



Urbanistica n. 130

May-August 2006

Distribution by www.planum.net

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Competitiveness and urban policies

Albino Caporale

That an Italian urban policy has never existed (or rather, a development policy for the Italian cities), seems to have been a consensus position among scholars and policy makers. However, a growing concern for the territorial dimension of policies has opened in the last 10 years a widening breach in industrial and development policies.

This paradox may find an explanation in the essays that follow from a study entitled *Economic and urban competitiveness policies in the future community planning of Objective 2 Regions*. It was commissioned by the Contact Group made up by Ministers and Regions at the Department for Development and Cohesion Policies of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and was coordinated by the Region of Tuscany and the Public Investment Evaluation Unit (UVAL). Concluded in the first half of 2006, it was carried out by the Istituto ricerche interventi sociali of Prato, under the direction of Marco Cremaschi from the University Roma Tre. In these essays, the model of urban policies considered is different from the urban rehabilitation or the 'Pic Urban' experiences, especially in the Italian version. Effectively, this latter has represented a significant model of integrated actions, but it operated in the wake of similar tools of intervention, and in any case remained restricted to just a few cases. Moreover, the layout of Urban was very precise, directed at specific and delimited 'target urban areas', and furthermore with an intensity of aid (measurable in Euros of investment per inhabitant involved) that could not be

repeated on a systematic scale. In Italy, however, there were other examples of policies involving urban and metropolitan areas: the city axis of the Objective 1 areas in the 2000-06 period; the urban ITP (Integrated Territorial Projects); the recent experimentation of the Strategic Plans; as well as, and this is one of the most original and relevant aspects of the research, the structural funds programmes in the Objective 2 areas. It is not a fact to be overlooked that the resources for intervention in the cities in all the Single Programming Documents accounted for over 50% of the financial planning. Despite the fact that many interventions within the cities were carried out through these programmes, it could be objected that the sum of the initiatives does not represent a unified policy (and here appraisals such as those laid out in the pages that follow dealing with four regions of the Centre-North prove useful). The same objection could also be valid for Urban, as for other programmes. However, it is important to emphasise that cities feature a major concentration of resources, projects and interventions; consequently, the urban dimension of development policies should be made more systematic on this basis, given the numerous examples and the accumulation of investments in quantitative terms. It is, nevertheless, necessary to reflect seriously on the impact of an integrated vision of such initiatives. In this case too, the research points up the aspects which have had success and the deficiencies of the combinations of initiatives in the cities and in the regions examined, from which we can draw useful lessons for the policies to come. In short, this study

addresses the problems of integration between urban policies and innovation, modestly attempting to provide an answer. As always, the best indications are to be found not so much in ideological passwords, but in reflections that go beyond the everyday rhetoric, tackle the problem starting from a basis of critical knowledge, and define shared strategies.