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The Paper Plan

Paolo Avarello

A plan ought to express the intentions and the objectives of the administration promoting it, at least insofar as the relevant choices entail physical transformations of the city and of the territory. Transformations that can be carried out only over lengthy periods and which therefore cannot be 'described' in detail *ex ante*. The achieving of these objectives, in fact, means the involvement of various subjects, public and private, bearers of interests, sometimes contrasting ones, which should coalesce and converge on these objectives, as it is in any case not reasonable to think that the administrations could have the necessary resources available.

A brief panorama of the most recent plans, stripped – or almost – of the incrustations of the old town-planning legislation (although still partly in force) presents us with quite a depressing picture. Territorial, regional and provincial plans mostly give, in fact, readings/interpretations of the territory, that is, its 'actual state', in any case readable also from the basic maps. Associated with the various parts of the territory, broken down into a certain number of 'categories', or of 'homogeneous sectors', there are therefore indications, or even 'norms', to which correspond more or less differentiated 'attentions' and 'treatments'.

The dominant motives of these plans, drowned in the rhetoric of unlikely 'local identities', 'territorial development', and naturally environmental, social, etc. 'sustainability', they delineate essentially forms of 'safeguarding' the territory. Hence no objective, other than that of the widespread, generic 'conservation' of the territory and relative, generic 'development'. Plans that seem even to avoid giving indications/prescriptions of sectoral planning: basin plans, landscape, park, quarry, etc., plans, many of which moreover 'prevail' by law over 'ordinary' planning.

The territorial/landscape plan, chosen by some regions, in some way as a 'simplification', is therefore a sort of 'model', from which in fact the generically 'territorial' plans differ little. And in these, generally speaking, there is hardly any mention of certain crucial questions, such as the location of important structures (hospitals, prisons, industrial areas, high schools, universities, large commercial centres, etc.), or the system of infrastructures, in particular those of transport, obviously of great importance in the organization and in the functioning of the territory, whose impacts above all often generate conflicts and/or perhaps 'compensations', *a posteriori*.

Law 142/1990, which assigned 'territorial planning' (formerly of state competence, but reserved for specific and not generalized situations) to the provinces and not to the regions, foresaw systematic institutional 'concerted agreement' between regions, provinces and municipalities (the State remaining in any case 'superordinate'), so

as to ensure/verify *ex ante* the compatibility of provincial and municipal plans with the action programmes of the regions. With the spread of territorial, regional and provincial plans, what seem instead to prevail are the 'weak plans', or a confrontation *a posteriori* between bureaucratic and hierarchical agencies, based *de facto* on conformity (with the higher level plan, even if coming into force *a posteriori*).

Also municipal plans, which have always been the core of Italian town planning, and which also because of this have undergone the most evident innovations and transformations, nonetheless do not seem to express clearly concrete, credible objectives of urban and territorial transformation. Is it really sufficient to quote (in the plan regulations) the new complex programmes, conceived as 'operative', through planned public/private agreement, and then merely in the plan maps indicating the 'zones' where they will be developed? How many 'building areas' in the old plans have remained 'unbuilt'? And instead how many non-building areas have been built on as 'variants', or perhaps more or less illegally?

What then are the choices of the municipalities, what are the readable objectives in their plans, once all the flowery language has been trimmed away? If these exist, they are generally bogged down in a morass of signs and words, which have very little to do with the concrete possibilities of being carried out by the administration, with or without private partners. And meanwhile the attributions of 'buildability' in the 'old' plans continue to weigh down on everything.