Plans for deciding: speed, goals and forms
Francesco Infussi

During the San Donato experience the work group participated in drafting many different projects. Whilst we conceived, promoted and extended some of these, for others we discussed and accompanied them. Others still we checked and controlled... there is no end to this list of roles which we covered in our capacity as consultants to the municipal authorities. On being questioned about a variety of purposes and situations, we even found ourselves analysing the same project from the standpoint of different roles.

For their part, the projects which we analysed belonged to a very large case study. Countless viewpoints can be mentioned to describe them effectively. In each case, we tackled a problem: how to choose from amongst the transformation intentions that emerged during the process, and how to communicate them to other parties, establishing a bridge between different moments of the planning. Last of all, an attempt at hybriding (languages, goals and forms) almost always featured in our work, in the attempt to create the approach (starting with the context, its restrictions and its opportunities) that was most suitable for each specific transformation. It endeavoured to avoid the set formulas and, as far as possible, cut away prescriptive excesses and authoritative statements, opting instead for reasoning and exemplification.

I will attempt to discuss this from various standpoints, only some of which are possible; yet to me they seem to be the ones that allow us to make an important statement about planning work, perhaps also about the role of the designer and the effectiveness of the designs. They cannot be placed in a hierarchical order, nor does one exclude the other. I feel that they describe the work we have done, even at the expense of a little simplification. They cover the 'speed', the 'purposes' of the planning activity and the 'forms' of the project.

Speed. During the planning process, time is qualitative, every period comprising it possesses specific aptitudes, which cannot always be repeated in the same episode. We recognise that there are many periods, linked to those involved, the institutional nature of some, the individual or collective nature of others. They are times that possess a 'different density', whilst at the same time forming part of a chronological order. When the process lasts a long time, as is the case in San Donato, different densities alternate with one another; time becomes populated in a discontinuous manner, and it becomes necessary to 'inhabit' it accordingly. As a result, the planning work must be carried out using a number of different speeds.

Speed 1. One must be ready to produce visions in advance, with rapid forays, which must also be very tangible, precise, and detailed.

Yet immediately after one must be willing to laically observe what has been imagined, and perhaps be prepared to discard the resultant product without hesitation. In these cases, the planning explorations are often used to stipulate the themes of the subject, and to translate the positions of those involved into spatial images. Other times, on the other hand, they can prove useful for triggering debate on new issues, avoiding making abstract statements whilst at the same time providing insight. Whilst they might prove arbitrary and one-sided, these still allow the process to approach a definition of the object in question.

Speed 2. It is necessary to 'keep up', whilst avoiding setting a speed which the process cannot metabolise. A rhythm that convinces people and enables them to share the goal can only be constructed in the course of time; it cannot be imposed and established one-sidedly, and amongst other things, does not have a foreseeable result. Under fortunate circumstances, contextual conditions permitting, if 'skilled' enough (in that order), it is even possible to speed up or slow down the process, thereby establishing a different rhythm. Often these changes in speed are triggered by 'lateral thinking' or the appearance of a metaphor or image which makes it possible to 'miss out' certain steps. Criticism is avoided and at times even a little confusion is generated, suggesting a new order for the issue and at times even a complete overhaul of the problem which makes it possible to see things in a different light. It should be noted that the designer is not necessarily responsible for this move, and the change in speed is not always intentional.

Speed 3. At times, on the other hand, it is necessary to hold back and forego, acknowledging how much and in what way the planning context is open to change. It is necessary to avoid stepping over boundaries that would inevitably result in a crisis in the process and perhaps even in its termination. During the planning process, reticence can be a virtue as important as precision for planning explorations. It might seem like a corollary to slowing things down; yet in actually fact it consists of a one-sided and therefore risky assessment of the inadmissibility of a given planning direction within that process. We will never have proof of the tangible productivity of that decision; for this reason it is a difficult step to take, and one that should only be taken if its consequences can be borne responsibly. The borderline which separates inadmissibility from admissibility (in a technical, non-legal sense) is a changing one and concerns the nature of each process; it can depend on the stakes involved as well as the willingness of those involved to allow their imaginations to undergo a partial overhaul.

Purposes. The operations which are carried out during a planning process are geared towards attaining different goals. By now it should be clear to everyone that planning is not always or exclusively geared towards carrying out whatever has been 'designed'. Much of what is produced is thrown away after being submitted for the scrutiny of those involved, much more besides is steered towards carrying out various kinds of roles within the interaction processes (with illustrations, demonstrations, trials etc). As a result, the variety of purposes linked to the various projects should be underscored in order to highlight the consequences that they have on forms and on speed.

Goal 1. As we are all well aware, the project is an instrument for familiarisation. It allows us to explore and investigate the configuration and dynamics of a situation. It can be used as a 'litmus test' which sends back information about the state of the locations, the stage reached by a given process, the role that the individuals concerned have taken on, and willingness to transform a problematic situation. Each planning hypothesis sketches out a map of those involved in terms of their difference, support and joint participation; often this is

less predictable than one would expect. More than with a survey carried out beforehand, it is by tentatively adopting a specific spatial configuration that the restrictions, resources and critical features of the place involved emerge. More than with a survey of interviews, it is by proposing a planning hypothesis that the (previously withheld) expectations and objections of those come to the fore.

Goal 2. When drafted properly, the planning documents are a formidable means of communication in a situation where knowledge forms of different kinds appear alongside one another, and constitute the language we need to use if we want to talk about the future. Statements describing the opportunities and conjuring up scenarios of transformation should always be placed alongside the potential spatial consequences of the words describing them. A planning exploration which attempts to translate the words of those involved into representations of the habitable space can play a very important role. It is a complex undertaking whose effectiveness is often linked to its promptness, and should be carried out in 'real time' during debates and workshops. On the other hand, it almost always requires extra time, so it is necessary to find formulas and elaborations that are capable of 'keeping up', or it becomes necessary to set up specific locations within which these contributions can be established in the planning forms that best suit the context.

Goal 3. The project provides a sizeable contribution to the attempt to outline the sense of a complex situation, constructing backgrounds for events (whether problems or resources) which, sometimes improperly, emerge during the planning process and which in this way can undergo a selection criteria that determine if they are included and how they are handled. In this case, the production of simulations, scenarios, visions and concepts aims to define interpretative instruments so that each can construct its own representation starting from a set of shared elements, whilst fitting its own hypotheses within a framework. In relation to the process phase, the outcomes can be provisional, encouraging further similar exercises for defining a shared scenario.

Forms. The planning activities outlined in the previous points, in relation to the various possible combinations between the different speeds and goals, lead to the production of specific documents which together constitute the different forms of the project.

During a planning process, many verbal and graphic statements are produced by the individuals involved. Once these have been selected, they form a specific project outline which gives meaning to the various dimensions of the transformation: from the spatial dimension to the interactive one, from the symbolic dimension to the process and even procedural dimension, assigning them a hierarchical position and importance.

The project can outline specific and precise configurations of space, or else it can 'limit itself' to a list of essential performances, taken from several planning explorations which are not noted. It can illustrate the most useful process for bringing about the preferred results, or indicate a performance level to be reached, leaving the route to be taken open. At times the project needs to share an image, at times it provides a detailed illustration of the construction of a problem. Other times it is a blueprint to be sent to the worksite, whilst still others it is an exploration that 'tempts' the context.

The distance which separates the forms from one another does not reside in the degree of their precision, and only in a few cases does the latter depend on the pre-established goal, for example a blue print to be sent to the worksite cannot do without certain relevant characteristics.

The difference, on the other hand, lies in the type of communication which the project aims to establish with other points of the planning. These can be inside and outside the process involved, and therefore involve other protagonists, deadlines, rhythms and processes taking place contemporarily or at a later date, at times even beforehand when it aims for a recursive effect. In other words, we might say that the form of the project involves (I would not say 'depends on') the type of interaction which is sought with the transformation in question.

I feel that in San Donato we have proposed a well-rounded and complex image of planning, without any limitations concerning the scale, territorial area, detail and goals. An activity in which the planning and designing of the space are fields which do not causally interdepend on one another (in whichever direction one wishes to recognise it), but creates a new object for surveying which belongs neither to one nor the other. I think that what results is an image of planning which takes on the task of constructing subjects interactively between different decision making and technical dimensions, expanding the field of the reasoning and, I hope, that of convincing those involved.