

# COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES AND TOWN PLANNING

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The initiative of the European Community and, in concert with it, that of the Ministry of Public Works, modified Italian town planning in the '90s in a number of aspects.

A first aspect regards the objectives. The Community's action has in fact helped to sensibilise the administrative and technical culture to the unifying value, in the European context, of the principles of the sustainability of development and of social cohesion. Furthermore it has induced the administrators and the technicians of the public administrations to operate - in a decisive manner and respecting these principles - to increase the competitive nature of their cities within the context of the integration and liberalisation processes that accompany the formation of the European Union.

A second aspect regards the method. The Community has in fact induced town planning to assume partnership and integration (spatial and social) as its main reference criteria. The means used for this purpose has been very effective. In keeping with the underlying principles of the construction of European unity, it has adopted competitive procedures to select and finance the programmes submitted by the member countries. The models of evaluation prepared (usable also for self-assessment) have served to make the respecting of these criteria stringent. In so doing, it has moreover contributed to increasing the spread in Italian town planning of the «evaluation culture».

The urban planning experiments promoted by the Ministry of Public Works, through its «complex programmes» (Urban Renewal Programmes, PRUSST, District Contracts), and also by a number of Regions, have been responsible for the innovative elements pointed out. The promotional activity - underpinned by several bids which, in the course of time, have progressively enriched this experimentation with new contents - has very extensively involved the local Italian agencies and town planners.

Within the framework that has been outlined above, the URBAN Community programme - although referred to a limited number of cities - is an outstanding experiment thanks to its specific aim of the regeneration of the urban fabric.

Hence, having the URBAN programmes here as our main term of reference, but with our eyes also on the entire experimentation on «complex programmes», it is worthwhile developing, even though partially, some of the considerations of a general character set forth above.

A first line of reflection is retrospective in character. Looking at the URBAN programme within the framework of Italy's urban renewal experience, it will be sought below to emphasise some of the significant trends thereof (in particular regarding the pinpointing of the spheres of intervention) and to identify - in terms of problems - some of the most noteworthy results.

Another line of reflection considers the URBAN programme as the peak experiment of Community policies and stresses some important specific components of the cultural message it contains.

One first consideration regards the social, economic and urban planning characteristics of the areas concerned by the URBAN programme. The typological variety of the areas could in fact give rise to the suspicion that their choice by the municipalities has been somewhat random. But this interpretation is not the case.

In the last thirty to forty years, the phenomenon of «urban decline» - in its complementary components of «socio-economic decline» and of «town planning decline» - has affected extensively the fabric of Italian cities and has concentrated, according to the case, on certain spheres rather than others: from historic centres to the settlements that have remained on the edges of intensive urban expansion, and from derelict industrial areas to the public housing districts, as well, obviously, as the illegal settlements.

In the contemporary city the occurrence in its fabric of new spheres and of new forms of decline is a physiological phenomenon linked to the ageing of town planning structures. The manifestations of decline must therefore be viewed as a natural part of the process of evolution. This circumstance

gives rise to consequences of two sorts: that renewal action must be addressed pragmatically to where need arises, and that, from time to time, it is necessary to draw up different, targeted action strategies, based on the original array of instruments of various types (town planning, administrative, financial, economic and fiscal), each of which has to be able to offer a broad range of options.

In this framework the successful experiments, setting aside the over-ambitious claims of acting as the standard solution or exemplary model, basically have the role of stimulus and emulation. That is, they limit themselves to offering ideas for devising original paths, inspired by the specific problems of the place and in keeping with local potentials.

The preceding observation is borne out by the methodologies adopted by the municipalities to select the sectors to be included in the URBAN programme. This choice is not based on consistent analytical systems aimed at indicating, through appropriate indicators, the social, economic, building and environmental characteristics of the decline. Precisely the opposite approach, it will be recalled, was followed for the first action programmes for the historic centres.

The difference of approach is not just due to the time limits dictated by participation in selection. There is another cause that seems more relevant. In general, the degraded sectors have already been studied and analysed (often many times) in preceding planning occasions. These studies, carried out at different times and even distant from the moment of the actual measure, have produced results that have come to form part of the system of collective knowledge and of administrative action. In other terms, the phenomenon of degradation has become rooted in the cities and the collective awareness thereof is regarded as having been acquired.

When we go from the approach of the programmes to their management - this is another salient element of the ongoing experimentation - the overly long time necessary for their start-up (indicatively three or even more years) comes into the foreground.

The lengthy times connected with the formation, selection and start-up procedures were a feature of the first URBAN programme and more generally of all Italian experimentation of the «complex programmes». The aspiration for more efficient administrative action is not generic, because in this specific case it is reinforced by the surrealistic situation of suspension that is created in the period between the great mobilisation of knowledge, resources, enthusiasm and expectations of a collective nature, which accompanies the formation of «complex programmes», and the actual start-up of the measures outlined therein.

The longer this interval, the more numerous and considerable the uncertainties that arise as to the future implementation of the programme. In three or four years the administrators and officials of the local bodies can change, and thus also the lines of political and administrative action, and the economic conditions of the context, and hence the propensity of private actors to invest, can also change. Urban degradation appears to be the only factor to remain stable, eventually becoming - *ad absurdum* - the best guarantee that the programme will be carried out.

URBAN experimentation, however, has contributed to the evolution of Italian town planning also indirectly, i.e. by forming specific professional capacities, enriching the technical-administrative organisation of the municipalities with dedicated offices, profitably integrating the competencies of public structures with external professional consultancy. This observation, moreover, holds also for the «complex programmes» as a whole.

In this connection, however, a number of problematic points should be stated. The episodic character assumed by each complex programme and the fragmentation (of time and function) of such experimentation, tend to make the adjusting the technical and administrative structures an improvised process, and therefore to make the results obtained unstable. Another source of perplexity derives from the fact that the world of formation - the universities in particular - has remained basically insensitive to the new formative requirements. And this attitude is bound to weigh negatively on the further development of the experimentation started with the «complex programmes».

The URBAN programmes, in any case, are bearers of a cultural message extremely useful for the further qualification of the national experience of «complex programmes», and more generally those addressed to urban regeneration.

In the first place, the URBAN programme asserts the centrality of the urban question and states it in terms of both promoting development and protecting social cohesion. The complementary nature of «social cohesion» and «development» suggests to our country two lines of reflection: on the one hand, it stresses that partial provisions and ones referring to the current situation - to which frequent recourse is had - are not sufficient and have to be replaced by measures that are incisive in terms of programming transformations; and on the other hand, it shows that measures for social cohesion and the promotion of development must be devised in a coordinated manner, acting simultaneously on a number of spheres (town planning, administrative, fiscal, etc.), and must not be fragmentary, that is addressing single problematic aspects.

Secondly, the URBAN programme has a distinctive feature in the confidence accorded to the local dimension of urban planning and management, i.e. to the local communities and to their administrators. On the basis of this, programmes of urban regeneration are drawn up and managed directly by the local communities, and in this way their capacity increases of promoting processes of «social cohesion» and «development» of «endogenous», and therefore «lasting», type.

The adoption of these lines - in keeping moreover with the principle of subsidiarity - reflects a political-cultural position antithetical to the one which - fed by a basic lack of confidence in the capacities of local communities - does not intend to confer on elected representative bodies those responsibilities and competencies which, instead, are essential to be able to tackle with «integrated approaches» the problems of urban degradation.