



Urbanistica n. 126

January-April 2005

Distribution by www.planum.net

Fausto Curti

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edited by Carlo Gasparrini

Carlo Gasparrini

Ariella Masbouni

Pier Carlo Palermo

Paolo Ceccarelli

Cesare Macchi Cassia

Paolo Avarello

Federico Oliva

Paolo Fareri

Carlo Alberto Barbieri

Patrizia Ingallina

Maurizio Marcelloni

Daniel Modigliani

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Roberto Bobbio

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In the last fifteen years European cities have shown their desire to play an increasingly central role, higher competitiveness in innovative economic sectors, ability to attract new activities and external investments, and growth in tourism and culture. The economic readjustment process has been long and complex, and for many years some cities have been hindered by a climate of conservatism and confusion. The defense of the status quo instead of looking for new opportunities was blocking the restructuring of production and delocalization under way. Today cities show great vitality, ability to implement revival strategies and experiment with new urban transformation policies (correction of imbalances, restoring areas in decay, urban and environmental quality promotion, services and employment opportunities), and are still Western society's preferential place for growth. Such unexpected social and economic regeneration and the reversal of the trend of the '80s have proved the most dismal prophecies wrong which associated, also in the collective imagination, the urban environment with a negative place doomed to decline, where contemporary society's supposedly irremediable problems (pollution, traffic, lack of security, deviancy) were concentrated. After a difficult transition period, Genoa has concentrated its attention, projects and resources on recovering the waterfront and revitalizing the historic center as a way to promote the whole urban system. These two adjoined areas, which up to fifteen years ago were very degraded, showed the signs of the

entire city's crisis, unable to create development and partially unaware of its potential in culture, tourism and leisure activities. All of Europe has many instances of cities where the center marks, also in terms of symbols and image to the outside, the turning point of this new 'urban renaissance'. The center is preeminently the city's showroom, for residents and visitors to enjoy, where projects and actions aimed at such areas' promotion determine the reversal of negative trends and are the most effective answer to the crisis. Faced with preconfigured decentralization and haphazard localizations due to the development of information and telecommunications technologies and to forms of immaterial production and communication, cities have become again the center of the most important political, managerial, strategic and financial functions. In the case of Genoa it has been observed that urban policies have focused too much on central areas and too little on peripheral ones. Similar examples can be found in Europe. In many cities, indeed, the majority of available financial resources for recovery have been invested in central areas representing a show-case, a space of self-representation. Also private entrepreneurs have invested in such areas from which they expect monetary returns, a better image and prestige. In this context of increasingly stiffer competition among cities to attract new prestigious functions, enterprises and tourists, large part of the contest is based on innovative and attractive capacity of the city centers. Public policies, from urban planning to cultural policies, are increasingly concentrating their efforts on places considered strategic in terms of attributed visibility or

potential to become a center, and there is no lack of urban transformation projects aimed at creating new urban centers along with traditional ones. Genoa appears to be an interesting test case to understand the scenarios of transformation in the near future of cities, and the role of public policies and resources (at local, national, European Union levels) in reversing the downward trend resulting from the changing economy. This city has strongly focused on recovery, restoration and maintenance of the public space enhancing a valuable environmental, building, historical and artistic heritage. Also the new image derives from strongly rooted elements of local identity. In this renewal process, also involving culture, no new big works have been necessary. No hard demolition or reconstruction, no need to plan new city parts or new buildings, the relationship between public and private operators has been balanced, public actions have allowed new initiatives to be launched, triggering new processes, giving opportunities and appropriately stimulating local subjects to invest. The European situation is different: the tendency of 'physical' transformation prevails with housing activities playing a major role (Manchester, Nottingham in England; Amsterdam, Maastricht, Almere in Holland; or Vienna). At times infrastructures and interconnection hubs of different means of transportation are an occasion to reorganize whole city sections and to create new centers capable of changing balances and hierarchies (e.g. Lille); at other times, new 'technology citadels', or for consumption, leisure, sports, and even culture rise over shabby areas (Bilbao, Saint Nazaire). Common or

standardized features can at times be recognized in the new operations; at other times the actions taken by European cities in response to city crises are varied, showing their riches and traditions, the different countries' cultural, institutional, civic and social conditions, creatively producing diversity and distinguishing features. Partnerships between public and private actors also look varied. Their common feature is their progressive opening up to the 'market' (through grants, mixed agencies with a specific mission, project financing, etc.) and a substantial reduction of procedural and intervention times as to long-unresolved issues (urban empty spaces in decay, waterfront no longer functional to traffic, etc.). Another common feature seems to be the search for new urban and environmental quality (city parks, green areas, pedestrian areas, new forms of transport and urban mobility, reduction of pollutants), a higher tendency to experimentation and works' sustainability, also stimulated by the European Union guidelines and support affecting new approaches, institutional changes, and innovative practices (Leipzig, Seville, Stockholm, Malmö). The bottom-up approach aimed at the involvement of local participants to make actions effective and permanent has been developed in many projects for big public residential housing estates, where physical upgrading has gone hand in hand with accompanying actions of the social and economic fabrics (Dunkerque, Zurigo, Budapest, Tallinn).