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## The Structural plan for Dicomano 'bridging'

Giovanni Allegretti\*,  
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On the occasion of the drawing up of the new Regulatory plan for the Municipality of Dicomano, the Commission and Council requested not just a project from the planners, but the initiation of a process that 'could create and develop a dialogue between inhabitants and institutions' on a fundamental theme such as the transformation of the city and the open territory. The process of dialogical planning interacted continuously with the phase of superseding the Regional law 5/95 of Tuscany, in the decade of its adoption. What emerged was an 'open' plan that proposes modalities for innovative design as an inheritance to develop over the coming stages of the planning process. Since 1995, Tuscan legislation has ruled that Municipal urban planning be developed in two different yet complementary instruments. The first, entitled the Structural plan, must be approved in union by the Municipality, the Province and the Region, and deals with the strategic contents of the planning, establishing the non-negotiable rules for active protection and enhancement of the territory's resources. The second instrument, entitled the Town Planning Regulation, enters into the details of the uses of the land and examines in depth some general analyses and planning elements. This instrument is more flexible and may be modified in substantial autonomy by the Municipality, although with the obligation not to violate the maximum construction capacity and the 'load' limits established in the strategic guidance instrument. In 2003, all the Tuscan

municipalities that had not yet drawn up their own Regulatory plan according to Regional law 5/95 (Decree on the management of the territory) had to begin the process of construction of the Structural plan. Among these was the Municipality of Dicomano, a town of 5,000 inhabitants 36 kilometres from Florence, whose territory (61 square kilometres) extends by bridging the territories of the Mugello and the Valdisieve, establishing itself as a link territory between two environments that surround the Florentine metropolitan area. In the case of Dicomano, the drawing up of the Dicomano plan, which began halfway through 2003, was complicated by a series of municipal and regional elections. The last phase of the planning then coincided with the entry into effect of Regional law 1/05, known as 'Super5' because it enhanced (without destroying) the preceding law. The small municipality thus became the 'opening act' in the experimentation of the new decree, had to undergo a condition of 'planning transition' full of uncertainties associated with the difficulties of the regional and provincial technical offices in interpreting parts of the new law and also linked to a delay in the law's arriving to applicable legislation, which only took place in 2007. This state of partial legal confusion led to a sort of 'joint creativity', which developed during the Conference on services, a space for direct dialogue between the various institutions that, for both laws, represents the fundamental moment in a planning process that is managed in collaboration by local bodies, Mountain Communities, and Provincial and Regional entities. The constant dialogue

between Region and Province allowed the Plan to fulfil the indications of Regional law 1/05 even before it was approved. In fact, in the 18 months of work preceding the approval of the new law, the planners had already collected and inserted into the plan the subjects of the political/technical debate that were forging the new section. In particular, one of the fundamental elements of the 'Super5' was immediately accepted, i.e. the need to impose the choices along paths that harmonise dispersed information, inter-institutional collaboration and areas of wide-ranging social participation (without confusing the three concepts, as the law seems to do still).

### *Locus amoenus ("pleasant place")*

Historically the centre of merchant trading, located on the plane at the beginning of an important valley in the Apennines running between Tuscany and Romagna (at the confluence of the rivers Sieve and Comano), Dicomano in the last twenty years has undergone a demographic explosion, growing by almost 2,000 inhabitants. The prospect, never realised, of a motorway link from Incisa to Barberino transformed it into a residential centre, marked by intense commuting to and from the Florentine metropolitan area. Despite the fact that Dicomano and Contea (its largest subsection) have undergone enlargements that were often inattentive to architectural and landscaping values, overall the territory has conserved intact its historical-environmental heritage, distinguishing itself from nearby municipalities through a strong growth in quality rural tourism over the last decade. The drawing up of the Structural plan allowed an

occasion to rethink the relationship between larger and smaller centres and open land, enhance the renewable energy sources and the quality of agricultural, forest and pastoral production, suggesting the need to review the relationships between Dicomano and the surrounding territories and Florence, and clear up the 'hierarchy and roles' with regard to hypotheses of economic development. In order to sustain such a landscaping strategy, the Commission held that it was important to have the assistance of professionals trained in the themes of local self-sustainable development, entrusting the work to young architects from the *Laboratorio di progettazione ecologica degli insediamenti* (LaPei) of the University of Florence. But, above all, it took the occasion to start up a permanent collective debate that - on various different levels - involved institutions, inhabitants and entrepreneurs firstly in the drawing up of the Structural plan and then of the Town planning regulation. This is why the approved plan still has, in its structuring parts, a visible trace of the participatory developments and the debates carried out, so that the detailed urban planning instruments may take these elements into account. The Structural Plan assigns to the detailed urban planning instruments the task of perfecting the social dialogue developments already initiated, arriving at the most possible 'shared' choices through working out any territorial tensions and conflicts. With regard to the opportunity for a vast social dialogue, there was agreement between the two Commissions that came one after the other in the drawing up of the Plan. For both, the construction of the Structural Plan was just the beginning of a development

that would be capable of 'de-provincialising' the urban setting, thereby clearing up the ambiguities and contradictions in the Report on the Start of Proceedings 2. The latter, in its all-encompassing nature, had presented as complementary various planning options that were in fact in conflict with each other, such as the opening of fashion outlets and the enhancement/improvement of the natural shopping centre in the small historical centre. The planned 'co-presence' certainly did not express great coherency in terms of town planning. This defect in vision needed correcting...

#### *Listening and prefiguring scenarios: the method and its results*

The construction of collective spaces for urban debate began right at the start of the overall studies for the Structural plan. Perfecting what had already been tried in the Structural plan for Scandicci, an effort was made to involve the citizens in a gradual manner, listening to members of the local community, in the form of over 30 open meetings and theme-based focus groups, in order to get a picture of the problems, expectations and possible solutions, and to favour a constructive dialogue between the different positions. For the meetings, symbolic spaces such as the Council Hall and the Planning office were made available. In a parallel manner, for one year, work was carried out in the schools and the summer camps in drawing up a 'Children's Plan', which involved students from the elementary and middle schools. The aim of the work was to stimulate an acknowledgement of territorial values, to reinforce the sense of belonging to place (perceived as a common anchor in the identity of both old and new

generations) and the general study of the transformations and historical fixed points in the community of Dicomano, in order to propose analytical points of view and hypotheses for their redesigning. In 2004, the detailed work of involving individual citizens, groups and families emotionally and functionally made possible a process of five open meetings, entitled 'The Thursdays of the Plan' because of their weekly occurrence. At these, the themes of the overall idea were exposed and discussed (in a sort of assessment of the state of progress of the Plan's works) and possible future scenarios were examined upon which to base the plan's choices: Trend scenario; the Scenario for gravitation onto the Metropolitan area; the Scenario for protection and conservation; Self-sustainable local development. On the basis of the latter scenario (collectively chosen as a horizon of reference) the technicians and the Commission amalgamated the development lines of the Structural plan, placing at the centre the 'Matrix of perceived social demand'. This was a concise summary of the requests and suggestions that had emerged in the Children's plan, in the various meetings with the inhabitants, and which had arrived by e-mail or inserted into the box at the Town Hall. Although pressed by the time restraints of drawing up the Structural plan, the listening programme developed in a well-modulated and in-depth manner. Because of its central importance, the description of this process - a rare event for a structural plan - was given ample space at the beginning of the General report. It also left clear traces in many 'graphic elaborations of the

Plan' as well as in the regulatory contents of the 'Statute of the Territory'. One strategic choice made by the Work group was to highlight the historical and environmental qualities of the territory and have a 'spatialised' reading of the results of the social dialogue. To that end, traditional forms of drawing the territory and its landscape were used; also, realistic/expressive-types of drawings were studied and used, as part of the experimental approach towards illustration that the LaPei has been using for over five years. The Scenarios and maps of the Heritage, examples of this form of illustration, use pictographic illustrations and 'relational' legends (i.e. legends that illustrate the system of reciprocal relationships between elements and with the landscape). All the illustrations refer to real objects, but, in order not to relinquish the role of a document destined for exact 'certification' of the quantitative and qualitative consistency of the elements illustrated, with a low symbolic content. This methodology ensured that the content of the Structural plan was enriched by meaningful suggestions and ideas. For example, it allowed planners to alter the volume and dimensions established by the Regulatory plan preceding the new Structural plan, reducing to a considerable extent the manufacturing, residential and tourist volumes. The approved plan sees a reduction of 33.7% in residential/tourist buildings and a reduction of 63% in the manufacturing buildings that may be constructed over the coming 25 years. In terms of viability, the social dialogue centred a wider debate on the Statale 67 road, reinforcing the refusal on the part of the new Commission to accept a section predefined by the

superior administrative bodies. In addition, the social dialogue contributed to overturning the 'urbanocentric' point of view which had been adopted up to that point in viewing the open territory, enriching the quantity and quality of the study reports. During the course of the work, to the Map of the 'Dynamics for the use of the land' (which reports the changes that took place between 1954 and 2002 and relates them to the territorial complexity registered by the General register in 1834) were added the 'Map of the traditional agrarian units', the 'Map of the zones of wild animals and the zones of repopulation and hunting', and the 'Map of the local roads'. And - in the maps of the project - the social dialogue helped to differentiate the rules applicable to the productive agricultural territory and to the abandoned areas, the recuperation of which to agricultural use is a priority for local development (the restrictions apply to the obligation to carry out philological restoration of the rural man-made objects and the agrarian systems). In addition, an analysis of the role carried out by hunting associations led planners to imagine partnerships between such associations, recreational associations, environmental associations and Municipal entities, in order to promote together - for educational purposes - the 'Areas of improvement to the wooded and pastoral landscape'. The idea to offer prizes for those who operate in the territory with associated management (for example, the doubling of the periods of validity of authorisation for temporary manufactured objects) is the direct result of the social dialogue processes that accompanied the Structural plan. The widest core of themes that emerged from the public debate, however,

concerned many of the 'urban and territorial fragments' indicated as elements with an identity that belongs to the territory, and therefore recognised by the Plan as 'unchangeable' in accordance with the provisions of the regional regulations. By means of the dialogue, the concept of 'structural invariant' was refined in comparison to the widespread way of understanding it in Tuscan town planning tradition. In this way, it ended up also including elements that were not physical but were linked to social variables, and found a clarity of definition that, in a parallel manner, Regional law 1/05 also sought for. The conservation-improvement of the traditional place-names and of the country graveyards, the importance of protected walkways for children and older people, the role of festivals and traditional markets and the new fito-depuration plant are all part of the group of elements collectively identified during the process of the public debate. The participatory process led - at the end - to the identification of the Areas of integrated rethinking (Air), complex portions of land the future transformation of which should (by self-imposed regulation) also result out of processes of collective construction of the choices. In particular, the Airs are meant to accord with the provisions of the new regional legislation, shifting the attention from 'passive protection' to 'planned protection' of the territory. In this, the process of social dialogue that accompanied and supported the drawing up of the Structural plan, played a vital role, which must necessarily be further developed in the drawing up of the detailed town planning instruments, currently in progress.

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