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In search of a working dimension

Paolo Galuzzi

I have been asked to comment on the town-planning operation carried out by the San Donato Workshop taking the Lombardy regional law of 2005 as a starting point. This involved observing how such a complex and extensive town planning process could be framed within the much narrower dimension offered by the new town-planning scheme for Lombardy, the so called Pgt (*Piano di governo del territorio*, or Territorial administration plan). By experimenting and interpreting a law that proposed a unique solution to reform the scheme and, in doing so, let more than one aspect of its application unresolved.

The Pgt adopted a particular structure, by flanking the existing Services plan (PDs) with the Plan document (Dp), a general, non-conformative plan, and the Rules plan (Pdr), a prescriptive document aimed solely at regulating the consolidated town and non urban areas. What was lacking was a working instrument to define the compliant planning aspects in terms of potential for urban, public and private transformation. This role appears to have been given, implicitly and inappropriately, to the traditional working plans or Integrated intervention programmes (PII), which represent the implementing stages. The absence of this component means that the experimental phase of the Pgt is midway between the traditional form of the town-planning scheme and the solution proposed in Lombardy through Regional law 9/99 with the Pii framework documents. The operation tackled by the San Donato project has taken up this challenge by opting for a more convincing

approach to the general and strategic aspect and its implementation. This choice was also helped by two special conditions imposed by the context: the high-quality urban context of 'Mattei town'; a single private partner in the strategic checkerboard of central areas undergoing transformation.

It is convincing how strategies, structures and projects have been combined in a Plan document that is not limited to being a document of policies and goals, but instead offers an overview of designs and scenarios illustrated in a programmatic and iconic manner. The essence of the project that has been explored and agreed is outlined in the Plan document, but since this lacks any regulatory component, even in the form of guidelines, it leaves the more specific and detailed treatment of the areas to be transformed to the Rules plan and Services plan.

In all three documents, the strategic and planning dimension are clearly interlinked, creating the network and tasks of the future design for strategic central areas and for individual local areas and neighbourhoods in the detailed transformation projects. This clarity is helped by their representation and verbal-visual communications, which is graphically precise and elegant in outlining the project's forms and performance in terms of relation and structure.

The contribution made by San Donato offers interesting starting points for gauging the threshold for an in-depth study of project exploration, and outlines a clear path for interpretation that leaves ample margins of flexibility and adaptation to unexpected events. There are two criticisms that I would like to point out concerning aspects that needed more careful

analysis in terms of the outlook chosen: the first concerns the project for the existing town; the second regards, again with fatal results, the relationship with the working dimension. In the case of San Donato, the Rules plan, which should specify the regulations for the consolidated town, appears to place greater emphasis on analysing the potential of the new projects rather than defining the quality of the existing fabric in terms of quality maintenance and building adaptation. From a planning process that pays such close attention to the formal and physical contents of the town and its surrounding area, we would expect greater valorisation of the quality of the existing town, in particular its modern value as a company town. Instead, hedged in by the strategic guidelines for the operating spheres and the overly synthetic and interchangeable intervention methods for the various fields of application, the physical aspects of the consolidated urban area do not emerge and only traces of the various settlement models can be seen in the analytical tables.

Lastly, in terms of operative aspects, although it is worth noting that correct operative reference is made to the Integrated intervention programmes and to the three-year Public works plan, for the more rigorous outcomes of the participation, the proposal outlined by the PGT for San Donato concentrates all the contributions, both in strategic terms and the plans for future transformations, in the plan proposal. This inevitably runs the risks of being exposed to the sequence of events, consisting of shared consensus, strategy and planning, that appeared to have been overcome in the proposed method. Not in the strategic long-term choices, which call for the creation of a consensus that

is not banal and authoritative and are the result of vision based on technical knowledge and government leadership; but in the more local solutions where it cannot always be assumed that the outcome of consultation will be confirmed at the later time of implementation. In this case, the operating dimension can help to make the results of the participatory processes more tangible and can be assessed first of all in terms of sustainability and, at a later stage, efficacy. In the future, the challenge facing innovation processes regarding the plan will be to make all three dimensions, which are often declined and structured in equivocal terms, consistent using flexibility and proportion: the meaning of the town-planning strategy, as expressed by the overall visions and representations through concepts and synthetic schemes; the contents and quality of operational programmes and the incisiveness of urban and town-planning policies; and lastly, the plans for physical transformation which represent its actual implementation. It is the last dimension that, in the end, provides a tangible measure of the contribution made by innovation and the integrity of the vision, strategies, programmes and policies.