# Urbanistica n. 140
September-December 2009

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and english translation
of the articles

# The liveable city and urban design

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"One of the characteristics distinguishing modern man is that of having long exalted the condition of the nomad; man wanted to be 'free' and to conquer the world. Today, however, we begin to see that true liberty necessitates belonging, and that 'to inhabit' means to belong to a concrete place".

One can live well (or happily) in the urban space when at least four requisites are satisfied. The urban space should be welcoming, allowing us to enjoy, in tranquillity and security, the use of the urban space and the contact between our bodies and the positive qualities of the physical world: air, light, colour, shade and sunlight, materials and landscapes. The urban space should be civic, offering us access to amenities and services of adequate quality on both a local and an urban level. The urban space should be social, allowing us access to spaces in which the encounter with other inhabitants is both possible and pleasurable. The urban space should be aesthetically pleasing, wherever possible allowing us to enjoy spaces that also have qualities that render them beautiful.

Inhabiting, as a concept, implies the feeling of belonging to a 'concrete' place, identifiable as such, and recognisable as an area with a particular extension; a place, therefore, that is 'comprehensible' in its dimensions. By this we mean that it is measurable (on a human scale) at least in the mental image that its inhabitants have of it. This suggests the further requisite that our four initial conditions for good quality of life be met in the context of urban spaces on a small scale, measurable and enjoyable thanks also to their being walkable.

However, the contemporary city of the kind that has been built over the last fifty years is a long way from satisfying these needs.

What can be done to improve living conditions in the contemporary city and to arrive at the conditions for liveability in newly built urban areas?

One possible course of action is the following: rediscover, recover, regenerate and renew the concepts, methods and techniques of a discipline little-practised in Italy, urban design; a practice dealing specifically, and I would say uniquely, with the questions related to satisfying the requirements for liveability. The following is a brief outline of some of the questions relating to four aspects in particular: the working scale of urban design, its effects on urban form, methods of implementation, and themes and places relevant to urban design.

*The working scale*
Urban design's scale is that of the intermediate dimension between town planning and architecture, the local scale. The planning expertise particular to urban design is an expertise used and applied in specific contexts on a local scale, and is translated from the abstract to the concrete in specific projects adapted to the singularities of specific locations. However, in as far as it is a discipline, urban design needs to be founded, formed and communicable through concepts, arguments, methods and principles or criteria that are generalisable and generalised. When it addresses questions relating specifically to the concept of liveability, this collection of concepts, methods and principles can be defined as 'small scale urban design'. Urban design does only operate on the scale of the local dimension, but one of its functions is to address, combine, create synergy between and integrate the two different, hierarchical, levels of infrastructures, amenities and services: the local or urban level (or that of the parts of a city) and the metropolitan level. Defining urban design's field of operations as that of the local scale demands that a renewed attention is paid to the scale of the neighbourhood (or groups of neighbourhoods), a denomination to be taken as referring to what the inhabitants recognise or might recognise as the context of their everyday lives as well as one possible articulation of the big city.

*The effects on urban form*
Urban design as an activity produces projects, and the process of realising projects produces urban forms.
The question of what forms result from urban design is also to be considered and therefore also the question of beauty – a question which is certainly not a mere formality, but imperative if we are to satisfy one of the requisites for liveability.
Beauty is very hard to define, but in the case of urban beauty it is not necessary to refer solely to the sublime, exceptional beauty of art. An area of a city can be considered beautiful, can be thought lovely and pleasing, if it is 'good to be there', or perhaps if 'we feel good there', and such areas are those in which basic requirements for a good quality of life are satisfied, requirements which are by their very nature anthropological and existential, and which for this reason can be considered shared requirements, common to all. This means that, by reflecting on the ways in which the urban space is used by its inhabitants, by considering the inhabitants' wishes regarding the kinds of use and the spatial qualities that the urban space can offer, and by reflecting on the extremely ample and varied number of models and patterns of urban space that can be identified through a careful study of the long historical tradition of forms of urban space in the city, we can identify several categories of places that are commonly appreciated by inhabitants, and which, for this reason, could be called the 'common places' of the city. We can identify, in this way, seven types of 'common place' necessary for a good quality of life: places in which to sojourn, places in which to walk, natural places, historical places, panoramic places, places for amenities and rituals, and places dedicated to commerce and leisure. And the more these

categories are present simultaneously, the better a place will be loved.

Since the four requisites for liveability can be satisfied prevalently, if not exclusively, in the public space, and since the categories of 'common places' are nothing if not the synthesis of the places in which these requisites can be satisfied, it follows that the primary material to be used for beauty in the city is the public space, or, rather, a network of public spaces.

But – and this is one of the specific and defining aspects of urban design – if aesthetic quality depends on the quality of the network of public spaces, it follows that beauty in the city can be created through operations of urban design, in fact almost exclusively through operations of urban design, and in a way that is, at least in part, autonomous and independent of the aesthetic quality of the architecture of the buildings .

*Methods of implementation*
Here I will mention only some of the aspects that characterise urban design from the particular point of view of implementation: the role of the participation of inhabitants in the planning process, the need for design codes in a project, and the long-term relationship between urban design and the city plan.

The local scale on which urban design operates is the scale best suited to the participation of in-habitants in the planning process itself. This is because it is inhabitants who are most keenly aware of the problems of their own neighbourhood, and they are capable of proposing solutions. The combining of expert and local knowledge also produces the best possible correlation between project and context, even as far as aesthetic results are concerned.

Participatory processes cannot produce projects, but they can produce guidelines for an urban project. In order to be useful, participatory processes must be introduced at the beginning of the design process. The need for design codes in an urban project is related to the necessity, over the course of the development and realisation of the project, to control the level of its aesthetic quality. Depending on the urban objects to which they are applied, and according to the intended results, design codes can be fixed or flexible, they can be expressed through drawings, symbols and discussions, with great thoroughness or simply mentioned in passing.

One of the most important and unvarying elements is the structuring of the public space (the network of public spaces) as a primary system, capable of sustaining and preserving the functional organisation and the formal qualities of the intervention.

But codes are not enough in themselves. Because of the complexity of a project, the sheer number of figures who intervene, the length of time involved, the need for an adequate interpretation and uniform application of the codes, and for the necessary completion of the various stages of the project, a technician is needed, a project coordinator who will be responsible for, and who

will guarantee the application, over time, of the design codes or of their eventual modifications.

Another specific aspect characterising urban design is the relationship with the general town or city plan, by which we also mean the relationship between the general scale and the local scale. The urban design project can also serve as an instrument for the exploration, the verification and the definition of conditions affecting certain choices involved in planning, in that it can be used as a planning scenario.

*Relevant themes and places*
One further aspect characterising the discipline, and one which also opens the way to possible future innovations, concerns various themes and places that are of importance for the future of the city from the point of view of the objective of liveability. The themes are essentially two: the rediscovery of the public space and the exploration of a new relationship between the city and the countryside.

The rediscovery of the public space regards both the new parts of the city and the existing, consolidated city.
In the newly constructed city the requisites for a good quality of life can be best satisfied using 'judiciously' compact neighbourhood plans, vitalised and characterised by networks of public spaces.

Compact newly constructed neighbourhoods, functioning as local centres, might also be inserted into areas of diffused urbanisation, with the resultant effects of reorganisation and articulation into clearly identifiable zones around the new centres.In the existing, consolidated city, the requisites for liveability demand that we reclaim the notion of public space, with particular attention being paid to the quality of places in which to sojourn and places in which to walk.

As for the exploration of a new relationship between city and countryside: what will be the fate, over the next few decades, of those ill-defined areas, between city and countryside, in which urbanised areas (varied in their morphology, density and use) penetrate, touch, interweave and intersect with 'green' areas of various kinds (farmed, wild, fallow, inappropriately used, etc.)?

Urban design is the discipline most appropriate (through the use, among other things, of planning scenarios) for the study of the possible processes, methods and instruments for the improvement (which often means the consolidation) of the organisation of these areas.

What does the future hold? The contemporary city in its current state seems a long way from be-
coming a city that offers a truly good quality of life. Given the condition of modern urban culture, we are talking about the medium to long term. What can be done in the meantime? I believe that what is needed is information, education and wide-ranging debate, and that propaganda is needed in favour of the liveable city, making the question of liveability a question for everyone, because every one of us should have access to at least the basic conditions for a good quality of life in the city.

# Urban planning and quality

*Stefano Garano*

In recent years, the architectural 'star system' has increasingly often been entrusted with the task of translating the aspirations and unrealistic ambitions of urban policies into spatial terms, with results that do not always coincide with the objectives and, above all, are not always successful in their relationships with the context. The current discussion on the quality of the interventions is based on the connection between the construction of the plan and the architectural design so that, even in many recent experiences, there has been an attempt to redefine the relationship between the standard, which implicitly determines a physical form, and the results in spatial terms, which consist not only of the built volumes, but also of the empty spaces; we were not accustomed to paying sufficient attention to the latter, considering them merely as being created, or left, by the full volumes. These operations cannot be attributed to a single discipline, since the horizontal and vertical interconnections in the design and construction process require a broad range of interdisciplinarity. The most complex, and the one with the greatest margins of uncertainty, is without a doubt the transfer of every conceptual acquisition into the physicality of the city and its system of systems. Similarly, the problem involves didactics, the basic objective of which is to organize urban planning criteria and methods to be transmitted to future planners and designers, in order to overcome the discretion of the intuitive and gestural choices without constraining the design process within the limits of a rigid code.

The expression 'urban planning' resembles the 'urban project' that has pervaded the vocabulary of the town planners and administrators of european cities for over twenty years and, for this reason, even if expressed differently depending on the operations being referred to, sometimes proves to be extremely generic and not without semantic ambiguities. In fact, terms having different meanings are often used interchangeably, while others still appear to be indefinite, thus revealing the need for a more well-defined vocabulary than that with which the theories and techniques referring to this expression have been constructed, in an attempt to indicate the operations of a city's qualitative transformation. The most widespread meanings are procedural and methodological, verifying technical, economic, financial, and administrative feasibility.

The urban project is a path consistent with a transformation process that is expressed by structural invariants and strategic variables, depending on the general conditions that influence the path as it moves toward its objectives. It is a matter, moreover, of organizing the implementation of actions, in which the execution times are long and the operators themselves, identified at the beginning of the process, may change over time.

Urban design and architectural design intersect and are integrated within the urban project, in its polysemous meaning which goes beyond the procedural and methodological aspects, to build a valid interdisciplinary hinge. Architectural design offers its contribution throughout the entire execution process, from the start-up and planning of the action, sealing its various phases, up until the moment of the spatial definition.

Experiences have demonstrated that complex programmes require certain preconditions:

- a management structure for technical, economic, and administrative coordination a public-private partnership, like the French Sems, the English Udcs, Berlin's Iba or the Ruhr's Emscher Parck, etc.);

- a prestigious professional, recognized as such by the architects who design the individual buildings, who plans the structural lines of the overall project and is capable of coordinating the various design phases, up through the working drawings;

- a clear definition of the objectives and, consequently, of the mission of the management structure;

- a close cooperation of the management organization with the institutions of all levels, and especially with local authorities, within a framework of certainties, in which the roles are clearly defined, avoiding all overlapping of spheres of responsibility and action;

- a clear relationship with the territorial context in which the operation takes place, in particular with the infrastructure, both physical (road system and transports) and intangible, with the major territorial facilities (harbours, airports, truck terminals, rail-to-road interchange nodes), with the personal services system, and with the activity areas.

Lastly, it is indispensable that the political intention to carry forward the programme of actions be amply approved, without having to be subject to second thoughts every time the government changes.

# New stories in the contemporary city

*Carlo Gasparrini*

Cities not only call for urban planners and zoners to have the ability to connect strategies, regulations and projects together by applying intelligent and practical solutions but also do so by taking optimistic risks. A few pertinent strategic visions use skilful experience to negotiate the planning of the future; stringent but agile rules stimulate rather than impede transformations; a wide-ranging multiplicity of projects, supported by these rules, that consciously interpret the dense fabric of these visions so that they take shape and develop form with the passage of time.

Rhetoric and practice oscillate between a variety of extreme positions. On the one hand, desperately isolated muscular architectural projects assert themselves in the surrounding modernity to produce icons in the urban landscape designed by self-referential designer architects, a type of structure that has never been built in Italian cities. On the other hand, the snobbish cultural veto on principle against the tram in historic cities or the installation of high tech elevators close to monuments. In addition to this, there are discussions on the legitimacy of contemporary architecture in our historic city centers and the opportunity to construct dangerously tall buildings presents itself in the suburbs that are sometimes paradoxical. Increasingly less is spoken of planning the contemporary city, of urban landscape in evolution, of the physical and symbolic relationships between spaces and their new users, of the need for reasoning in urban design and composition not to mention individual beautiful objects, or quantitative additions that are just as insignificant as they are confident.

Beijing, New York, Bilbao, Barcelona, and Milan are just some of the paradigmatic cases in the problematic search for an attention grabbing space in the city, and in the media too.

Notwithstanding the fact that several journalists have attempted to convince us that the spectacular Oma skyscraper for the Central chinese television in Beijing may be thought of as being 'the Arc de Triumphe of the new metropolis', as with other similar recently built objects the distance of this one from the city remains unbridgeable. Their solipsistic gigantism does not build new syntaxes, nor measure or articulate distances, nor reinforce crucial nodes in the urban design, and they do not define spaces people can take possession of. The eulogistic exaltation of Beijing's new urban monumentality as new architectural symbols has also been accompanied by the consecration of Herzog and De Meuron's olympic stadium. However, it is strange that in this case the same journalists should have been sodisinterested in the fact that the stadium might be an important architectural reference of an north-south urban axis that designs the whole Olympic district culminating in almost 700 hectares of Forest park, the largest park in the city. And so we have neglected to learn that this gigantic operation is measured by an idealistic extension of the historic north-south axis that runs through the 'Forbidden city', therefore being measured by one of the country's major settlements, chinese culture's most important symbol and most enchanting place.

The city of New York also makes headlines for us europeans when it abandons the ground for aesthetic competition between new sky-scrapers. And yet the destruction of the Twin towers is not only remembered for the dramatic reason that we became adjusted to in 2001. Those who have followed events behind the traditional stories of the spectacular catastrophe, of the nameless victims, of the presidential rhetoric and so on, know that New York has changed profoundly in the way it collective shares its urban choices. The debate on the methods of reconstruction, the competition to plan Ground Zero, the definition of the collectively discussed 'Principles' represent a legacy of impressive ideas and practices. Since 2001 New York has demonstrated how the whole of Lower Manhattan can be regenerated by confirming the need for a shared relationship and by working on a richer tapestry that is also connected to tourism, culture, art, and leisure, on a new system of urban relationships, on the principles of sustainability that must guide urban redesign. The results are therefore not only measured by or compared to the quality of the new skyscrapers but above all to the sense and size of other indirectly visible operations in the context, such as the reconquest of the relationship with the Hudson river for which the East river Waterfront park is the most significant example.

On the other hand, Frank Gehry's project for the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao some years ago surely represented the paradigm of architecture's ability to dominate and negate the communicative circuits relating to knowledge of the complex wider processes of urban transformation in which the job takes shape and matures. In this case the city council was grappling with a river separated from the city because a pervasive complex of abandoned industrial areas had suffocated it. It has not been a straghtforward sequential journey to move from the strategic plan to the architectural project and then to the 'new cathedral' i.e. a symbol of this renaissance. Nevertheless, the fertile relationship developed between a comprehensive town development plan for the city and the individual quality operations was certainly a determining factor in the 'Bilbao effect'. While the planned urban motorway along the Ria was not built for the original reasons, it nevertheless represented a potent instrument of urban recomposition between the two banks of the river and formed part of the reconfiguration of the infrastructure network by intercepting the new centrality.

Operation Forum esplanade in Barcelona attempted to rethink the coastal line's arrival at Diagonal mar in a difficult space in which to get the tremendous technological infrastructure and the new exhibition and conference spaces to live together, including vertically. While

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recognizing its great importance for the consolidation of the waterfront, the sensation is one of a theme park, dispensing a great urban planning tradition able to express an urbanism and an architecture on behalf of the city's citizen. The aim of all this was to provide space for a culture of transformation 'through individual building', the subject of separate and very excessive overdesign that ends up being insignificant precisely because of this design style. However, the interesting and plural experimentation in the open space on the waterfront allows a view of urban recomposition to be glimpsed.

It is difficult to speak of our Italian cities in this framework. Operation 'Citylife' to redevelop the old fiera in Milan seems to have even more exasperating characteristics of design composed of fences and sheet glass and this in spite of the flag-waving idea of a presumed 'hyperplace' placing its trust in the strength of imagining the reality of towers 'from S. Gimignano to New York'. In contrast to what was proposed in Renzo Piano's unfairly rejected plan, the winning tender's project completely lacked good practice in urban design to guide the transformation. In contrast to Barcelona, it has been some time since the city has discussed and internalized ideas of the city and new urban relationships or completing experimental planning projects on schedule. This makes it much more difficult for good interaction to take place between the indisputable requirement for urban visions and strategies and the quality of the individual wedge-like tower blocks, now burdened by the oversized appearance of real estate and developed in the absence of a comprehensive view of planning for the city.

Consequently, in contrast to the past, our way of interpreting the contemporary city needs to be renewed through richer closer disciplinary convergence by, for example, observing the areas of superimposition and contamination working together with other adjacent disciplines with great interest and with unorthodox lines of research that can bring life-blood back into traditional urban planning and zoning: from landscape architecture to landscape ecology and several sectors of the earth sciences as well as infrastructure planning, all capable of enriching the tired discussion of the urban development plan. That is to say, by taking a comprehensive view of research into urban landscape transformations induced by infrastructural, environmental, and energy networks that have developed very fertile planning and interpretative pathways. This 'landscape urbanism' works along the most affected areas of contact and osmosis in the new multidisciplinary concept of urban design.

# Principles of urban design

*Antonio Pietro Latini*

After considering the most recent vicissitudes of the disciplinary debate on urbanism in Italy, one may have the impression of a persistent condition of dissociation. In fact, the discourse within urbanism seems substantially unbalanced if one looks at its contributions to the construction of the disciplinary system. On one hand, at least since the first half of the '90s, the debate on the 'process' aspects has dealt with all areas and products of urbanism: those related to the region and to the different thematic sectors as well as those concerning comprehensive, strategic, mostly structural plans and those regarding the implementation phases or, rather, the local area plans-programmes, that is general and local plans which have been 'ontologically' interrelated, more than ever.

On the other hand, however, for what the 'substantive' aspects are concerned, the élite has fostered the debate, expressed positions and indicated judgement criteria almost exclusively regarding regional and comprehensive planning. Hardly ever, the disciplinary system of urbanism has felt the need to face the merit of the expected or achieved results at the local area level: e. g., about the actual products of the various kinds of regeneration programmes financed since the early '90s. Most times, the mere feasibility seemed to be the only relevant goal. Nevertheless, if one looks at the situation abroad, one can find a significant debate on values to be adopted and on objectives to tend to, as well as considerable scientific production and institutional achievements. This is the result of many decades of a rich disciplinary building, which the italian culture has largely contributed to with the role of a protagonist until at least the early '70s.

In today's Italy, it is quite surprising the general lack of interest about not only acquiring or, perhaps, defending the rationales of the matter in the relevant occasions of public policy or claiming their specificity in the professional and/or academic fields but even disproving its components, challenging the logic tenure of its scientific structure, repairing those aspects that show a need of updating.

*Seven principles*
During the last six or seven decades, urban design has produced and refined a largely shared 'axiol-

ogical system'. Its values were assumed from within the specific disciplinary evolution, most time as an opposition to the contemporary state of the art, or from other sciences such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology. They appeared sometimes on a piecemeal base, some other in subsystems and later on consolidated to become a set of elements with significant mutual relations. Here they are mentioned as seven of them, but it is un-

derstood that they could be grouped or divided in other fashion.

1. Since the early post-Ww2 years the awareness had matured that "the life of urban man was becoming more anonymous and mobile; or in architectural terms there was an inexorable movement from symbolically rich systems to impoverished ones, from cultural roles to functional ones, or just simply from place to space" (Rosenberg). This had led many designers to "attempt to re-establish the basis for urban identity: "The feeling that you are somebody living somewhere", as Peter Smithson phrased it. The contemporary theoretical achievements of philosophers such as Heidegger reinforced the role of place, and therefore, simplifying, relevant public realm, in the centre of the disciplinary system of designers.

2. Designing by places, that is by meaningful urban elements, loaded with identity, leads, by analogy, to the search for awareness in their composition. Their voluntary, 'non-accidental' syntaxes are first of all a prerequisite to avoid disorienting (Lynch) and inhospitable (Mitscherlich) settlements. It is not at all an issue of style, though, since both prevalent space, and prevalent volume, systems may work.

Rather, it is a question of ability to produce a deliberate and recognizable 'figura'.

3. Choosing the syntax of elements as a central focus of urban quality assigns a key role to the context, which adopts multiple declinations. It means attention to the congruence of the project with its natural and social environment; to the continuity and integration with the surroundings, in terms of relation, not necessarily replication, of the settlement patterns; to the understanding of the conventions of cultural geography and balanced insertion in the locale; to the 'concinnitas', that is the harmony with the immediate morphological frame. In other terms 'context' means awareness of the fact that each piece of the human environment is an element per se as well as a part of a superior entity: a 'twinphenomenon', as Aldo van Eyck would name it.

4. The italian culture of design has contributed highly to the knowledge of the rules of association among the different components of the urban landscape. The relationship between urban morphology and building typology, the correspondence between building types and density and, more simply, the dialectics among monuments and urban fabric are the bases for the virtuous composition of the elements of the urban scene and essential references for a structured interplay among their different rôles.

5. The question of number in urbanism has been crucial for long and for various circumstances in the disciplinary debate. It implies the search and, therefore, the possibility to assess the suitable balance between unity and multiplicity. It is a controversial issue because it projects from philosophy to economics and governance.

Many are the positions on this topic. Some emphasize the goal of stylistic coherence and therefore back architectural designs of entire neighbourhoods entrusted to one archistar or to the technical office of one developer only. When one looks at the results of this attitude, though, especially the most recent ones, they are rather upsetting, boring or arrogant.

Decades of urban design have shown the aesthetic quality of variety in a city where the urbs is the reflection of the civitas: 'pro hominum varietate' to phrase it after Alberti, but also its ability to create richness, allow for a gradual implementation and foster the participation of a larger set of actors.

6. The ideal expressed by Leibniz: 'diversitas indentitate compensata' confides the equilibrium between variety and coherence to the authority of a head group or to the ruling power of a sketch. More frequently, in the best practices, it relies upon an essential tool: a system of rules, codes or guidelines. They allow for designing cities without designing buildings, as Barnett has said, and control the overall quality of the whole.

But they find their relevance also in the economic realm, because they guarantee investments from future uncertainties, and in the methodological one, because they force designers to clarify what is key in their schemes and what is unessential.

7. Its anthropocentric attitude is one of the distinctive characters of urban design and one of the qualities that differentiates it from building design the way architecture has been envisioned by the disciplinary discourse in the last decades. So, the spaces of the city, new and regenerated districts are, in fact, expression of the community and are supposed to be designed to the measure of man. Cities are articulated in parts each with its own characters of a city, functional and formal. They are given an image and become themselves recognizable places.

*Merit in urban design is a question of method*
In Italy there is little debate on the merit in urban design and there are authoritative members of the élite who sustain that this is a matter for 'architects'. This is probably one of the reasons why there is very little urban design in the many regeneration programmes in this country which seem rather either zoning exercises or oversized megastructures.

How is it possible to channel the resurgent interest in urban design to make sure it has an actual positive effect on our urban environment? It seems that merit is a question of method.

The italian debate on urbanism in the last ten to fifteen years resembles the discussion shown in the english Pag report of 1965. Similar is the description of the situation and similar are the measures suggested such as the division in 'structure' and 'local' plans. Similar are the factors that are considered the cause of the crisis, too. Except for one: the lack of instruments that contribute to the quality of urban design and of the environment, a condition that hardly anyone seems to care about. The italian effort towards quality seems to be centred in a generic containment of land consumption and in the ut-

ter application of fashionable architectural competitions, despite their disappointing results, so far. The operational plan, the way it is intended and has been used to this point seems rather to function merely as a way to withhold and channel development rights and indirectly foster inflation.

Is out there anybody willing to make an effort towards more responsibility in urban development: e. g. guidelines for public buildings and processes for urban projects that are transparent, incremental and possibly participated?

# Beyond the 'progetto urbano'?

*Mosè Ricci*

There is a question that bothers me reading this new book by Paolo Colarossi e Antonio Latini. The urban situation and the same idea of the city are deeply changed in Europe in the last 30 years. Also the city forms are completely different… Does the progetto urbano theory match these changes?

The geographer Franco Farinelli that always assumes a stimulating point of view about things, claims that from the moment in which computers have started to dialogue among themselves, the territory,

as a category of description of the phenomena in the space, is no longer necessary. In july of 1967, the day men landed on the moon, while everybody watched the sky, the most important thing was happening on earth where two computers were starting to communicate and share information between Cape Canaveral and San Francisco. From that day on our life changed. With the development by means of instant artificial adjacency and intangible networks that bring different realities in immediate communication, or create new realities, the virtual world has conditioned our way of living, working and economizing.

Cities tend to lose precise physical connotation and constantly become fields of relation. Perhaps we do not have the need of the territory to move and communicate, as Franco Farinelli states, but we always have the need for more landscapes and places to live and acknowledge. All of this significantly changes our way of thinking of the future and its forms. Urban and architectural culture struggles to accomplish these concepts. It often assumes anachronistic and elitist positions. Progressively losing the contact with the real processes of change, it risks becoming unessential.

Two simple examples: the first one regards the mania of the house. In the last few years every one of us has wanted to buy a house. We have sought to reassure our future investing money in real estate because there was a wide market, because it was the safest way to invest money, because the shares or government bonds and all other forms of bank investment in some way had failed. In 2008 the total volume of construction of our country was calculated, over 300 million cubic meters. It is the ninth consecutive year that this amount has exceeded and is predicted to continue in the coming year despite the crisis.

We are now accustomed to watching the satellite images of Italy at night and recognizing the infinite cities that progressively invade the geography of our local landscapes and tend to approve this nature. But what is happening at a closer scale? Or in other words, what levels of architectural and urban quality know how to convey the processes of construction development that are predominantly assailing the italian cities?

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In Rome we have disputed about Richard Mayer's project for the Ara pacis or the one by Calatrava for the second university, but nobody has spoken enough about the 80 million cubic meters spread by the new regulating plan on the città eterna. It has not been discussed, neither much is known about the advancement of the residences, the parco Leonardo model. As if very few architecture of the star system could or should compensate the enormous weight of the city without author, that in the most extreme cases is called by the christian name of its constructor.

I want to say that this incredible construction boom that deeply marks our territory and our landscape individuated by numbers, was in fact hidden by means of communication. And the italian culture of the project has almost become uninterested of what was happening in the country and in our society.

In the last ten years, in Italy, the biggest planned construction massacre ever made was committed, surprisingly nobody has talked in terms of offense to the landscape heritage, environmental risks and the quality of transformations. We have not known how to object. We have done and looked elsewhere. But when, this is the second example, the new 'house plan' of Berlusconi's government was announced with emphasis on the measures that regard the substantial elimination of the building permit and the partial exemption of the urban constraints, shields have been immediately lifted in the defense of the landscape and the territory. With a significant generational gap. Gregotti, Aulenti, Fuksas, Gabrielli and many others have made fire and flames (appeals, articles, references, etc.), while younger intellectuals and planners like Boeri, Ciorra, Garofalo, etc., have assumed more possible and opened positions.

We are all aware with great alarm of the risks that the new regimen involves, but surely, as we have seen, we do not have a virtuous system to protect. Fortunately the crisis is restraining the avidity of the construction industry (40% of new unsold constructions in 2008) and with few money in circulation less will be accomplished as opposed to the previous years.

The danger of our landscape will not be attenuated by the new regimen. The so-called house plan must be governed. To do so, it is necessary to associate simple, quick and clear planning devices (guidelines, guide projects, diagrams, concept design studies, etc.). The regional devices of execution will have to be considered along with the architects and urban designers. It should have been done like this before.

We must swim in the tide of changes, as Manuel Gausa writes in the first issue of Monograph, and push it towards new targets of quality. To confront these topics and issues stands nothing but architecture and the city. These are the things that we have to deal with through projects. Kyoto, the Nobel Peace prize to Al Gore, global warming, CO2 emissions, oil prices, renewable energy, protection of the landscape values, large social migrations, racial and religious integration, issues of the eco-

nomic crisis and security that overwhelm local societies. The whole world worries and works on these urgencies. Environment and society are the major philosophical and political paradigms of this new millenium. Like economic disciplines, architectural disciplines cannot remain untouched or pretend that these problems do not overwhelm it forcing them to make profound changes. These transformations urge us to design projects deeply tied to the context. That simultaneously involve different scales of intervention, Capable of change over time; that can be modified and personalized from those who experience it; that contribute in some way to fight the environmental emergency. Projects that ultimately render the changes sustainable both by the social point of view and by the economic, landscape and environmental one.

This is the ecologic role of those who explore and shape the future. This is the possible role of urbanism and architecture against crisis. Does the aesthetical progetto urbano strategies match these challenges yet? Do we really need to go back to this theoretical frame to meet the sense of contemporary age? Probably yes. In Multiple City, a recent exhibition about urban theories and experiences in the last century very well displayed in Munich at the end of 2008 by Sophie Wolfrum, the curator, Italy is present only in the Progetto urbano section with the studies by Aldo Rossi, Gianfranco Caniggia and Saverio Muratori. The abandon of the progetto urbano scientific tradition did not produce further significant innovations in the Italian urban studies culture.

The first big credit of the Colarossi and Latini book is to lead us back to think about this and to study again the progetto urbano techniques and meanings.

# Urban design, form and architecture

*Elio Piroddi*

I am grateful to Mosè Ricci for having recognized the traces of a school in the work dealt with by Colarossi and Latini. This means that our group is agreed first and foremost on a crucial point: the utility and the necessity of urban design as a morphological discipline between planning and architectural projects.
Colarossi is right when he states that its physiological dimension, so to speak, is intermediate, that its privileged space is the district public space. But I wonder whether a dimension of this sort does not assume a somewhat restricted visual angle.

*The domain of urban design*
Broadening the visual angle means simply identifying urban design in morphology, that is in questions of form. In the twofold aspect of overall vision and of specific projects. Starting from the fact that, when one wishes to transform, translate, materialize a programming act into concrete form it is necessary to have a technician of form, that is, a morphologist. Which is tantamount to saying, after Morris, an architect.
In reality it often happens that problems of form occur only as from a certain moment in the process, leaving urban design to come at a later stage. It seems to me that this attitude leads to a confusion, to a limited conception of the role of urban design. I am convinced that if a problem of form is put, this cannot be restricted or reduced to a given dimension, below a certain critical threshold (for example, the 'district'). Whether it concerns the project of a landscape, of a park, of a garden, of a city, of a district, of a road, or of a territory, however vast it might be, we are always in the field of urban design. From the Grand Axe de la Défense to Renzo Piano's Vulcano Buono (Good Volcano) and to Sarkozy's recent consultation on Grand Paris, which made the Journal of architecture write about a 'return to urban morphology'.
That the basic nucleus of urban design is of morphological type, i.e. substantially of architectural type, does not have just a theoretical value but also great practical value, for example in teaching. Whereas instead many town planners (perhaps the majority) have abandoned the questions of the form and the aesthetics of the city and therefore of architecture.
Hence Garano is right when he states that 'the town-planning project is inseparable from the architectural project'.

*Is there any sense in still speaking of urban design (?)*
I put in brackets the question mark that Mosè Ricci puts explicitly. I put it in brackets because I think that it should be removed.
Ricci's question rests, in reality, on the observation of a series of metamorphoses of the city (the so-called ex-

plosion of the city, the apparent prevalence of virtual spaces), of defeats suffered by urban design (crushed by the great media event) and of disasters (the boom of uncontrolled building, the widespread poor quality).
It is difficult to speak of the city in general terms; yet, at certain latitudes, there are cities that act as samples. It seems to me that Rome is one of these. In Rome there is truly everything: well-being and degradation, quality and sloppiness do not occupy different, separate areas (East End-West End style). As in a sort of 'action urbanism', we find mingled, with a certain almost light-hearted indifference, luxury districts and 'spontaneous' housing estates, wealthy houses and poor houses, suburbs, garden villages, the gigantic volumes of huge retail outlets, and large office, hotel, sports and technological centres; objects scattered over a still half-empty territory, held together by a transport, mostly road, network always on the verge of collapse.
A sort of moth-eaten patchwork in which urban design is an élite exercise.
This panorama would appear to bear out the perplexities of Mosè Ricci. Instead, in many, not uncommon cases urban design can still be carried out and in fact is carried out. I am not speaking of China or the United States, grandiose workshops of urban design, where not so much was ever built before as since 11 september. I would just recall that, in the due proportions, Europe is not lagging behind: in Berlin, from the Iba (the first international relaunching of the 'fabric' form) to the critical reconstruction of Stimmann, in Hamburg, Hafen City, '97-2017; to Stockholm, Hammarby Sjöstad, 1990/2010;
to Paris, Rive Gauche, 1991/2008 and to Amsterdam, the Almere new city. Also in Italy urban design is exercised (Turin, Naples, Milan, Rome) whatever the quality might be. But the necessary condition for good urban design to be carried out is a city administration with clear ideas and the force to put them into effect, which in fashionable jargon is known as efficient governance.
Having stated the above, I find an optimistic or pessimistic attitude, or even a catastrophic one, out of place. You cannot regret or dream about a city that doesn't exist or which no longer exists. If there are maladies, the town planners-architects (as doctors for the living) have to treat them or at least report them and try to improve the situation. Aware that the hierarchy of responsibilities on the subject of urban quality is highly stratified, and the urban project sometimes intervenes when these have already been imposed by other operators. And it is this, among other things, that induces me to propose a broader horizon for urban design.

*Principles, quality and rules*
If urban design operated, together with planning, from the large dimension; if a number of simple general criteria guided the projects for new settlements (addition, complexity, continuity, diachrony) many mistakes and incongruences would be avoided.
Colarossi and Latini quite rightly put the question of pu-

blic space at the centre of the urban project. Very well. But what today are the ingredients of public space? No longer just the piazza, the local district road, or the garden, but the major mobility networks, the car parks, the open spaces, the spaces inside the big urban facilities, spaces for temporary or periodic use, for transit, for high-speed crossings, the spaces of the main green network (think of the territory of Rome).

Gasparrini's observations seem to me to tend rightly to expand in these directions the horizon of ur-

ban design, with all the other subjects that this involves, from landscape architecture to landscape ecology, to certain sectors of the earth sciences and to the design of infrastructures.

Even exceptional architectural events should be filtered at the outset by a morphological programme that authoritatively represents collective demand. Gasparrini, for instance, correctly observes that the location and therefore the symbolical significance assumed by the Beijing Olympic stadium (the 'Nest') was not a casual, self-referential event but the programmed epilogue of a new urban axis, 'the ideal extension of the historic north-south route'.

But, in general, it is the facilities of public interest (libraries, museums, theatres, cultural research and training centres, buildings for the public administration and for worship) that ought to provide the nervous system for and, in some way, give a heart to the districts and magnetize the key central offices, whose sole reason for being called this is that they are the headquarters of those specific facilities and otherwise of Auchan, Ikea and Leroy Merlin.

The urban comprehensive Plan (Piano regolatore generale), for its part, sets only quantitative constraints and ones of intended use. Nothing or hardly anything about the morphology; for example about the 'grain', that is about the maximum and minimum dimensions of the buildings and about the tissue of the fabric: yet an absolutely decisive feature for purposes of the form. The whole distribution of the heights, in a territory that is still fairly empty such as that of Rome, appears foolhardy: big isolated volumes, districts of small one-family houses in contact with intensive settlements, buildings identical to those of the compact city in the middle of the countryside.

One fails to see why a comprehensive Plan should not set out general rules that stem from an equally in-depth reflection on the morphological features of the urban territory as that on functional organization. Grain, fabric form or open form, materials, treatment of the marginal areas, of the axes providing the structures, of the central places and of the green network, etc., form (ought to form) what I refer to as morphological zoning. Which should be associated with and in some cases replace functional zoning.

With regard to the quality of the single projects ('the small dimension') and the rules, I have some reservations about putting overmuch faith in the rules, if under-

stood essentially as meta-design rules.

'Designing cities without designing buildings' (Latini after Barnett) works in cases in which an urban project defined on a modular basis is combined with a high property value of the sites and hence with a demand of very high standard (e.g.: the centre of Chicago, Manhattan, Rive Gauche, Borneo Insel at Amsterdam, perhaps La Spina of Turin). That is, in exceptional cases.

In the majority of cases guidelines are necessary but not sufficient to guarantee the quality of the final product. Lacking an interactive coordination the rules that the project had given have not been decisive in terms of the quality of architecture. This derives, very clearly, from the by now chronic incapacity to speak a common language. But also from the tremendous differences of level that exist in the professional class.

So Colarossi is right when he states that an urban project cannot be abandoned to those executing it without the designer continuing to coordinate it also in the construction phase. Or, when the project is very complex, that there should be an efficient public management to accompany construction to the very end.

*Beauty*
The problem of rules involves the beauty of the city.
Art in general does not necessarily generate beauty. That is not its mission. But we, architects and town planners, cannot remove the problem of beauty. Other artists can do this, having recourse to that 'aesthetics of the ugly' which is not an invention of today. But the city cannot be taken out of its context. Making a city beautiful is the intrinsic aim, implicit in urban design, not fungible with the 'ugliness' of other artistic practices.

An ugly city cannot be a work of art as an installation or simply Duchamp's 'Fountain' (urinal) can be. A city cannot be 'horrible'. It cannot transmit a feeling of discomfort.

Except that the objective of the Bauhaus, giving quality to quantity in architecture, has failed. The messages received have not fertilized mass production. The overall quality of the districts designed in the past century depends not so much on the excellence of their urban design as on the consonance of a choral discourse, of a 'competence to build' (Choay); in short on a culture. When too many explicit rules are needed, it means that there are few agreed, shared rules. It was perhaps for this reason that Gillo Dorfles wrote 'It is best not to speak about beauty'. Something about which, in spite of everything, some of us cannot agree.