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A new planning hope

Oriol Bohigas

It is undeniable that the increase in sub-urbanization and the degradation of the peripheries, typical of the majority of Spanish and Italian towns, for which urban planning is most subject to bureaucratic constraints of dubious legitimacy, is closely correlated to the obligation to adopt or approve general master plans or equivalent planning models. These plans, applied in the local or provincial sector, are in fact responsible for the loss of the urban connotation of cities, in view of the counter-productive effect produced by their structure and their implementation, and the acceleration which - with rare exceptions - they have imposed on the processes of deurbanization and territorial disorder. In consideration of these failures, it is essential to subject the planning instruments used to careful scrutiny.

It is not incorrect to identify just three elements as the only instruments through which a master plan is able to determine the fate of a fragment of a city, i.e. zoning, the road network, drawn up as a function of autonomous premises, and the unexpected formal consequences that the application of the plan involves in both the public and the private sphere. While the aim pursued is designing and building towns and districts in keeping with the great European urban tradition, it is clear that the adoption of these three instruments must necessarily have disastrous consequences. To obviate this proven inapplicability, the two solutions most sought after are, as a rule, deregulation of the territory - which we exclude - and the substitution of the master plan by a series of urban projects, a solution that

presents a plausible scenario, although it contains drawbacks of a space-time character. While an exemplary method in defining the construction of new districts or the reconstruction of a small urban settlement, drawing up a system based on single urban projects is clearly impossible to implement in a more extensive territory or for longer-term projects. In the light of these uncertainties, it has been preferred to go on approving master plans, with negative or at least useless results that have not been worth the considerable efforts made. However, the new legislative context introduced in a number of Italian regions, manifest in the adoption of the new Structural plan of Reggio Emilia - the first one, as far as I know, of any importance - which, under the guidance of Giuseppe Campos Venuti, indeed opens up new expectations, seems to have taken the new strategies into account. Apart from acting as a model for future plans, the Structural plan of Reggio Emilia can be a testing ground for confirming or modifying regional laws, which, in the long run, will be the real promoters of legislative change also at national level. And this not only in Italy, but also in such countries as Spain, the victim in the past of analogous errors and uncertainties. The most important aspect of the legislative renewal mentioned is the subdivision of the old master plan, the legacy of the urban planning law of 1942, into three planning instruments: the Municipal structural plan (Psc), the Municipal operative plan (Poc) and the Urban planning building regulations (Rue). This has enabled the Psc to be applied to just programmatic aspects. In simple terms, the Psc is a general plan that defines only a number

of guidelines - a sort of 'urban ideology' - almost of policy and thus not pertaining to the specific context of the project; while the Poc represents the structure on which the formal control of the short-term programme operations is based through a system of urban projects. In short, this is an intelligent solution that enables general aspects to be separated from particular ones, and at the same time makes them coincide in a common process. For the first time, planning that does not come between projects, and for the first time town planning becomes a 'new planning hope'.