

URBAN and social policies

Antonio Tosi

The URBAN programmes have provided Italy with an important opportunity for innovation in its urban policies: they have supplied the resources and a credible theoretical basis - the idea of integrated approach - so as to finally break with the town planning-building construction tradition of urban renewal. The option for an integrated approach has been evident for long also in social policies: it seems to me that a discussion on the relations between urban policies and political policies, and on the effectiveness of the URBAN programmes in Italy in pursuing social objectives, can start from a comparison between the use of this idea in the two fields.

The relation between urban policies and social policies is problematic in itself. It is even more so in such a context as ours, in which there is a clear-cut separation between the two fields, and in which urban policies remain very close to policies based on town planning. Viewed in this way, integrated urban policies do not necessarily respond to the social objectives of social policies, nor is it certain that they deal with the same requisites of social relations as those pursued by integrated social policies.

Reference to the area - through such designations as 'districts in crisis', 'districts in difficulty', etc. - is in its turn a variant of the general model: it reflects the idea that poverty today tends to become concentrated territorially and that localised action is more effective in treating poverty and social malaise. In the case of policies against poverty, however, reference to the area does not involve any centrality of the town planning-building dimensions, which are but one of the possible dimensions to be integrated in the action. The measure is made up of an offer of services and of opportunities of a varied nature and of their inclusion in active policies able to counter and reverse processes of localised marginalisation. The local, transversal, contractual, participatory character that is summarily indicated with the term 'integrated' defines the basic requisites for this reinclusion process to be successful.

The 'difficult districts' present difficulties of different degree: different degrees of concentration and of cumulability of problems, different progressions in the drift towards results of marginalisation. There are extremely problematic situations whose phenomenology corresponds to the current image of the 'district in crisis': a high concentration of (various types of) poverty and malaise, spirals of depression, break-up of the social fabric, segregation from the rest of the city, etc.; and there are districts that have 'normal' problems of malaise, often sectoral, as may be found in many urban peripheries and in a certain number of historic centres (with us, this is the most likely situation, in spite of the dramatic tones of public speeches, referring to every difficult district as a 'ghetto').

Now, the 'model' of integrated action, in its strong form, as communicated when talking about social policies, seems to apply above all to situations of great turmoil and of great concentration of such malaise. This strong form of the model is also the clearest example of what an integrated (approach) can mean in policies..

In these situations, the integrated action will underpin a reinclusion project, which means the reconstruction of social relations and recomposition of the local social fabric, the re-establishment of confidence, the development of local social capital, and so on. 'Renewal' itself is work on the status of the inhabitants: «renewal of a place goes by way of re-legitimisation of its inhabitants» (Catherine Foret), their acquisition of control over their own living environment, and thus also their inclusion among the actors who define the criteria of quality of space and of the ways of dwelling: a consideration of participation that is not a ritual one must come to grips also with this problem. In these situations the model logic is cogent: the multidimensionality of the measure and the involvement of the inhabitants must be understood in their strong significance. It cannot otherwise be seen how - in contexts of exclusion - a «lasting improvement in the conditions of life of the

inhabitants», «giving confidence and security back to the population», etc., as the documents establishing URBAN state, can be achieved.

In reality, the majority of the areas to which the URBAN programmes apply in Italy do not correspond to this syndrome of territorialised exclusion. In the majority of cases historic centres are concerned, usually characterised by a noteworthy social and economic mix; nor do the peripheral areas concerned always present characteristics of accentuated marginality. It may be that this is a reason for the relative success of many URBAN programmes: in non-extreme situations, even the 'weak' variants of the model might be able to achieve appreciable results.

This fact however poses various problems. The first one concerns the meaning and the composition of the integrated approach in the situations in which the URBAN programmes are applied. Whereas for situations of strong exclusion the virtues of the integrated approach have been defined with considerable precision and coherence (which does not mean that the arguments are always convincing), it is not equally clear what it means for areas of 'normal' or more complex problems. We have to suppose that in these cases appreciable social objectives can be obtained even without being subject to the demanding requisites of the strong model, and therefore also with a certain sectoral element in the measure. But one fails to see why that element of integration that comes into play must be aggregated around objectives of urban renewal: rather than, for instance, around objectives of insertion in jobs, of treatment of youth malaise, of management of inter-ethnic relations, etc., according to the situation. A correct integrative logic can only define locally the relations among the components of the project, without presupposing *a priori* the dominance of some component or other.

Lastly, there is the risk that such programmes - while fulfilling some sort of social objectives - will sacrifice the more problematic components of the question. This not only because of a selection of the project areas that does not attach priority to the extreme situations, and not just because of the inadequate social focalisation of the programmes, but also for the effects that could stem inside the areas treated from the combination of the various objectives: in what sense, for example, does environmental renewal in historic centres or the introduction of 'qualified' economic activities respond to social objectives? In what circumstances does regeneration not become the premise for gentrification? And so on.

A confirmation comes from the way of indicating the social objectives in the project. In the URBAN projects the social contents of the programme are seldom translated into policies or into an offer of (social) services: more often - in accordance with town planning tradition - they are resolved in the indication of containers, or of structures for the supply of services (often of an uncertain nature): 'integrated centres', '(polyvalent) social centres', 'service centres', 'promotion centres', 'centres of aggregation' etc. Not services, therefore, but at most the premises for possible services. The social objectives are juxtaposed to urban renewal objectives, without being drawn up in the programme in the form of policies.

This last observation suggests that the programmes could have different meanings in the various regional situations. It is possible that an integration of social policies in the territorial ones in accordance with the scheme adopted in the URBAN programmes is more plausible in the urban areas of the South where poverty is widespread, and the lack of infrastructures is an important cause of poverty and malaise.

On the other hand the southern cities are also those in which local welfare is particularly weak. This could in some way justify the generic indication, of preliminary type, of the objectives of social policy. But this also brings up the question as to whether it is possible to entrust to weak interpretations of the integrated project important and difficult social objectives in the absence of an adequate context of social policies. This geographic observation draws attention to the specific nature of the processes of «territorialisation» of poverty and malaise in our country. As several times suggested, the concentration of poverty seems not so strong in Italy as in other countries. Poverty and social exclusion have, in many regions, a character that is (relatively) little localised. At district scale, concentration is less frequent and less definitive. The degraded areas in the majority

of cases do not correspond to the extreme situations designated by the concept of 'district in crisis' Even the districts in difficulty often have a socially mixed character. To the extent to which this characterisation is true, it could provide further arguments in support of a 'light' application of the model. But it also justifies a certain perplexity as to the fortune that the area approach is encountering also in our country: that is to say, the question arises as to why - in a country where the concentration of malaise is relatively scanty and social exclusion passes to a lesser extent through this type of territorialisation - the area approach is becoming so popular. Under these circumstances it would be advisable to reflect more profoundly on two types of reasons at the basis of the fortune of local action (which reasons, as stated, are to some extent independent) and to deepen the potentials of local action in situations not characterised by strong concentrations of poverty. It would moreover be appropriate to verify better the comparative effectiveness of area policies compared with other policies against poverty ('category' policies). Lastly it would be advisable to ponder on the reasons for this delay in constructing policies. We can think of the advantages that reference to the local area can offer - compared with reference to categories - in justifying selective social policies. For France Daniel Behar interprets the passage to area policies as a way of achieving the principle of «positive discrimination à la française» in the field of integrative immigration policies («unutterable regarding integration policy, positive discrimination is admissible for the *politique de la ville*»). Other reasons could concern the pressure exerted by the demand for security in the sense of 'localising' or 'districtising' the intervention of the administrations.