



## Urbanistica n. 126

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*Fausto Curti* Out of place. Large projects lacking context

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Received books

## The regeneration 'beyond the center': the complex programs

Franca Balletti

Launched in the '90s, the city's regeneration process has led to the establishment of a new development pattern through which Genoa has secured a 'multidimensional' image, where it is no longer associated with purely industrial and port-related functions, but plays an important touristic and cultural role and attracts high-skill production operations. The local administration has been able to seize the opportunities offered by the so-called 'major events' and to obtain EU and government funding, especially in connection with the so-called 'complex programs'. The city's new strategic layout revolves around two main themes: the recovery and reuse of the old harbor, for touristic, recreational and cultural purposes; the gradual expansion of the process to substantial parts of the historic city; and the redesigning of public areas in the city center; and the recycling of disused industrial areas, a process which started in the '80s under the EU Resider Program, with the reclamation of the former Italsider site (Campi, in Val Polcevera) for small-scale manufacturing and commercial operations. Although the media have often focused on the city center, the vast conversions carried out (or currently under way) in areas outside the center, using the new plan-project-management integration tools, are equally important (San Biagio, Fiumara).

**The beginning of the experimentation process**  
Genoa's experience can be broken down into stages, each with its own features, goals and tools. Together,

such phases outline a substantial evolution from the initial occasional location choices and project compartmentalization, still entailing large use of conventional process planning and management procedures, to a more 'mature' stage, involving the latest complex tools, namely, the PRUSST (Programs for Urban Regeneration and Territory Sustainable Development) and the *Contratti di Quartiere* (Neighborhood Contracts), which focus on the sharing of choices, the combining of material and immaterial actions and the prior appraising of project feasibility.

The first stage began with the San Biagio integrated program, involving the reclamation of one of the largest areas formerly devoted to oil processing. Designed for the creation of a mix of residential, commercial, hospitality and service functions, the initiative partly relied on funding made available under Law 203/91 for the construction of police dwellings. If compared with complex programs, this was still an isolated episode. However, it provided an opportunity to test out a government-controlled reclamation operation featuring complex characteristics in terms of costs and high-income functions, the latter being indispensable in order to ensure profitability for a project promoted by a private body (Coop7).

### The consolidation and implementation of different tools and procedures

The second stage, which included the PRUs (Urban Recovery Programs, Ministerial Decree 1/12/94), the PRIUs (Urban Regeneration Programs, Ministerial Decree 21/12/94) and the first-generation Neighborhood Contracts (Ministerial Decree 22/10/97), led to: the

recovery and infrastructuring of public housing areas (PRUs for Voltri, Pegli, Begato, San Eusebio); the re-cycling of derelict production facilities (PRIUs for the Fiumara's Ansaldo site, the ice factory in Piazza Sopranis, the cotton mill in Cornigliano and the tannery in via del Mirto-Marassi); the restoration of old city areas (Neighborhood Contract for Porta Soprana-Carmine-via Giustiniani); the completion of the old harbor conversion, begun with the Columbus celebrations, with the redevelopment of the old docks.

These projects have reflected the local government's increasing ability to attract financing, the expanding focus from mere landscape recovery to social and economic promotion, the gradual inclusion of the initiatives in urban policies, as well as a growing interconnection with conventional planning tools, especially following the revision of the city's general plan in 1997.

It can be safely said that the Genoese complex programs were not introduced as 'subversive tools', as some sort of leverage means for opportunistic variations to the plan, but as projects in line with the plan's overall philosophy. Although many of the past initiatives were sponsored by private bodies, a public tender selection system and official commitment deriving from undersigning memoranda of understanding and framework agreements have made it possible to opt for projects in the interest of the city, as well as to define performance rules.

### Towards integration into an overall city design

The approval of the PRUSST marked the expansion of the involved territory to almost the entire city, as well as the introduction of a set of measures devised to create infrastructures, sustainable

development opportunities and integrated activities, to enable the assessment of their consistency, mutual compatibility, practical and financial feasibility, and to provide an opportunity to test the relationship between public and private interests.

Although the objective framework was designed to include a very large territory, the allocation of the funds confirmed an inclination to privilege the waterfront and adjacent areas, with the exception of the infrastructure network and fruit and vegetable market of Bolzaneto in Val Polcevera. While leading the complex transformation of strategic public areas to completion, the comeback of several initiatives to the same locations has left the needs of the suburbs unanswered, which have not as yet been paid back for the environmental expropriation they underwent as a consequence of the industrial role they assumed since the 1800s.

The latest Neighborhood Contracts redistribute funds in a more balanced manner between the old Ghetto and two public housing areas: one in Voltri in the west-end and one in Molassana, in Val Bisagno. Nevertheless, adequate quality standards across the entire urban territory will only be achieved if urban policies begin to focus on the creation of a 'city of cities', designed to enhance the local identities deriving from Genoa's old multi-center layout, as outlined in the city's 2000 strategic plan. At a time of serious financial crisis for municipal councils, complex programs may indeed represent, like the European projects (Resider, Urban I and II) did before, the key to meet the expectations of suburban communities, as opposed to the strategic areas in the city.