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What plan for what town planning?

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When Enrico Mattei decided to locate the Eni Hq in the outskirts of Milan in the 1950s, the choice fell upon San Donato Milanese, which at the time was still an agricultural village with just over 2,000 residents located in the first city belt, 7 kilometres from piazza Duomo in the centre of Milan. This was the beginning of Metanopoli, a model company-town which fitted neatly into the industrial town model. The town planning project was based on the principles of the modern architectural movement, and entrusted to skilled young architects. They placed all the public services, schools, shops, the church, large sports facilities, and green areas alongside the homes for the oil company workers, administration staff and management. The Eni development was the main engine for development at San Donato Milanese, both economically and in terms of urban development. The city grew, with clearly identifiable and relatively autonomous areas which had a close relationship with Metanopoli, and were either similar in quality (plenty of green areas, no fenced off boundaries, and good services) or very different, as in the Certosa (the Korea for immigrants) and Di Vittorio (a large social housing area) districts. Local policy makers soon found themselves having to deal with the problem of re-establishing a balance. At the beginning of the new century San Donato was a town with a population of 32,000 residents in the most densely developed area in the *milanese* region, 10 minutes by metro from the city center, with plenty of green areas and good services, but some problems deriving from developments in its recent past:

- Eni took the decision to sell all its real estate in order to concentrate on energy, its core business;
- the main purchaser of the office buildings and plots was an investment fund, Asio, linked to the American investment bank Goldman Sachs;
- at the same time the company housing was sold off to employee cooperatives, while the large amount of parkland, streets and public areas were sold to the municipal authorities, which took on their maintenance;
- in 2003 the new private owner announced its intention to profit from its assets, which meant developing a general project together with the municipal authorities which would then allow it to sell the various areas according to a specific schedule;
- the current town planning scheme, approved in 1994, does not allow control of the formal quality of projects, and this would be a crucial aspect for the administration in the event that the owner decided to propose a general project that could impact on the structure and form of the city;
- we are also going through a transition period as far as town planning legislation and instruments are concerned. Research into a new set of rules introducing a division of the Area management plan into three different instruments has been underway for some years. These three instruments would be a Planning document, Regulations plan and Service plan;
- during this transitional phase, the Regione Lombardia began introducing new instruments from 1994, such as the Municipal town planning policy framework document, a guideline document that opened up planning activities towards greater flexibility, allowing exceptions to the current regulations following

approval of the Integrated action plans. Not long afterwards the Services plan was implemented by regional law 1/01. This made it possible to establish the conditions for planning and developing the public city. The decision to revise the Plan therefore took place against a complex background in which laws were changing. At the same time there was a need for rapid responses, in order to seize the opportunity provided by the willingness to collaborate of the new owner of some crucial areas for change. This particularly complex framework was the reason for applying for the support of the university in revising the town planning instruments. The Department of architecture and planning's San Donato Project divided its work into four main areas:

- a framework document set out with a view to the role of the Planning document of the law under discussion, a tool with a strongly strategic role, which offered an opportunity to examine the current situation of the city and its development prospects;
- working with the administration in developing an Integrated action plan which would make it possible to build consensus around a complex town planning project involving central areas of the town and avoid project fragmentation;
- a Services plan based on law 1/01, but which could easily be translated into the Services plan of the new law under discussion;
- a shared planning programme in the various areas based on the and three-year Public works plan, which constitutes a 'bank' of analyses, descriptions, images, discussions and materials on the various parts of the city capable of providing material for the various

activities. After regional law 12 was passed in march 2005, we added one more area of activity to the four main ones. This was linked to the drafting of the Regulations plan, and preparation of the Planning document and Services document. The preparation of the Framework document was based on discussions about the future of San Donato with political parties, associations and opinion leaders involved in a debate organised via focus groups which made it possible to discuss scenarios and interpretations and allowed the participants to arrive at a shared vision. The work in the districts represented another way of relating to the city, from the grassroots up, and its component parts, together with local residents and players, raising issues and translating them into projects. This highly structured process initially involved developing a model (analysis of the physical and social context of the districts, investigation of the problems perceived by local players, an exhibition and workshop, district projects and a final report), which was replicated in all the districts. The Services plan developed alongside the process as a whole, and enabled us to look at the services in depth as well as their organisational dynamics in relation to the reference area, and emerging needs, by comparing them with the data. These activities helped to open up negotiations with private entities, in particular Asio, with regard to the future of central areas, by involving their planners in discussions about their future structure and making a careful assessment of the public and private benefits of the issues discussed. All this made it possible for one of the most important

proposals of the operation to revise the planning instruments to emerge. Unless it is modified by the implementation of the Integrated action plans, it will constitute a real project for urban reform which will extend the quality of the north-east part of San Donato (Mattei's villages Metanopoli and Bolgiano, linked by a wide avenue/park which has achieved monumental proportions thanks to the size of the trees and width of the street) towards to south-west including the more disorganised, less structured areas of via Libertà, via Trieste and Certosa. The lap involves transforming one of the main central routes (Gramsci-Battisti) into a boulevard with a triple row of trees, separate pedestrian walkways and cycle paths, running from the metro station at the north end of the city right through to the south, reorganising a series of public spaces, squares and civic functions, and giving quality and spatial order to the less attractive part of the town. Transformation of the central areas will also allow the creation of a new central square and a park in Il Pratone, an undeveloped 10-hectare plot in the town centre. It is a complex operation that could be easily put in place through the agreements forming part of the Integrated plans, and potentially would have considerable impact. Approval of the Framework document and Integrated action plan for the central areas was granted in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The following months were used to prepare the Management plan area (Amp) that the government coalition chose not to debate at the town council during the last months of its tenure. The electoral defeat prevented completion of the project through adoption of the Amp, and so far has resulted in suspension of

the collaboration between the San Donato local administration and the Polytechnic. Beyond this partial result, and the inevitable feeling of disappointment after a period of such intensive work, as we stated earlier with regard to the university's role in actual planning processes, we think it is important to present the materials of this complex collection of activities. Looking at the overall significance of the work we have carried out I would like to underline some aspects which I think introduce some important innovations:

- we have overcome the two-speed logic involving the participation of local players and residents and the transformation of the indications from participatory processes into projects. As already emphasised, the two dimensions were managed very closely, which gave excellent results in terms of method and content;
- we gave the Framework document and Planning document the role of strategic town planning instruments capable of defining the direction, scope and possible effects of the choices to be made, also by involving local players;
- we tested a method of implementing regional law 12/05, using greater flexibility with regard to land use restrictions, project preparation and services planning, without eliminating a strong public role in guiding the processes of change.

Becoming involved in a transitional phase with some even dramatic implications for the delicate balance of the town that grew from the foundations of Mattei's intuitions, we felt responsible for interpreting this high-level tradition by looking forwards and trying to project his intuitions into the future. We felt we could do so by supporting the administration in a very

complex planning initiative. We interpreted this responsibility by trying to work on a complete plan for the city, considerably put to the test by the local input, that would give San Donato a stable, almost definitive structure, a new balance between the past and the future, through work on the inherited quality and extension of this quality to the rest of the town. As often is the case in town planning, things went differently. It is never possible to arrive at a definitive structure, you only ever travel along a stretch of road. The only thing we can do is be committed to ensuring that this stretch of road is leading in the right direction.