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The future of town planning and *Urbanistica*

Paolo Avarello*

Italian town planning has changed rapidly during recent years: it has confronted new themes, experimented with new instruments, techniques, and methods, and even invented new specialisms and developed a new professionalism. All to meet the new needs of 'territorial management' suiting the appropriate evolution of an increasingly complex, articulated, and diversified society.

Yet 'territorial management' remains a simple application of principle for real practice is fragmented by the way the administrative system and its 'powers' are articulated, being managed in a jealously guarded manner. This means a 'subsidiary' concept is required: a global, holistic approach to solving problems, from the sharing of objectives to political action and co-operation.

While planning remains the fulcrum of INU (*Istituto nazionale di urbanistica*, Italian National Town Planning Institute) interest and aspiration, it has changed profoundly in recent years, not only because of the effects of new regional laws and EU directives, but above all because of the influence of examples from other European countries, especially urban transformations.

New forms of planning which transcend the Italian experience have been added to the old Italian town development plans in terms of the objectives, scale of reference, field of application, content, construction methods, as well as the selection of themes, behaviours, politics, and actions to be induced. In particular, the local development plans, inclined less towards building

regulations and concentrating more on the aims and objectives of the administration, that is, establishing the co-ordination of diverse more or less long-term public actions and leaving the responsibility of defining future actions and operations to other 'operational' instruments. Therefore, these are plans which at last consider and incorporate temporal dynamics, and so confront the uncertainty that the future holds, as well as the changes in conditions and interests that arise with the passage of time. Moreover, these are very different plans from those imposed by law from on high according to a predefined model, whose activation had to 'conform' to a rigid layout, leaving the needs of the interested administrations and their opportunities effectively unmet and missed, incurably.

In contrast, the layout of the new plans is based on the evolving reality, opposing and supporting trends while maintaining useful margins of operational flexibility.

'Expert' plans that do not need to prefigure the 'future assets' in rigid detail *ex ante*, but interact with reality by pursuing predetermined objectives by suiting the politics, interventions, and actions to them. The exact opposite of the comforting ideological fairy tale of the (always) 'right' plan of the (always) wrong reality.

Therefore, in being adapted to reality and in being able to adapt them through time, the plans are useful to the administration as they are more practical and efficient than the old plans. Lastly, these new plans dialogue with the planning system of which they are a part, and which can no longer be composed of a pyramid of power with consequent exchange of vetoes.

However, instruments thus conceived open up a large space between the upline

choices and definitions and the downline practical interventions. If this space is not covered by suitable technical knowledge town plans soon return to being useless maps to hang on the wall, or else the best hypothesis is that they find a place in the 'book of dreams'.

In conclusion, in the new plans, equalisations, and complex programs innovation does not need any clarification of the pros and cons for and against it, but in contrast needs to be a serious reconstruction of content and methods.

Moreover, the cultural and instrumental dissolution of the old urban planning, in freeing administrations and town planners from the old ways of informal loose unconsolidated and unofficial ties and connections, forces great growth in the technical culture and resulting practice developed. A great growth which INU, through its journals and particularly through *Urbanistica*, insists on being a part of by using all the weight of its cultural tradition, conceived to be innovative.

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