Urbanistica n. 123
January-April 2004

Distribution by www.planum.net

Introduction
Alessandro Balducci

"To construct contexts, scenarios, overall images of cities capable of producing appropriate settings for local action designed not to dictate behaviour but to direct attention (...) the expert planner promotes general discussion on the style of life, on the design of civilisation. He is committed to stimulating social imagination and to directing it towards the production of the city and the land" (Giusti 1995).

This section presents material and reflections on the emergence of initiatives in contemporary cities that pose interesting questions on the subject of the construction and production of public assets; experiences implemented and sustained by social actors outside the sphere of public administrations. The idea came from a research study conducted in Milan on changes in the forms of urban government through which we observed practices for the treatment of public problems by looking at society rather than at public administrations. The material produced has already been presented in seminar discussions which, with the critical contribution of various academics, explored the more general possible implications of what we were gathering and looked at other interesting research studies conducted in other cities with similar perspectives. This helped to broaden our outlook to include other cases and interpretations. This section consists therefore of eight brief contributions: the Milanese research is presented in the first in four essays by the group that produced it. In addition to this introduction, a map which gives our

vision of Milan, containing a brief summary of the material by F. Cognetti, P. Cottino and G. Rabaiotti and a contribution from P. Fareri which sets the cases in the context of thinking on the evolution of urban policies in Milan. There is then an article by G.C. Paba on the results of a research study in Florence, a commentary by G.F. Lanzara on organisational dimensions and changes in progress, and an article by P. Healey on the problem of integrating the stimuli that come from society in governance processes. Finally there is a critical commentary by M. Sernini who reminds us that when faced with apparently new phenomena we need to maintain a long term perspective of what the city has always been and of how it has tackled problems of government.

Urban policies in Milan: government or governance

In our research on Milan we examined some case studies, selected from a list of forty actions undertaken by self organised social actors in either the private or third sectors which consisted of initiatives in Milan which suggest forms of government outside the sphere of public institutions. The cases not only allow us to investigate a point of view that I believe is original, but the changes that have occurred in the treatment of urban problems also provide interesting indications on other subjects such as the very important issue of the evolution of how people aggregate as it relates to space or the new forms of participating in the construction of choices that concern the city. The cases are very diverse: from the 'social centers' promoted in illegally occupied buildings by groups of young people that evolved over time towards

the role of real cultural centres (Leoncavallo or Torchiera), to the environmentalist association that manages an innovative urban park that became a very important resource for the city (Boscoincittà), to the charity institution that, starting from a very traditional assistance activity, decides to develop an interesting urban project that deals simultaneously with social, housing and cultural needs (Villaggio Barona), to the neighbourhood organisations that are developing an interesting new activity for supporting the many needs of the population of historical public housing estates (Comitato inquilini Molise-Calvairate-Ponti) and defending a neighbourhood identity that is threaten by gentrification processes (Cantieri Isola), finally to the associations developing projects for the re-use of abandoned public buildings attempting to create the social and cultural basis for a re-development project that cannot be conceived only as a physical project (Comunità Nuova, Olinda), etc.

All these cases seem to be as new forms of production of social capital that can be analysed in contrast with the impoverishment of social capital due to the weakening of traditional intermediate organisations. The general idea is that we need to go back to study the city and particularly the forms of social organisation of public activities because our old categories are not effective any more. The research proposes therefore a discussion through empirical evidence about how planning is affected by the emergence of new forms of (private and fragmented) production of public goods. It is already almost ten years that scholars from both sides of Atlantic have

been discussing the type of transformation in the public action that is referred to as the transition from government to governance. In the situation of fragmented cities, we refer to governance in two ways: as the simple withdrawal of government from complex social processes in favour of essentially delegated and basically private sector action, or in terms of the opportunities offered by the new situation for a profound change in the nature of government action. The latter necessarily also involves a withdrawal from direct action in many spheres, but at the same time seeks, in the changed and more complex context, to govern using new tools and means (Healey 1997). In Italy there is a rather clear neo-liberal right wing approach to local government that is addressed to the reduction of direct public intervention in general and to the sustaining of private action in the field of health, assistance, local economic development etc. But there is also a left-wing 'third way' approach that is directed to a substantial change in the character of public action. Focussed upon the implication of civil society, but also to a new form of governing the deployment of public action through the mobilisation of a wide number of public, private and third sector actors. Given this situation we have been concentrated upon the change in public administration, the relationship of this with planning, and we have in some way overlooked what is happening in urban societies independently from formal, institutional public action. The research project I want to describe has tried to look at governance the other way round: from the bottom-up, observing the mobilisation of civil society

in dealing with public problems that are neglected by formal public institutions.

Key issues

The following paragraphs focus on some key issues that these bottom-up actions raise.

There is a first key issue that is about how territorial aggregation in contemporary cities is changing. Milan used to be a city of strong neighbourhoods. Not only because some of them were ancient villages before 1923, but also because the radial structure and the culture of the city was strongly based upon the web of neighbourhoods, that have significant names (Bovisa, Barona, Corvetto, Greco, Baggio, Rogoredo, Garibaldi, etc.), many socialisation agencies have a form of organization that is based upon a neighbourhood structure: the parish churches, but also school districts, political parties that used to have branches distributed locally; the local articulation of social services, and, of course, an aggregation of neighbourhoods used to be the basis for local government decentralisation.

During the last fifteen years we have witnessed a complex process of weakening of neighbourhood significance. In the first place there has been a weakening of some traditional socialisation agencies like parish churches that used to be an important core of local life; secondly there has been the crisis of political parties (starting from the beginning of the nineties) that has immediately led to the crisis or disappearance of their territorial organisation, particularly important for the three major political forces (Christian Democrats, Communist and Socialist party).

Furthermore there has been

a strong vague of rationalisation hierarchisation and concentration of all the local services, from schools to services for health and public assistance, until the local government decentralisation that moved from 20 to 9 great sub-municipal councils. While the real impact in terms of cut to the expenses and rationalisation has been modest the sense of impoverishing the meaning of neighbourhoods has been very relevant.

What emerges from many surveys is that trust and significance of local relationships is diminishing dramatically and this is very important for the development of a sense of insecurity.

It is ironic that after having taken away all the territorial structure of public services there has been a reintroduction of the concept of neighbourhood for the deployment of a municipal police and in general of security forces structure. The introduction of neighbourhood municipal policeman and of neighbourhood policeman are respectively the more advertised policies of local and national government.

Our case studies show a different way of aggregation with a more complex linkage with space. It is quite interesting that the totality of the associations that we have studied are localised, not local.

While all the initiatives take place somewhere having as a significant problem the establishment of effective relationships with the local milieu, they are never local institutions in a strict sense. This is true for Comunità Nuova that manages the Barrio's Social Center together with a private foundation not based in the Barona district where the social center is located. The Cassoni Foundation, after a long tradition of activities

managed in all the metropolitan area, with the Villaggio Barona decides to root itself in a specific place, selling all the properties to invest in the new Village and to be identified with one specific local initiative. The Social Centers promoted by young representatives of what is called the antagonist juvenile left just casually arrive in one part of the city or another. Even the Cantieri Isola association is organised by activists coming from outside the neighbourhood that is the theatre and the objective of their activity. The Tenants association Molise-Calvairate is promoted by a leader that used to be a tenant but she is not any more and is formed by volunteers coming from many different parts of Milan. What all this means? In some way we can consider that there is a movement toward a specific place that is significant for institutions and for single participants. Voluntary associations need to link their action to a specific place. Italia Nostra to Boscoincittà (for which now is more known in the city than for its institutional activity), Comunità Nuova to Barrio's, Cassoni Foundation to The Barona Village etc. But also activists and volunteers of all these initiatives coming generally from outside try to link themselves to a particular place. They are a particular type of 'city users' (Martinotti 1993): social actors looking for a place where to root actions that keep relevant non local dimensions.

In a city that is highly fragmented and in which the traditional organic forms of socialisation linked to space and places are in a deep crisis we see the raising of new forms of territorial aggregation that are not a manifestation of the emergence of the "community without

propinquity" prophesised by Melvin Webber, but rather a need to give to oneself an identity the means for which is again a specific place. Propinquity is not the engine of community any more but the identification of oneself with a community remains an objective of many activities of individuals and associations. In this movement space plays again an important role even if very different from the past.

It is important to reflect upon what all this means in terms of social organisation of cities in its relationship with space.

A second key issue is that of the relationship between these experiences and the formal public institutions. Analysing the case studies we have verified that relations are reduced to a minimum when they are not of open conflict. This could be in some way a peculiarity of the municipality of Milan after ten years of right wing government. But there might be something more. There are few situations in which there is cooperation and reciprocal recognition between formal public institutions and new subjects that are active in the public sphere. While these actors are relevant subjects of the territorial governance in many sectors of public policies, formal policies tend to develop their action systems ignoring these experiences.

As we have seen in many cases there is the development of appropriate ways of dealing with problems and opportunities that emerge from society, through incremental complex paths of probing means and strategies (Lindblom 1990), while formal policies reconstruct their world dealing in a very simplified way with the categorized problems of

elders, youth, mental ills, immigrants, etc.

From this point of view it is important to notice that in principle the change from a government to a governance approach to urban policies does not imply per se any shift in the paradigms of administrative action. There has been a long discussion in the past about the reduction operated by the public administration in approaching social problems. Antonio Tosi (1994) has called this an Administrative Theory of Needs that leads public administrations not only to see only problems for which there are ready solutions in the experimented routines of treatment, but also to consider mainly those solutions that tend to be identified with an object, usually a physical object: the need of children are kindergarten and schools, of adults are health services and hospitals, of elders are homes for the aged, etc. This reductive approach could be even emphasized from the first of the two approaches to governance I have been describing above: in order to decentralise, to cease the direct relationship with the final customer of the service to private agencies you may need an even stronger standardisation.

This is the reason why, in our case studies we have seen that the public administration try to build a social center for young people after having cleared away the one borne spontaneously; try to build a public space after having cleared away the public activities that were already there; open a new service of so called 'social porters' in the great public housing estates after having expelled the Tenants Committee that is doing just that kind of accompanying social work.

Here we see the true issue of governance as social capacity building. The capacity to guide a system that is growing in complexity and that requires a multiplicity of actors to deal with a multiplicity of problems. These actors might (perhaps) be protagonists not only of their brilliant initiatives, but also of new processes of urban governance.

In Milan what we are seeing so far is mainly the retreat rather that a re-definition of institutional public action. This is the reason why the initiatives that we have studied seem to be projected toward an independent or conflicting relationship rather than towards integration and cooperation. Nonetheless there are some interesting signs of possible cooperation in the Villaggio Barona, Boscoincittà, Barrio's that for the moment start just from a relationship of authorisation or concession of a space but that could evolve positively with wider implication for the redefinition of the paradigms of public action.

A final key issue that I want to rise is about the redefinition of the scope of spatial planning in the context of these experiences. The case studies that we have examined are interesting laboratories for the redefinition of the public sphere in a metropolis that is more and more fragmented. They are not just urban protest movement, nor the isolated activities of voluntary associations that give a structure to the "shifting involvements" from "private interests to public action" (Hirschman 1982).

They rather seem uncertain signs of the redefinition of the public sphere in a situation of diversification, and accelerated pace, of change in the city.

It is interesting that these experiences do not call in any sense for a re-discovery of an ancient sense of organic community.

They rather build new "traces of community" (Bagnasco 1999) in a different situation in which old and new forms of territorial aggregation tend to mix up.

In this sense these are extremely re-levant resource for social and territorial cohesion in a city that risks to become just a patchwork of enclaves, micro-societies,individuals (Sandercock 2000).

If this is true, we need to go beyond the simple observation of their existence.

From this point of view planning and spatial planning in particular can play a significant role in two main directions and with two main tasks.

A first task is to give a local frame-work to these activities. All of them need to build a local project out of a specific initiative: from the association Olinda that tries to re-use the mental hospital, to the Tenants Committee of the Public Housing Estate, to the Cantieri Isola association, to the Cassoni Foundation.

For their same effectiveness they need to put their project in a local meaningful map.

They have been developing deep knowledge and development capacity inside their initiative but the point now seems to transform this capacity in energy that can go at the local level beyond the boundaries of their initiative. And since the localised spatial dimension of these project is such a significant constitutive element a construction of a local project as a network of local places and initiatives can become a crucial point for their evolution.

A second task, related to this, is to help these experiences to build a transversal network at the city-wide level. They are quite active in the vertical, integration of each specific experience: Italia Nostra with the environmentalist movement network, Cassoni Foundation with the catholic charity organisations, Leoncavallo and Torchiera with the network of the antagonists social centers, the Tenants Committee with the organisation of public housing tenants associations, but all these are vertical networks that do not interact among each other for the completely different culture and kind of organisation.

Planning and planners that are already active in many of these experiences can help the construction of a network of experiences, places and local projects that can become an important web across the city. They need to put their project in a meaningful map at the city-wide level that is also a way of reconstructing a new type of spatial cohesion after the weakening or disappearance of the organic spatial linkages.

Bibliography

Balducci A., "Agenzie di sviluppo locale come nuovi attori della *governance* urbana", *Urbanistica* n. 112, 1999.

- "Le nuove politiche della governance urbana", *Territorio* n. 13, 2000.

- "Una riflessione sul rapporto tra politiche per i quartieri e politiche per la città", *Territorio* n. 19, 2001.

- (ed.), *Cittadinanza attiva, pratiche sociali e la produzione della città pubblica. Una ricerca su Milan*o, Dipartimento di architettura e pianificazione, Politecnico di Milano, december 2002.

Bagnasco A., *Tracce di comunità*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1999.

Castells M., *The Rise of the Network Society*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000.

Giusti M., *Urbanistica e terzo attore. Ruolo del pianificatore nelle iniziative di autopromozione territoriale degli abitanti*, L'Harmattan Italia, Torino, 1995.

Healey P., *Collaborative Planning. Shaping Places in Fragmented Society*, Macmillan, London, 1997.

Hirschman A.O., *Shifting Involvements. Private Interest and Public Action*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982.

Le Galés P., *European Cities, Social Conflicts and Governance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.

Martinotti G., *Metropoli. La nuova morfologia sociale della città*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1993.

Sandercock L., "When Strangers Become Neighbours: Managing City Differences", *Planning Theory and Practice*, vol. 1, n. 1, 2000.

Webber M., "Order and Diversity: Community without Propinquity", in L. Wingo Jr. (ed.), *Cities and Space*, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimora, 1963.