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Urban planning for waterfront redevelopment

Rosario Pavia

In Italy, the subject 'waterfront' has been given new meaning only since the implementation of the 84/94 law which signalled a turning point. Here are a few of the key points:

- the establishment of a port authority in the major ports, like a governing body for the port;
- the liberalization of port activities, but maintaining the public role of the maritime state property;
- the establishment of a port committee, an organisational body for planning and management of the port area.

The new scheme called 'port planning Regulations', takes on a new dimension: no longer a mere 'work plan' but rather an actual functioning plan - economic, managerial, urban, environmental and infrastructural. With this view, the procedure of the Agreement between port authorities and the local council is very important. On one hand it opens up the integration between port and urban planning, while on the other hand it reveals the conflict between the port's needs and those of the local administration. Law 84/94 reflects a great transformation in maritime transport: the international dimension, which is part of a globalized market, needs technologically advanced infrastructure and competitive services. The growth of maritime transport has enormously favoured an increase of traffic in the Mediterranean, offering Italian ports new opportunities for development. Within only a few years, the port authority has had to deal with forced modernisation of port areas, made even more difficult by the scarcity of resources and the lack of effective autonomous financing.

A port has its own identity and needs a functional autonomy which permits it to organise itself logistically. It is for this reason that ports tend to close themselves off from the city; and for this reason the port authority defends 'its' territorial concessions, even when some areas are underused or unusable. The city's position is that it tends to push towards the port, to move towards the sea and to re-appropriate port spaces which were once used as public spaces. In Italy there have been numerous attempts to recuperate urban spaces, with projects for the redevelopment of areas around the port, the results of which have been modest. It needs to be underlined that before 1994 the council administrations weren't clear stakeholders, whereas today, a new synthesis between city and port has been established. Between the Council administration and the Port authority there exists the possibility of a new dialogue. Ports continue to be separate from their cities. The line of separation between city and port is a line of tension, conflict, opposing interests and the interaction of often incompatible realities. In many port cities, this line materialises in barriers, fractures and impassable divides which impede the port's own view of itself. How can we transform this line of separation into opportunity and resources? How can we bring the city back to the port, at the same time, guarantee the port its autonomous function? This is the theme of waterfront redevelopment in Italy. A process in which the redevelopment of the waterfront proceeds slowly, with difficulty and scarce results. The cause being that it hasn't yet understood, specifically, what is the 'port area'. It still isn't understood that the 'waterfront' is a space in-between two

different realities - both active, both dynamic and both vital for development. From this interpretative perspective, the line of separation between city and port is understood as a space of conflict which could interact positively with both port and urban areas. It is for this reason that many, by now, consider the line of separation as a filtering line. Some Port authorities have begun to promote project agreements which deal with recuperating the waterfront: at Trieste, Marina di Carrara, Civitavecchia, Genova and Napoli. Still, this process has just begun. It is a difficult process, above all if the Council administrations and the port authorities don't reach understanding. This mutual comprehension is essential for interventions to function well. An economic, institutional and cultural game is played on the waterfront. The latter has to do with the complex identity of port cities, in which two identifiable systems interact: that of the urban centre and that of the port. The redevelopment of the waterfront is thrust into this new scene, which involves not only public operators, but also private. For a long time, they (private operators) have singled out port areas for new urban centres for real estate businesses and for cultural, management and leisure activities. The waterfront is strategic in the functioning of our ports and for the standard of living in our cities. Through redevelopment projects for the waterfront, the centrality of the coastal territory is restored with new economic and cultural resources, public spaces and landscapes.