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**Out-of-date
town planning answers***Paolo Ceccarelli*

In recent years the 'town planning' debate has been ennobled by cultural arguments of various natures. Their origins lie in a historic phenomenon, which is habitual but not particularly interesting in current urban contexts: large-scale public and private interventions in real estate and infrastructure. In the larger part of cases promoted by public operators, the town plan is conceived so as to attract private investment, offering good speculative opportunities. All is centred on this aspect when private operators conceive the town plan. With few exceptions the operations generally involve recapitalisation of the existing city, reinforcing and redeveloping the consolidated urban fabric. Just where the majority of the population live and carry out a large part of their activities, none of the interventions help to organise 'the exploded city' in a different manner. The elements in the contemporary city's crisis are not the major or minor adjustments required from each of its components *per se*, but reside in the fact that these elements do not connect with each other to create an efficient functional system. For example, a great directional centre which is not particularly accessible because the road network is inadequate or a public transport system is lacking. Or else a large residential neighbourhood which is unattractive because it lacks a good comprehensive system of health, education, and social services. And not only this. Very often what makes the difference is not the existence of a service but its quality. Good access without causing excessive pollution, a well organised airport which does not suffer

from too many flight delays or too much lost luggage, good to excellent medical services, safety and security which... Today is a little naïve to say they are only resolved by improving the architectural quality of a particular area, or comes from old supporters of brick for brick which has been given a makeover (applying a neologism from politics in the USA: they have become neo-property developers because it sounds better than property speculators). A weakness in the Italian urban system is the lack of private investment, and more significantly, the lack of international investment. Many large-scale urban developments have been promoted and driven by public intervention. Private interventions have above all been made because they were already property owners in areas undergoing transformation, or more generally were already solidly rooted in these places, in contrast to what happens in other European countries and always defiladed foreign capitals. The reasons for this predominance of the public, with the emphasis on local projects, and the lack of 'external' private investment, are firstly that there are extremely few guarantees regarding the certainty and time scale of the procedure. Secondly, that transparency concerning decisions is lacking; and thirdly, that infrastructure and services are inadequate, etc. The strong predominance of public intervention in projects that ought to be an integration of the private and public causes further problems. There is a risk that once activated, only those parts that are the direct responsibility of the public authority will be carried out after which paralysis occurs because these initial structural operations are not followed by wider private intervention. Another risk is a difference between the

quality of the public interventions, which are the fruit of good planning and project management culture, compared to the distinctly inferior quality of successive private interventions. No improvements are induced in this case: above all there is an explicit mirroring. In conclusion, the frequent short circuiting of urban projects and town planning in general, as well as of public and private interventions, are not caused by project technicalities or planning, or management, but by structural factors. Town plans are very limited and old fashioned replies to problems in the contemporary city.