



Urbanistica n. 133

May-August 2007

Distribution by www.planum.net

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The form of the city

Luisa De Biasio Calimani

The competition between architecture and town planning, in progress for some decades, has led in the last few years to the exasperation of this rivalry. Despite the efforts made by some, the two disciplines have not succeeded in establishing an interactive relationship.

On the one hand there is the illusion that the city can be constructed by the 'rules', and on the other the presumption that a sum of buildings, provided they are well made, constitutes a city.

Town planners, even those technically well prepared, tend to regard the city as an ensemble of relations and functions whose container has no need to be formally represented, almost as though it were an intangible shell, a virtual scheme.

The formless city stems not only from the impoverishment of the town planning discipline, but from deeper causes, concerning the weakening of the urban culture, of the collective awareness of what is beautiful, of the symbolic value of the single places and of the city as a whole as the maximum expression of a people's identity and civilization.

Concepts that today seem un-important, but which have represented basic values in the relationship between history, culture, society and city. Political power no longer seeks, as was the case in the past, to be represented through the form of the city to which was assigned the task of transmitting it in a more or less imperishable manner. Nowadays there are other, more ephemeral means of representation. Political power no longer invests in the great synthesis of man's activity and thought represented by his habitat. It has renounced the symbolic value of the city as

a collective good, delegating the governance thereof to economic and financial power.

The Masterplan of San Benedetto, too, found itself up against the conflict between collective and speculative interests, and made a definite choice of field, not borne out, either now or then, by the public governance of the town.

The formless city

Urban projects have opened the debate in concrete and operative terms. They have forced a confrontation on the subject of the form of the urban space, almost always ignored since the post-war period.

Masterplans have almost always been lacking in the idea of form, and urban projects lack an overall and relational vision between the places. Every part of the town is designed very often without any dialogue with its surrounds. With the new Masterplan of San Benedetto del Tronto we have sought to overcome this usage, and we have provocatively inserted therein the images of a transformed town. The choice of 'integrated' functions has been translated into spaces and forms, heights and volumes, suggested by the place where they are to be located.

This is the challenge of complementarity in unity. Leaving to successive phases the precise choices of location of the free and built spaces, confirmed by the possibility of making transpositions of zone by the implementation instruments, is tantamount to a renunciation of determining the form of the city.

The Masterplan of San Benedetto has chosen to give indications, even cogent ones, if required by a given place. The Urban sports park, located in the most sought-after area of the town, is one example: perceptible and usable in

the plan project, it was, in the proposal of private interests, hemmed in between buildings which made it, even if formally public, an asset for almost private use rather than one pertaining to the whole town.

Income, producer of imbalances

The reason that induces millions of persons to migrate, hoping for better living conditions and for opportunities that only the city can offer, turns out for many to be a wrecked dream. As shown by the 10th Biennial of architecture, the processes of runaway urban concentration in the world have made inequalities more acute and have accentuated marginalization.

In the city poverty seems even more dramatic, rubbing shoulders with immense, vulgarly exhibited wealth.

We have sought to reverse this pattern in San Benedetto to overcome the structural imbalances determined by income and by town planning-architectural sloppiness. There are no 'equal opportunities' for inhabitants in the provision of services, of green areas, of urban accessibility; the various places of the town do not interact, nor is there any relation between the vast hinterland and the seafront, as taught by history.