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**Received books**

**Seven important questions and some implied considerations**  
Nicolò Savarese

For many years until today, the urban planning seems to have been bewildered by the operational evidence that every day the 'field' imposes on it. To get around this situation with a certain lucidity, we should identify the problems that arise and then try to examine them more in depth in order to draw indications, both on a theoretical and on a practical level. In order to contribute and stimulate such debate, I will attempt to focus on seven questions that in my opinion are relevant to the implications and to the contradictions that may arise.

**1. The administrative scale of the territorial governance**

The local autonomy act (142/90) put a sharp end to an ongoing debate and experimentation over optimal dimension for an intermediate territorial level of governance, between Regions and Municipalities. Because of institutional and administrative properties, the role of the Provinces in the overall reform for the local autonomy was redefined, even though in many regions, especially in issues having to do with territorial planning, this act still hasn't been enforced. Nevertheless, I believe that this probably is not the cause, but rather one of the symptoms of problems at hand, that haven't been resolved, and that also show itself in other instances and forms. The Italian CSF Objective 1, 2000-2006, has in fact, in 'Integrated Territorial Projects' singled out the fundamental instrument in order to carry out the strategy for the development of Southern Italy. Nevertheless, because of the diffusion of the ITPs, for the years to come, the

issue of a more careful definition of the territorial and administrative scale of the local development will surely be in the center of southern regions attention. One could raise a question about the distinction between the economic programming and territorial planning; but the problem is not posed by the terms of territorial projection of a socio-economic program, because in an integrated project, these two dimensions are inseparable. Rather the problem regards subjects that are responsible for investment management, and fixed or variable geometry of the territorial intervention areas.

**2. The social partnership in the planning**

The problems that arise from local development show another important aspect: the agreement over the political direction on the decision-making and management level. In fact, the issues in the local development and integrated planning, shift the center of gravity in the relationship between public administration and local community, towards the bottom. The regional legislations, give way to partnership-based decision-making process, during preliminary phases of urbanistic instrument formation. But, from this point of view, the mechanisms of citizen feedback, followed by the administrations counterdeduction, foreseen by the urban planning act (1150/42), remain much more acute in the protection of rights of citizens. In fact the main problem lies in the management of plans, which are subject to cross-pressure from interests and compromises. The problem is bound to persist until the plan management is not confronted and doesn't interact with the strategy. In a democracy based on efficient and widespread

information, the management of the plan should become permeable in respect to participative processes. The absence or scarcity of the above-mentioned permeability means that, most times, the incapacity to recognize and employ the conflicts as an intrinsic of every democratic process of planning. On the other hand, the examples from the Local Agenda 21, of CIP Urban or of *Contratti di quartiere*, constitute a collection of best practices in the field of social conflicts, which allows us to perceive, without any suspicion, different ways to execute the plan.

**3. The coordination of spatial implications of non-urban policies**

The INU National Convention on sectorial planning (Florence 2001), has formally taken note of the existence of non-urbanistic policies that influence the state of the territory through control of land-use and of some urbanistic parameters. Certain urban-planning paradoxes, that arise in that way, teach us that it is not sufficient, to only take action in various possible sectorial dimensions of planning, but that it is absolutely necessary to bring all of them together in a unique physical space, that will still be able to be defined as urban or territorial, if only the urban-planners would not renounce to claim their specificity. We should also keep in mind that, besides the functional or disciplinary attributions of professional responsibilities, we are dealing with rights of any citizen to a clear definition of rules and regulations that preside over the transformation process of a territory.

**4. The plans and infrastructural systems**

The planning of transport systems and related infrastructures has always had an important place in

civil engineering, but its true influence on urban planning is a fairly recent occurrence. A complex urban system can be represented through a nodal-based and a grid model. The central components of this model are the functional localizations and the space-time relations between them. In consequence, an urban plan that doesn't include a traffic and mobility plan is a non-plan. Nonetheless the above mentioned evidence, the birth of a new kind of sectorial planning (from the traffic plans to the current mobility plans) has not really occurred following the development of a new discipline, but rather as a consequence of incapacity of urban planners to update its technical and methodological instrumentation. Since some time we are assisting the emergence of the information society, with its revolutionary systems of communication. It has already began to create significant impacts on relations between people, social groups, businesses, and therefore on the structure of future cities and their hinterlands. Also in this case, reflecting on the impacts and implications that this change should have on their field, the response of the urban planners, has so far been scarce and unsatisfactory.

**5. Financial sustainability and feasibility**

The financial sustainability of Italian urban planning has always been, and still remains, one of its major weakness. Since 1982, with the creation of the FIO, the territorial investments have always progressively strayed away from the ordinary/extraordinary scheme, to become more and more oriented towards a competition and prize based system. On the other hand, the EC Structural Funds in majority operate

with this logic, tying the rules for national investments to an always-growing competitiveness. In these conditions, the objectives and strategic priorities of the local administrations are changing radically and fast. What is taking place is a right market strategy, i.e. the understanding of potential competitors, and the capacity to 'sell' one's territory on the market. In other words, the urban and territorial marketing is bound to become a key partner of the planning. Furthermore, it's important to be able to recognize and take advantage of public financing programs, which means having a major availability and flexibility in the land use. In all this, the traditional urban planning risks of becoming the only true dependent variable. The problem of financial sustainability of the plans and projects, if put in conventional terms, can not be resolved, and on the other hand a plan/project that is economically unfeasible, would be unacceptable. Rather than avoid the problem, it would be more useful to discuss more in depth the concept of feasibility itself, and all the different levels on which it is laid out: on a strategic and operational level, possibly considering also completely giving up the idea of the causal and linear relationship between the plan and the projects.

## 6. Sustainability of the plans and project evaluation

In July of 2004, the Directive 2001/42/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council came into effect (on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment). In reality, the Habitat Directive had already introduced the concept of evaluation for all the interventions with potentially negative impact on the environment and

species present in sites of Community importance of the European network Natura 2000. In Italy, this network currently covers 17% of the national territory and could quickly grow to 25%, after management plans have been approved. Given the reduced size of sites, it's easy to understand that a great variety of different kinds of interventions, and almost the entire national territory, will have to become subject to environmental evaluation. Although the network doesn't interfere with the systems of environmental protection of the member states, the approach for the Area Plans (as foreseen by the environment act no. 394/91) and the approach for the Management Plans (foreseen by the Habitat Directive), differ in a substantial manner. The Plans for the Natural Protected Areas in all effect are urbanistic plans and not only sectorial plans. The Management Plans, on the other hand, establish only the criteria for protection. It's important to keep in mind that the sites of Community importance are functional for specific habitats and specific species, that the management plans must maintain in a favourable conservation status. The concept of standard is replaced by performance. In effect, the principals of the urban-planning legislation become contested, which means that the authorization of interventions should be based on a thorough environmental evaluation, rather than on a correlation to a set of static and invariable parameters. The evaluation instruments and techniques, are now sufficiently developed to allow an effective and trustworthy application in the field of urban-planning and not only in the field of environmental protection.

## 7. The concept of landscape in the urban and regional plans

The issue of the Code for Cultural Assets and Landscape represents the last act of a long process that has led to a concept of 'landscape' as a cultural resource.

Regardless of the cognitive aspects, on a local level a new element emerges: affirmation of cultural identity as an engine of the economic development. Having recognized the 'historical value' of the territory as a fundamental matrix of its present framework, in this manner becomes a key imprinting factor, in any plan or project. We can see a long Italian tradition in development of 'landscape planning' that includes great names, as those of Roberto Pane and Giancarlo De Carlo. Nowadays, the link between the development and the structure of the landscape is more evident and imposing in comparison with that tradition, because the assessment of the cultural identity is not only a label of origin for local production, but an essential component of the 'economic base' of a region, so according to a theory in which the vitality and prosperity of a certain area strictly depends on the economic activities orientated towards extra-local consumer markets. The evolution of consumption towards models that are influenced by the traceability of the products (the identity of their origin), rather than the production process (the identity of a company brand), allows us to confirm that the 'economic base' of a territory consists of typical local products that are considered 'exportable'.

### Elements of a diagnosis

The questions posed here present a multitude of reciprocal links contributing to the diagnosis. There are two kinds of problems that

are typical in the current Italian context. First, a scarcity of interdisciplinary practices; and secondly, the lack of a serious national policy for the city and territory.

Above all, we can observe an always diminishing importance of the discipline itself, and that of the urban planners. Having underlined some of the roots of urban planning (deriving from architecture) we have an awareness that the paradigm of 'integrated planning' originates from 'planning by projects' in the seventies, and that both linked with the Theory of Systems that is applied to the field of regional planning. Integrated planning has to be based, in synthesis, on systemic vision of the territory and of sectorial policies. The culture of an urban-planner or architect, in the project management seems to be still important and significant, on one condition: that his role is closely related to a capacity to coordinate various disciplinary competences, that nowadays has been weakened.

On the other hand, in the complicated process of decentralization and regionalization that began in the sixties, the Italian state has not been able to conceive a framework legislation in the urban-planning field. To make things worse, in this sense and only in this sense, can we see the promulgation of national acts that have taken away very important administrative competences from the local governments, as for example the case of the act no. 183/89, that if it was rigorously applied, would transfer wide competence in the field of urban and regional planning to the 'Basin Authorities'.

In conclusion, the National Institute for Urban Planning (INU) led the way inspiring regional legislations, but their new versions show centrifugal tendencies for

the governance of a heritage, the territory, that as the cultural one, constitutes the fundamental base of our identity.