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What plan for what town planning?

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**Problems, policies, and research**

Ecological network and planning  
 The project of ecological network in Ptcp of Mantova  
 The system of the provincial green. The ecological network of the Province of Novara  
 Strategies of riqualfication: planning ecological network. The case of Province of Bologna  
 Ecological network in the urban design

*edited by* **Antonella Bruzzese, Antonio Longo**  
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**Projects and implementation**

Beyond the Company town. Plans and projects for San Donato Milanese  
 A plan for Mattei's city  
 Shared neighbourhood planning. The structure of the 'Laboratorio Quartieri' and its activities  
 Planning with the inhabitants: open issues of a shared experience  
 Starting from the neighbourhood to reach the neighbourhood  
 Form and contents of the 'Strategy and framework document'  
 San Donato. Four images of change  
 Closing the gap and maintaining tension  
 The Services plan project  
 The Area management plan for San Donato Milanese: legislative architecture  
 Plans for deciding: speed, goals and forms  
 Work on the plan. Interview with Achille Taverniti  
 Coming closer to the town, experiencing life in the town. Interview with Mario Dompè  
 Politics and policies  
 San Donato Milanese a workshop on innovation  
 In search of a working dimension

*Harald Bodenschatz*

**Profiles and practices**

Town planning in the new Berlin

*Giovanna Bianchi*

Practices and instruments for the quality of the 'Space of day-to-day life'

*Davide Ponzini*

Public real estate appreciation as a local development opportunity

*Yodan Rofé*

The white city of Tel Aviv

*Giovanni Laino*

**Methods and tools**

The crisis in Campania waste. A short reconstruction of the story

*Gian Paolo Corda*

The real challenge for Expo 2015

## Practices and instruments for the quality of the 'Space of day-to-day life'<sup>\*\*</sup>

Giovanna Bianchi

I believe we can share the idea that beauty, also understood as a morphological quality, is a need for the quality of living also in daily places; that master plan is not able to directly produce the morphologic-functional quality of interventions but it can only set up preconditions and it is therefore necessary for local administrations to identify procedures leading incrementally to the shaping of interventions also for the fragments of the 'normal' city, which are often of moderate dimensions, frequently mainly of a residential nature. If we recognize that other 'concerns' - framework conditions: residence, public proximity services and areas - are coming up besides the polarization on city competitiveness, it follows that it is necessary to test in design and planning also structure and organization forms of city spaces having local relevance. And it is just in order to deal with local issues of urban nature that I consider useful experimental practices, which are fit to set up rules directly producing space organization and formalization effects. One of the first fields to explore could derive from the British tradition of guidances, regulation and policy instruments (they are not best design handbooks if not with regard to technical contents), as they prevail on regulatory prescriptive models and are used in planning processes. But this is also the case of France, even if a very different one, with its mainly environmental guides applied to urban and building transformations. Also our tradition is not disinclined to producing

guides and handbooks; in fact one of the signs of the 'new plans' season at the end of the Eighties was the introduction of performance languages with guides, handbooks, abacus, lists of best practices. However, I have the feeling that our experience is thoroughly different as it is a technique to enrich the plan regulatory language and not a tool local administrations have in order to link development regeneration policies with the qualitative and formal aspects of the project within public-private partnership and participatory practices: plan tools therefore, not tools of the planning process. A second, highly interesting possibility, consists in focussing our attention on sets of practices with which local administrations test ways to 'keep together' both threads of the argument: the implementation of an intervention policy and the setting up of a planning project. I am referring to the more and more widespread recourse to competition practices where the definition of space quality criteria and performances gathers prominence and specificity: design and planning competitions, calls for participatory contributions and action proposals. I shall use some experiences to better clarify the aspects distinguishing these practices from a 'traditional' architecture competition: the call for participatory contributions and action proposals of the *Programma preliminare del Programma integrato di intervento* (Print) of Pietralata (2006); the four design competitions for public works in fifteen city planning programmes *Meno è più* in Rome (2005-2007); the two international design competitions *Abitare a Milano* and *Abitare a Milano/2* for eight social housing interventions in Milan (2005-06). The main aspects of these

competition practices are to my opinion: the management nature, the technical nature, the planning attention applied to the 'normal' city. I am speaking of a management nature, because the competition is a 'tool' of the local planning process of a public-private partnership and participatory kind that is used to gradually shape the morphological-functional quality of the interventions and accompanies the plan. This is the case of the Pietralata Print, where the notice of competitions is enclosed to the preliminary programme and opens the procedure for the setting up of the integrated programme calling for remarks and proposals by the various stakeholders. This is the case of *Meno è più*, where the municipal administration introduces the competition as a concerted realization of public works by private stakeholders within programmes and prepares performance and functional documents for this purpose, which are going to be enclosed to the calls: for each programme, at least a public work must be realized by private stakeholders through a competition procedure. This is what happens in Milan, where the municipal administration identifies an operational experimental path along which one can reach the planning definition: the notice of competition requests to draft a preliminary design and a typological experimental in-depth project; the winners are entrusted with the working plan and at the same time the administration draws up the 'Integrated intervention programmes', i.e. the tools 'comprising' the design from a procedural viewpoint. I am also speaking of a technical nature, which can be more or less structured but it always has a strong communicative value, as

the notice of competition is accompanied by guidelines or preliminary planning documents introducing performance, policy or prescriptive rules concerning the formal and functional aspects of the open and built spaces project. This is true for the Pietralata Print, where design criteria are enclosed to the notice of competition; such criteria must be applied in planning contracts or permits to build and are to be considered a sort of 'binding minimum': general rules, not for specific places, but rather quality requirements, a sort of check list, a code of good behaviour. This is the case of *Meno è più*, which is based on a preliminary planning document divided in two parts: during preselections, contents concern the organization and the location of the programme, general planning criteria, the exemplifying planivolumetric design, the description of the area features; during the selection phase contents concern the performance requirements for the project. This takes place in Milan, where the competition is based on a Masterplan supported by a Preliminary planning document (Dpp) for each of the areas that supplies the planning criteria also to be used for the assessment of the submitted projects. In particular the Dpp is a verbal-visual document supplying informations on the competition area and the neighbouring context, identifies the strategic lines of the urban development and performances that the project should ensure ('conceptual schemes' and simulations). I am speaking, finally, of design attention paid to the 'normal' city as these competition practices are starting to be practised also in smaller, less complex interventions, in day-to-day spaces. This is what happens in the

Pietralata Print, where the competition procedure concerns suburban, mainly residential patterns, requiring widespread reorganization, improvement and adjustment interventions that concern services and networks. This is the case of *Meno è più*, where the competition procedure concerns schools, nursery schools, equipped areas for playgrounds, car parks, squares in suburban areas. And it is the case of Milan, where the planning and management procedure aims at defining new intervention rules in the field of social housing, as also interventions of this kind can become occasions of regeneration if they are planned as city interventions meeting not only housing but also 'living' needs.

There are three reflection elements we can get from these tests: the morphological-functional quality is a social construction, and can be looked for only within transactional and participatory processes; the competition procedure is a way to request an enlarged debate, get numerous solutions in a short time, enhance the quality of proposals, stimulate discussion at local level; the technical documents accompanying the tender are a way to pay attention to the qualitative aspects and to the space outcomes of a transformation well in advance and to gradually set up the morphological and functional rules for a specific place, thus steering its transformation over time.

\* The text incorporates speech presented at the conference planners and beauty in cities, Department of Architecture and Engineering, University La Sapienza, Rome, in June 2007.