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A plan that rethinks Bologna and urban planning

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The changes that took place in the major cities have arrived in Bologna with some delay and have been mitigated by the city's undoubted economic, social and political solidity. Only recently have they appeared clearly, and their undesirable effects have progressively occupied the political agenda. The present-day of European territory is distinguished by a blend of urban situations where the 'old cities' continue to play a fundamental role as fulcrum, but within a complex system that includes different urban forms, where people live their existences in different ways in widely varying geographical situations, often living in more than one place, generally working in others, using school, health, cultural and commercial services in yet other places. The identity of these 'people' is no longer known, but has become a cosmopolitan blend of different nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, races and a composition that is highly unstable. These forms of difficulty, which are now directly felt and suffered in Bologna, constitute the surface of those deep-rooted processes of transformation which in various ways affect the whole of Europe. Over the twenty year period that separates the last two general plans there has been a clear change in the city; changes of administration have interrupted continuity over the years since the Second world war and have placed urban planning at the centre of debate; a regional law has come into force which changes the relevant institutional framework. During this long interval the right conditions have developed for a general

rethinking as to the future of the city and the characteristics of a new urban planning instrument. In 1990, Bologna and the municipal authorities around it obtained recognition as a 'metropolitan city'. The guidelines to the Regional territorial plan that is currently being prepared indicate the need to move away from polycentrism towards a 'regional system' where Bologna 'can become capital', which "distributes values, identities and benefits among the entire territorial system, repositioning itself... among the circuit of European regional capitals". The Plan has operated on the assumption that competition with other European cities of similar status is possible if its characteristics as an attractive city are strengthened, in particular through a multiplication of opportunities for the populations of young people who are able to develop their skills, who are capable of viewing the world differently, and are therefore equipped to bring about change. It is necessary to guarantee a style of living in its broadest and most varied sense, which enables and assists coexistence. The image of the 7 Cities in the Structural plan has various functions: it interprets the processes of urbanisation, demonstrating its territorial breadth; it identifies a strategy that is capable of being implemented in other metropolitan districts; it proposes perceptible forms by relating the strategy to the physical space. The Cities are the recognition of the existence of new urban forms in the Bologna area, or rather over extensive areas of the city with their own existing or potential integrity and quality, where different and varied blends of population, fixed or transient, express their way of living in many different ways, recognising

themselves as members of that population if they share a neighbourhood that they are prepared to look after. The Cities propose a strategy that seeks to bring together the municipal, metropolitan and regional area in supporting the role of Bologna as a national and international centre of undoubted importance. Only the two Cities along the Via Emilia are considered as part of Bologna (described as the 'city cities'). The cities of the bypass, hills, river Reno and river Savena, on the other hand, are proposed as metropolitan cities because the factors that distinguish them and give them their name (respectively the major road, the character of the landscape, the Reno river and the Savena torrent and road) are also elements that structure the metropolis. The same attributes in the Bologna Municipal structural plan can be used to develop quality and value in plans for other municipal authorities that overlook the same bypass road and rivers, or are sited on the hills above. The long - or mid - distance communication system that characterises the City of the Railway and the new organisation of the central station and its vast surrounding area will bring about far-reaching structural change for Bologna. The seventh City is therefore national and international. The Cities are territorial forms that seek to emphasise differences which are already present and 'highlight' strategies that are developed in different ways in space, in time and in relation to the people concerned, also using ideas and proposals from the past, crossing administrative and territorial divisions and community boundaries. Urban design and urban planning have always sought to achieve (though

they are rarely put into practice) ambitious objectives of structuring space by identifying medium-long term territorial strategies. The combined effect of many varied factors has progressively cancelled out this characteristic of 'mission'. The Structural plan, a component of the new municipal plan, makes it possible to restore a basic aspect of urban planning; on the other hand the deep-rooted transformations that have taken place in the area today make it useful, sometimes indispensable, to build scenarios. The Bologna Municipal structural plan has been developed with this awareness and, in relation to some of its characteristics, acquires a strategic aspect. It is therefore a fundamental interpretative framework for a composite series of urban planning works and actions, the feasibility of many of which is proven and accepted. It seeks to consolidate the medium-long term vision through a wide-ranging process of consultation with institutional, economic and political figures and through promoting understanding of the territory through the discussion of clearly identified choices. It emphasises the importance of building up a shared image of the territorial area, which is clearly anchored to the spaces to be redeveloped. For Emilia-Romagna's urban planning legislation, the structural plan is one of the major new factors. The documents that precede and accompany the 'nucleus' of the plan (consisting of the report, regulations and illustrations) are, on the one hand the Knowledge framework and the Preliminary document, and on the other the environmental and territorial sustainability assessment and the Constrains charter. Each of these documents has its own small history, which reflects problems and

requirements that have emerged more or less recently in the urban planning process. Their approach and, above all, their concomitant construction provide the first significant indications of the 'reformed system'. The new approach can be seen also in the stages of the process: Conferences, agreements, competitions are the procedures provided by law in order to respond to the requirements of discussion, agreement and openness which are of central importance in the field of urban planning and dominate the social and political world. The choices in the structural plan for Bologna are set out with reference to cities, systems, ambits and situations: systems and ambits are provided and pre-defined by law, cities and systems are introduced in order to emphasise the strategic approach and the attention towards the physical configuration of the territorial area. While the 7 Cities indicate where redevelopment is to be encouraged over the next 15 years, the systems, situations and ambits indicate the ways in which the plan seeks to guide actions and policies that affect the territory as a whole, in order to promote quality in relation to the various conditions that mark the starting point. The transport system, the system of public spaces and community services and the ecological and environmental system are customary (almost 'classic') structural components. In the Bologna Municipal structural plan it is sought to highlight the objectives followed for each system and to describe the policy criteria operated, in line with the supra-local planning guidelines and creating the foundations upon which the Urban building regulations can provide a basis for the regulations governing the development of public

space. With regard to the classification of land use, the plan identifies 3 kinds of area (Development area, Developed area, Rural area) each containing Ambits that can be recognised according to the types of development, the state of conservation, the level of services and the functional mix, each of which is sufficiently wide to assure the possibility of future compromise (that frequently cited notion of flexibility). In order to structure local choices, the plan also identifies 37 situations, giving them the name with which the inhabitants usually identify those same parts of Bologna. The situations refer to large parts of the municipal area which are regarded as 'cohesive' from the morphological and/or functional point of view and in terms of its landscape and environment, where a selected series of actions, linked to those that support the re-organisation of the entire territorial area, is capable of bringing about improvement to general living conditions and of meeting the fundamental standards of urban quality expressed by the law. The choice of identifying 'Situations' emphasises the conviction that a structural plan must operate on all scales that are regarded as necessary for adequately representing the guidelines laid down for operating other instruments. If urban equalisation is the method established in the Plan for obtaining the necessary resources in order to provide infrastructures and services for the territorial area, its achievement is accompanied and implemented by assessments, public involvement and communication, projects and preliminary proposals. The range of instruments and procedures that have

been developed over the course of the last two decades have been developed and operated with the understanding that they now form part of a 'normal' wider approach to urban planning. The Bologna Municipal structural plan, which forms part of a long period of redevelopment in the city, began to take form along the way and its approval is achieved as work continues. The plan seeks to operate from within the processes and to guide them, and in doing so it has followed an original course of including in progress projects: through the Cities, with a territorial strategy that constructs physical relationships and significance between the places being redeveloped; through the Situations, with a thin thread of action and policies (integrated access and sustainability, ecological and environmental quality, social quality) in order to link public spaces that will be created through redevelopment with those that already exist; through the Ambits in order to indicate role, facilities, services and conditions of sustainability in operations that are regarded as decisive. Certain decisions have been inherited which have been developed over the last decade, for the creation of new industrial, business and management complexes, the decentralisation of various university buildings, the expansion of existing specialist structures. All of this highlights a phenomenon of general significance: the extreme complexity of the decisions which affect the present-day territorial area. This is due to competing considerations concerning numerous aspects and interests which often conflict with each other. Once the decision has been made, it also gives rise to long timescales in reutilising abandoned areas, both for the

'preparation' of the land as well as for mounting what is generally an integrated operation. In this context a new urban instrument, typically a structural plan, has the purpose of organising, highlighting, adjusting where at all possible, and integrating actions that are capable of changing the general framework and living conditions.

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