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If the plan...

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Planning as a problem

If the plan ...
Paolo Avarello

If the plan must recover original contents and intentions one must think about different plans from those of traditional urbanism, not looking to recompose in 'new plans' themes and modalities of 'old plans', but rather developing techniques and knowledge that is different from the past. The problem of limits, for example, can no longer be dealt with in terms of traditional 'dimensionamento' (fixing overall dimensions), but must be constructed on different givens, perhaps taking content from bla bla currents (sustainability, participation, doability). Deciding which parts of a territory should not be transformed for urban purposes is a first screening out of the problem, either more or less drastic, for situations and conditions, but also for the general good, perhaps for prejudicial opposition to every transformation. Also when one deals with restoring disused areas, those under-used, degraded, that are everywhere the first klaxon call to urban transformation. An advantage is that the local plan is no longer alone as it was in the past, when on the table of the 'territorial framework' one didn't know what to design. Today, on the contrary, one has to make a great effort to put into order a plethora of interpretations, indications and clarifications: a complex operation, interesting, and sometimes also even useful. The condition for institutional action, naturally, is knowing and being able to bring to a conclusion pertinent and convincing arguments. The system of planning in not, in fact, a deductive process but an argumentative one. Almost always, however, the most drastic limitation derives from the scarcity of

financial resources. The plan can activate and/or attract resources, but also these are never unlimited, and in any case are always conditioned. Public funds (i. e. from the European Union), for goals and programmes, often do not coincide with local needs. And other conditions derived from the timing and the manner of spending, with the result of privileging 'spending efficiency', rather than the efficiency of programmes, financing the 'financiable', rather than the necessary. But conditions are also imposed by private funding, from the existence or not of a local market, and also from the fact that for every investment one can reduce for public saving only in part. A good part of resources must be, in any case, used for maintenance, in particular for that of infrastructure: also this is necessary for development, but almost invisible, and of little interest for public officials, even though reducing the infrastructure deficit in our cities would be a priority. On the 'contribution' of private funding much has been said and written, in an ideological key, sometimes to enthusiastic, sometimes with aversion. Only rarely has been posed the problem of 'guaranteeing' the usefulness of contributions, the effective utility of their destination and the quality of the intervention. Undoubtedly, however, in the implementation of new plans (structural) one opens a gap between the intentions of the plan and its realisation that follows. On the one hand, therefore, there is the temptation to define and regulate in more detail the same plans, or even to return to old plans, on the other hand there is the objective difficulty of dealing with the plans upholding the standards on general objectives over a long period of time, while

running from 'case to case': that is to say the 'occasions' for financing and the eventual requests and offers of constructors and proprietors of land. The solutions, if they exist, can only lie in developing greater capacities to debate, to confront, and to evaluate: a new and different 'culture of territories' (and of its governance), that enlarges the interests and competences of what, today, still for many, 'isn't really urbanism' (ambient, infrastructure, landscape etc), getting over the administrative difficulties, in order to come to terms with the real problems; if their are vested interest they should be 'dealt with'. If, once upon a time, it was 'just' by definition that which respects the plan, today instead one must search every time to reconstruct a reasonable equilibrium of interests, and demonstrate that one is proceeding in the most even handed way possible, with respect to the context, to the offers and to the needs: that in what translates into market forces, the most simple, and that which is manifested at a social level. The experiences of the last few years are a good example of 'cases' on which one should draw up an evaluation. From an overview comes the suspicion that too often what is realised is exactly what would have happened anyway, but with more rhetoric than was necessary.