstone is the need to *justify* any orientation or disciplinary act. We live in an era of communication that encourages immediate, self-referential messages, apparently with a common sense. There is an enormous need to reconstruct and share minimal truths about the meaning and effects of ongoing operations. The need responds to both ethical and epistemological rationale (Peels, 2017). For Gigi Mazza, that became an obsession, a mandatory but always fleeting commitment. Perhaps this is a ‘mission impossible’, like educating, taking care for, and governing people, according to Maud Mannoni, if those functions are understood as a unilateral relationship between expert and subject (1973). Campos Venuti was perfectly aware of the need, but mainly dealt with guaranteeing convincing, or at least acceptable answers under the given conditions. Secchi

used this topic to build satisfactory rhetoric that did not become common sense; indeed, he strengthened the groove between technical expertise, which is a bit elitist and abstruse, and everyday practice. Pier Luigi Crosta probably felt close to Mannoni's positions. For as complicated as the commitment may be, it is a responsibility that cannot be avoided. If planners are to play a social role of any importance, they must give reasons for their intentions and proposals in forms and ways that are accessible to common sense, but conceptually consistent with the demanding principles of practical reason (Chapters 6 and 13). On the other hand, nostalgic reference to the (real or presumed) past 'lessons of planning' is not enough, nor is an appeal to pure contingency, because neither a discipline nor the claim of 'technical knowledge' holds up without a paradigmatic vision as a responsible, shared choice. With the awareness that the limits of disciplinary orthodoxy have long been clear (since the 1950s–1960s in Italy, when De Carlo and Samonà, as architects and planners, and Carlo Doglio, as a political and social analyst/activist, denounced the 'sick roots of urbanism': De Carlo et al., 1976; Doglio, 1995 and 2021); however, it is precisely the best experiences that have shown how difficult it is to achieve substantial and widespread progress.

Capability in action is the third cornerstone. Rightly so, this requirement was always a mandatory priority for Campos Venuti. Mazza's critical investigation began with realization of the limitations of relevance and effectiveness of currently planning practice. The gap between form and practice pushed Crosta to radically revise the idea of urban planning, with some risk for a nihilistic outcome. Secchi could not lucidly ignore the limits of the effectiveness of normal practice as the most audacious experiments. His conclusion was that planning action can even generate nonimmediate effects in the long term and in perhaps unexpected ways. However, I do not believe that this perspective can become an alibi before the difficulties or impossibility of providing answers to current problems. The effective capability remains an unavoidable requirement for the public and social role of urban planning. The point is that, as Mazza and Crosta unequivocally showed, this result cannot be pursued by adopting more traditional models of rationality that inspired the rise of modern town planning. Therefore, the discipline would need to conceive and legitimize a nontrivial metamorphosis.

Personally, I am not sure that there is a future for planning in a sense that is not merely bureaucratic or procedural. I am convinced, however, that this

possibility cannot avoid the three requirements that I have summarized in this conclusion. A willingness and capacity for a break would be necessary, a substantial discontinuity with respect to the prevailing institutional models over the long term and still influential in recent years (Palermo, 2016). The facts show that a radical change has already occurred (Gabellini, 2010, 2018). The modern project is today an archaeological find, even if Bernardo Secchi still evokes some value (such as by Eric Mumford, 2018, and other authoritative voices). Gigi Mazza aspired to a more rigorous foundation of the capability for regulation and control in the discipline; he discovered and sanctioned the radical, insurmountable weakness. Today, Campos Venuti would realize that his reform-oriented programme is weaker and more open than what he could have imagined at the turn of the century. Secchi's last 'paradigm shift', from city design to visioning, was an indirect confirmation of the same trend. Meanwhile, planning continues to repeat marginal, hardly innovative, and often vain discourse, while urban design seems to be satisfied with a limited and specific *bricolage* that is not devoid of utility, but is far removed from its original ambitions. No true winner has emerged from professional contests between the various 'urbanisms'. The most influential trend today is probably tactical urbanism, which tacitly and reflexively echoes the great disciplinary deconstruction initiated long ago by Pier Luigi Crosta. While attempts at the beginning of the century to reintroduce new programming and integrated spatial projects (by Alberto Clementi and others) now seem to be dying out, without leaving very significant traces. This is true, even if the perspective may always be considered up to date and potentially relevant; perhaps it is the only sustainable one, free of any real alternatives. I believe that the discipline in this phase should not avoid some questions of evident interest. Is this the current state? Should we limit ourselves to acknowledging it with conviction or resignation? Or would it be right and possible to imagine a future that is at least partly different? And how? The fate of the discipline depends on the emerging answers. I have tried to suggest some traces.

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Pier Carlo Palermo
Roots and Frontiers.
Figures and Cultures in Contemporary Urban Planning

Urban planning is a discipline, or rather a set of practices that always has trouble finding a well-developed, shared structure. It has many diverse roots that presume a variety of unequal lines of development that are not always compatible. Schools of thought and programmes for action often have distinct connotations, such as regional traditions that inhibit the spread, and synthesis of various planning ideas. The perspectives also seem uncertain: they may be perceived differently depending on the context. Vagueness or indeterminacy are limits that need to be overcome.

This book re-examines the roots, frontiers, and borders of urban planning. It updates the framework of 'classical references' in Italy that should now at least consider the generation of the 1930s. It investigates pioneering issues, as well as the way in which have been refined by some authoritative branches of the international literature. It presents a comparative investigation that aims to overcome divisions and borders in space and time. An important metamorphosis seems necessary with respect not only to the tradition of the 'modern project', but also to the 'reform-oriented programmes' of the late 1900s. Finally, the book covers the rediscovery of political and social aspects as well as the physical city. Urban planners should perhaps not only deal with rules and visions, but take direct responsibility in the realm of effective action, that is, urban policies and projects that transform the city.

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