

## **COSENZA**

The object of the programme is the historic centre and the Via Popilia area, the most degraded district of modern Cosenza, afflicted by considerable problems of social malaise.

The division between the historic centre, located on the slopes of Colle Pancrazio, and the building expansion beyond the river Crati (in its turn separated from Via Popilia by the railway embankment) gave rise to difference between this and the modern city. This caused the decline of the old town from the standpoint both of the dispersal of the productive community and of the conditions of life, hygiene and utilities, in spite of the presence of buildings of particular artistic and architectural prestige.

The Cosenza sub-programme of the URBAN Community initiative is a coherent, organic excerpt of the Mayor's Programme, presented in the elections of November-December 1993 and adopted at the first session of the municipal council. Immediately after being elected, the activity of promotion and of involvement of the population in all its components took place not only, obviously, during the course of the election campaign, but also through the creation of the communication activity by the municipal administration, no means being neglected: from the setting up of a press office to posters, to the creation of an Internet site, to the periodic publication of a bulletin sent out to all the families, and to the acquisition of television spaces in which to broadcast weekly all the relevant information.

The URBAN programme for Cosenza thus took as its objective that of becoming the binder and the unifying instrument of territorial policy and the citizens.

An important moment for the identification of the project areas and the finalisation of the programme occurred in 1994 with a transnational workshop held in Cosenza by the European "Districts in Crisis" Association, which Cosenza had only just joined. During this, with various actors and with the representatives of the districts concerned, the emergent themes and the instruments to resolve the problems of alienated districts were discussed.

The initial strategy of "attack on the historic centre", which proved to be the winning one, foresaw on the one hand a measure on the infrastructures with the reconstruction of buildings, and on the other supporting actions for productive activities, setting up new service functions in keeping with the times, with special regard to the problems of the community and social malaise.

Naturally, recourse has also been had to the various forms of bidding for the design and implementation of the works foreseen in URBAN: from the competition of ideas to public notices of design, to competitive tenders and to private bidding.

The fact that the drawing up of the programme and the launch of the new Master Plan were simultaneous, furthermore, prevented urban planning obstacles from being opposed to the carrying out of the various Measures; if anything URBAN enabled important works, fundamental for the image of the new city foreseen by the Master Plan, to be carried out.

In this context the municipality of Cosenza acted at two levels: on the one hand, providing incentives for private actors to upgrade buildings, establishing handicraft and commercial activities, and preserving historic buildings, as well as the attempt, which was successful, to bring back into the district some important cultural functions; and on the other hand, identifying critical points to be addressed in order to guarantee accessibility and connections between the historic centre and the new city.

I think that the evaluation of the results that our programme has already obtained is worthy of particular reflection. Initially, it had seemed off-balance in favour of physical measures and with few resources for

social typologies. However, many of the physical measures have had very worthwhile social spinoffs. The physical measures, in fact, together with the contributions to productive activities, led within a very short time to a renaissance of the historic centre that was truly astonishing both because of its rapidity and for the quality of life that obtains there. And only through their integration was it possible to achieve these results: until it became explicit that the municipal administration would be investing in both the short and the long term in the rehabilitation of public spaces in the historic centre, no operator in fact came forward to use the grants offered for the purchase and restructuring of the old workshops. But when this became clear, within just a few months this trend was decidedly reversed. Today, the historic centre of Cosenza is one of the most visited places in all Calabria, above all at weekends when young people from all parts crowd the streets and the bars and clubs until late at night.

There is no doubt that the evaluation of the induced effects is also a positive one.

From the increased employment (more than two hundred new shops and workshops, of which one-third accounted for in URBAN, the social cooperatives for management of the services, and the skilled personnel for the functioning of the Culture House and all the activities created by this in quick succession), to the fact of repopulation (there has been a definite return to the historic centre also in terms of residence), to the attraction of other investments (private operators have requested to participate in the Urban Renewal Programme approved last year and regarding more or less the same objective area as URBAN, for a total investment of 400 billion lire or 206 million Ecu). The strengthening of social ties between the inhabitants also definitely increased, which is observed from the fact that living in the historic centre or in Via Popilia is less and less regarded as a negative element.

The bureaucratic structure of our municipality, thanks to URBAN, has been given a strong boost towards a more coordinated and collaborative way of working than was the case in the past and, at the same time, it has started opening towards the many and varied opportunities offered by the EU. Coinciding with the restructuring of the services performed by the municipal administration, the organisation of an intersectoral work group wholly within the municipality for the management of the programme has probably been one of the causes of the success of its implementation.

Also the organisation of and participation in national and international workshops have contributed a great deal towards the professional growth of the bureaucracy of the Cosenza administration, and towards equipping it for the democratic challenges that will increasingly be a feature of the competition among cities.