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Ludovico Quaroni: urban planning concepts before their time

Patrizia Gabellini

In Ludovico Quaroni's way of planning, in his writings and in his teachings, various writers have recognised a precocious awareness of concepts that have become characteristics of our contemporary ideas and indicate the abandonment of Modernity. With Quaroni the scope of urban planning is centred on the 'physical city'. Research is shifted to the intimate relationship between urban buildings, environment and society, to the territorial differences that are established through elusive and stratified historical processes, to the historic city as a place whose original characteristics are permanent and enduring, making identity more evident. The interpretation and planning of the urban and territorial 'figure' make use of immediate and comprehensible visual forms-metaphors that are capable of acting as an expressive focal point for interpretation and as a driving force for the project. The 'image' is therefore a necessary vehicle for an interpretation that can be communicated. This is an important shift of emphasis in comparison to the Modern point of view applied to the new city in order to express in it a functional rationality and to try out ways of living that are consistent with universal biological requirements. Present-day accordance with the teachings of Quaroni is found in the frequent use of terms such as context and landscape, in the way in which landscape is seen as "a heritage of identity resources, whose conservation requires a deep understanding of the processes of selective

accumulation that have operated over time, and above all a deep understanding of the ceaseless interaction between environmental factors, dynamics of building development, ways in which local societies live and work and cultural and symbolic values of the period" (Clementi 2002). When it is recognised that "there has, without doubt, been a recourse to image and imagination during the last fifteen-twenty years, as a widespread and, in some cases, decisive step" in urban planning research (Belli 2004), it reinforces the capacity for this part of Quaroni's work to penetrate into Italian urban planning. The contribution towards the role of urbanists and their practices is not as strong and actual, but constitutes a fertile awareness of significant questions, several of which have been widely examined over more recent years. Underlining the multiple and intersecting aspects of planning, Quaroni refers to the common interests of experts from varying disciplines and to the need for interdisciplinary activity. To this same aspect he adds on the intellectuality of urbanists, on the cultural character of their task. The idea of a work with such wide-ranging interests and implications draws attention to the need for internal communication, aimed at other technicians or figures in the planning process. The conviction that urban planning is a 'moral culture' moves this attention to external communication, involving divulgation to those for whom the plans and projects are ultimately destined. Today it is normal to think that consensus around an idea is fundamental for the creation of conditions for a subsequent action and to leave a mark within the unrestrainable flow of history. Methods of divulgation have lost their

ingenuity and the sophisticated development of forms of communication is one of the distinctive elements of contemporaneity. On the other hand, the convergence of studies on public policies in the field of planning has spread awareness of a shared expert and general knowledge, which is not predefined nor predefinable, within a process that tends to blend them together and to create in itself new areas of teaching and new skills. This has contributed towards a final abandonment of the prospect of demiurgic urban planning introduced in the wake of progress through history and has rendered anachronistic that elitist vision of urban planning that is still to be found in Quaroni's thought. With reference to planning form, three of Quaroni's expressions are worthy of consideration: *Piano idea* (Planning idea), *Piano norma* (Planning rules), *Modello direttore* (Directing model). The *Piano idea* is an expression introduced into the urban planning debate in the mid 1960s, raising the question as to the two-fold nature of the local development plan. The *Piano idea* should establish "the overall idea of the plan". It is a programming instrument, "an 'abacus' of subsequent controls" that will be the prerogative of the *Piano norma*, which represents the regulatory aspect, linked to the multiplicity of interests and actions and the result of an interdisciplinary interpretation, which is subjected to adjustments. The *Piano idea*, in this interpretation, reemerged a few years ago in the proposal for the new regional planning law for the Marche Region, marking a significant difference to a banal version of the Structural Plan. This proposal for organising

the urban plan (Planning idea and Planning rules) is the result of research into a specific form for the urban planning product and for understanding a problematic relationship between vision and execution. This focuses upon the temporal dilation of urban action and seeks to deal with the participation of many different figures and with changes in the surrounding conditions. Considerations as to timescales and urban planning methods also form the basis of the *Modello direttore*. In this case it is proposed to incorporate into the plan a series of instructions designed to control the form without confining it to a rigid, restrictive three dimensional solution such as that of the volumetric plan. The different methods of understanding and translating the plan, commenced in the early 1980s and progressively metabolised, provide the clearest proof of the interest aroused by these teachings of Quaroni. The Planning idea, Planning rules and Directing model become a part of the idea, which was striking and contrary to prevailing thought at the time when it was formulated, that it might not be appropriate in all cases and in all places to revert to a unified planning system, given the notable economic, geographic and human diversity of the Italian regions. Even this view now forms part of the accepted theories and practices of planning.