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If the plan...

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Planning as a problem

The Survey concentrated on historic and urban centres, semi-central and peripheral areas, high-value containers, natural commercial centres, historic shops and centres, and small municipalities. A number of the more significant commercial revitalization measures, in all these sectors, have been analyzed in the terms of the problems: general, managerial and functional. The Observatory also provides a useful 'Tool Box' above all for local administrators, for improving the quality of complex measures and those with a problematic result, more and more of which are of concern to Italian towns. The Observatory on commercial revitalization measures in historic centres and urban areas, recently set up by Indis, National institute of distribution and services, of Unioncamere in collaboration with Anci, the National association of Italian municipalities and coordinated by the regions, has been developed by the Guglielmo Tagliacarne Institute with the support of a large, multidisciplinary technical committee. The basic reason for establishing the Observatory was the need to strengthen the points of comparison and verification at national level, and then to make known throughout the territory the knowledge gained, 'organized' in the form of instruments of analysis and intervention. In many quarters there is, in fact, a growing demand to assess and record diversified experiences, carried out in the specific Italian situation, in a sector recognized by the main public and private actors engaged therein: regional, municipal and provincial

Administrations, autonomous functional bodies, representative associations and cultural bodies. The first results enable us to understand better the territorial spinoffs deriving from the support policies carried out by the regions. There are 185 commercial revitalization measures in progress in Italian urban areas, 52% of them concerning historic centres, 23% traditional historic shops and markets, 11% natural commercial centres (urban settlements historically characterized by the presence of diffuse activities, 9% semi-central areas and 5% small municipalities. All of this following a number of main guidelines regarding: strategic situation, urban marketing plans, town revitalization programmes, and projects for the historic centre; structural problems, such as renewal of the public space, refunctionalization and rehabilitation, upgrading of infrastructures; animation-promotion-communication, customer securitization and actions normally of short-term type; coordination, town centre management, control room for policies and actions, development agencies and mixed promotion companies. The present situation has been reached by means of an interest that took form in the eighties. Towards the end of the decade there took place, with force, also in Italy, with different rates of progress in the various territorial contexts, a rapid process of growth of the large-scale sales structures integrated with other formulae, according to the shopping centre model, which modified extra-urban landscapes, the inhabitants' behaviour, models of functioning of the major cities and socio-economic situations of the various local contexts. The role of commerce, integrated in the system of

mixed activities, in improving the level of liveability and vitality, is by now beyond question, but has not yet been sufficiently understood. The policies of improving commercial activities in urban areas as carried out in Italy have been heterogeneous in various ways: their theoretical and conceptual basis, their design solutions, managerial choices, and mechanisms of normative regulation. The range of options is broad enough to justify study and analysis aimed at understanding the relations between instruments, specific features of the places, and economic sectors. A first survey level is the typological sector. The experiments carried out cover a diversified range of geographic, orographic and settlement typologies (towns in the plains, in the hills, by the sea, large, medium and marginal centres) and are the expression of requests made separately by public, private and associative actors or by their collaboration right from the planning stage. Consequently, the variety of the types of measure adopted deserves attention, in order to compare, verify, monitor the effects and results in a positive and/or a negative sense. Another important aspect to be developed is the management one. Proposals, studies and projects are often based on approaches of territorial and urban marketing type, real estate promotion, urban transformation, functional rehabilitation and reuse, integrated and unitary management of measures (of the pattern of foreign experience of Town centre management), actively listening to the inhabitants-operators in participated design experiences, strategic framing of development. Lastly, it is necessary to consider also the functional sector and that of product

supply. A strong trend is under way towards functional concentration which is opposed to the widespread urban fabric system. Cases of ever more articulated transformation, the carrying out of Complex urban programmes, the diffusion of integrated projects, the recourse to Area plans, the increased attention of actors in the past not involved in commercial activities located in historic centres, are all elements that contribute towards multiplying the opportunities of intervention and which may be regarded as the privileged places for a systemic reading of the functional system and of product supply.