



Urbanistica n. 125

September-December 2005

Distribution by www.planum.net

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The city of time and the culture of planning

Sandra Bonfiglioli

Time studies of the inhabited city have produced considerable material over the last ten years. Time oriented policies have spread from the economic, social and community sphere to that of architecture and urban planning. Yesterday 'urban time' constituted an innovative field of study and action. Today the idea itself that the *inhabited city* is a mobile archipelago of *chronotopes with borders that can be redesigned by events* has become common sense. A chronotope is a physical time configuration: constructed historically; inhabited permanently-temporarily by a mix of changing populations; breathes according to open/closed cycles of local functions, both permanent and ephemeral; is used by inhabitants according to phantasmagorical designs of time-tables, calendars and presence cycles; is embedded into new multi-scalar nets of person, goods and information mobility.

Disciplines think over time

Disciplines are working to find the time cause of changes. The hypothesis underlying this research effort is that time (which and in what form?) is the DNA which generates new forms of configuration (transfiguration), rather than clear shapes of objects, which characterise neo-modernity. I have put forward the hypothesis that time consists of an architecture of times available for collective intelligence. These time architectures, some of them planned, others given by nature, are the outcome of the combined action of technologies, of forms of

applied rationality and of scientific and also narrative knowledge.

It is philosophy which takes on the task of rethinking the new organisation of the question *urbs civitas* (inhabited city). Massimo Cacciari brings into play the subjects that allow us to think of *urban time*: the destiny of borders, of staying and going, of nomadism. These are subjects he has dealt with many times, but today's thinking is directed towards understanding the *radical nature* of urban and social transformations and urban transformations in particular because it has been said many times that these new forms of settlement are *other than the city* we seemed to know. And we continue to use the term city only for convenience. Philosophy, together with art, is an old travelling companion of architecture. It knows how to approach the problem of the different forms of inhabiting that have followed one after the other in terms that are understandable to the culture of planning, better than the human sciences have been able to do. It is possible that the newly rediscovered complicity between architecture, art and philosophy lies in the fact that the three disciplines work on the same time horizon which denies the value of what is current almost as if it were a surface that veils the depth of time for present states. These disciplines, at least as far as their theoretical tradition is concerned, inscribe what is current in the construction of the *present*, capable of tracing and renewing like the past what is simply chronologically *before now* and of indicating the *sense* of the future which is both currently possible and conceivable.

For many years *art* has addressed itself to the city:

through a *new site specific* phase of *public art*; through a new frontier of interdisciplinary work that calls together artists, architects and others on an equal basis to work on complex urban projects. Just at the time when engineering and human sciences are moving away from their paradigm to approach that of architecture and the culture of planning, architecture is moving towards the disciplines to which it is traditionally allied. As opposed to the *descriptive disciplines* (whose strength lies in having no fear of what is current), since the 1980's, anthropology and geography of the family, urban and community sociology, labour and organisational sociology, time geography and gender studies have conducted pioneering investigations into new uses and individual audits of time and into new collective urban rhythms which depend on flexible working hours modulated in atypical patterns. Numerous research studies have investigated the transformation of the structure of mobility from home-work-home commuter movement to a zigzag over large areas. They have investigated the ties between the causes behind the structure of mobility and the evolution of different metropolitan forms. They have put forward general theses: the *commuter* movement, based on circadian rhythms, is set in relation to the gravitational logic which constructed the first generation of industrial metropolises; zigzag mobility on an archipelago of large scale settlements is set in relation to (is describable by means of) a new metropolitan form which is flexibly structured by calendarised flows of people, goods and information.

What role has *Italian*

architecture/planning played in this?

It has seriously taken on the task: of describing and integrating the spatial and time-related reasons for geographical and socio-economic changes; of researching a *method of architectural and urban design* that is sensitive to time and to space; of developing the praxeology and instrumentation complementary to the project. Results can be recognised today, finally out of pure technicality, as giving us an understanding of the city of time and of a time oriented planning culture.

The signature of the research into planning-design lies in the concept of the chronotope. To introduce time into urban planning and architectural design, under the heading of public opening hours which make the collective life of a community settlement possible, involves: taking on responsibility for a monument in the civil history of places, constructed historically in layers of negotiated time norms which persist for a long time, longer than the generations that initiated them; and orienting new generations in *constructed* space and time and opening the possibility for establishing appointments in time and for public life itself.

A new welfare

This host of investigations and projects encouraged new social actors who arrived on the public scene, such as women *caregivers*, adolescents, children and the elderly, to speak up. These actors are at different seasons of life and have different anthropological characteristics. A demand was formulated by this galaxy of new protagonists on the public scene and forwarded to decision makers to transform space

and time and it was not at all obvious in terms of the way it was requested (*governance*), in terms of the underlying time culture (oriented towards one's own life-project in which work exists, but is often not prevalent), in terms of the idea of quality it stated:

- to *co-ordinate* new public opening hours by means of city time policies;
- to *equip society with policies for 'night planning' and 'festivity architecture'*;
- to *design and renew public spaces*, both open and closed, capable of hosting cycles of events even mass events for entertainment and culture, sport and festivity;
- to *develop technologies and co-ordinate timetable databases* to orient the market of advanced information services for mobile populations;
- to *relocate citadels of continuously opening services* along the routes and nodes of multi-scalar movement networks;
- to *integrate transport infrastructures into systems*, and those for pedestrian mobility in particular.

Enterprises and economic operators play a new role. On the one hand they are sensitive to the new terms of welfare with regard to time aspects above all, while on the other hand they have an interest in structuring the new European territory. This context calls on architectural design and urban planning to consider two important areas of research: the space-time support and organisation of the *new welfare* and new structuring of geographical areas; a new idea of the city of time which is both a *theatre of life* and a *public body* of new populations that inhabit it.

A new time design for welfare in Europe is already on the horizon. The question is not trivial for the prospects of urban planning.

Post-reformist Italian planning has forgotten the period that made the centre-left's support for welfare in the 1960's one of the cornerstones of its identity and action. The new welfare that is being built needs to understand and regulate the space-time aspects of the new social contract which is slowly emerging. New regulation poses the problem of a more complicated game in which the organisation of access to services has many variables.

Can we still believe that Italian urban planning, as a discipline, is responsible for the construction and functional and cultural organisation of space, or better of the space-time of inhabiting not only places but also multi-scalar networks of places? It is not easy to answer. Italian urban planning has recently worked more on the renewal of planning instruments and on public management procedures and less on the *content* of planning and on its *social mission*. It seems, however, to have abandoned the subject of space, which is its tradition.

The hypothesis is clear that it is the space-time approach that brings back into play new content for a new social contract and community organisation. A consideration of time in architecture and planning makes it possible to take into account that relationship which binds *individuals and society*. Public timetables do in fact provide regulations that govern the living times of individuals and these regulations guarantee the opening hours for services, the appointments and the mobility that make social life possible.

Time in planning culture
 What is brought into play when we include integration between the dimensions of

space and time in architectural design and urban planning?

A sphere of *recovering and re-adaptive action* on physical structures at the *urban micro-scale*, the scale measured by the practices of bodies in the pedestrian routes taken in their everyday-life, has been identified in urban time policies by inhabitants, residents and temporary guests trying out urban structures. The subjects of design and planning action are important because of the problems of uninhabitability, degeneration and unsafety that they produce, because of the extent to which the discipline disregards problems and because of a shortage of the technical skills required to improve matters. The subjects in question are the renewal of walking areas, ordinary maintenance for public works, protected pedestrian routes for children, the integration of the pedestrian traffic system with other types of vehicle mobility, the ergonomics of pedestrian routes for inhabitants with poor motility. It would be banal to think that this *urban planning with a good heart*, caring for women, children and the elderly is extraneous to the deep seated principles of planning culture. The rights of the body, considered in the flesh at different ages of life, active in the new physical state of urban time and precisely in the process of inhabiting urban time and space each day, are brought into play by all the new social actors on the public scene. The sphere of action of micro urban planning is inscribed in a context of *first aid*, a time scale the discipline prefers not to consider, abandoning it to the technical departments of municipal offices over-loaded with work. Contrary to the idea that complexity lies in huge

multi-partner projects, urban time policies have verified that the more planning and design considers the properties and sensory nature of bodies, the more complex the time dimensions become whether of a social, urban, anthropological, gender, biographical, morphological or historical nature. It is difficult today to consider a new city. The complexity of physical transformations, the fragmentation of society and interests, the weakness of the system of political representation and the weakness of the discipline leave little room to hope that this enormous task can be tackled. Which task seems improper to many. Rem Koohlaas, a theorist of the *generic city*, thinks of this not as poetics, but as the outcome of a systematic reflection with general theoretical results. The names themselves given to cities at the beginning of the twentieth century, megalopolis, edge city, infinite city, urban galaxy, implicitly declare that no constituted power can put its hand to managing such gigantic size. Dealing with the city in terms of time is different.