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Profiles of Italian Urban Planning

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It is difficult to estimate the number of local authority plans produced in Italy from the country's Unification until today (certainly tens of thousands) and it is even more difficult to bring together all of the documents that they comprise. The Rete Archivi Piani urbanistici (RAPu¹) – the Network of Urban Planning Archives - now holds over 3000 planning documents (one third of which are in written form and two-thirds drawn). They have been gradually brought together through the construction of an organisational network which brings together the activities of different archives and can be consulted through a web site (www.rapu.it) which contains the database, the digital reproduction and a catalogue². These make it possible to study various aspects of Italian urban planning techniques and themes in a way that has never been possible in the past, for lack of adequate and a sufficient number of sources.

In order to move around among the thousands of documents it is necessary to identify some kind of order, typically a *periodization* which, on the basis of various relevant and shared criteria, make it possible to distinguish the features of the plans made over this period of time.

It often happens that the periodizations in urban planning are exogenous, resulting from events that are extraneous to the discipline itself. These forms of ordering are reasonable and unavoidable, given the incidence of economic, social, political and cultural factors, but penalise the ability to understand aspects which are peculiar to urban planning practice and the knowledge that supports it. An endogenous periodization, which is developed in respect of the plans in terms of their characteristics, changes the perception of time, the significance and meaning of historical developments, and is certainly more effective in identifying the dynamics of themes and techniques³.

Now, with an unprecedented collection of documents available, providing valuable material for studying urban planning from within, the conditions are finally created for an attempt at *integrated periodization*. This places the disciplinary technical production (from which the periodization originates) in the context of various influencing factors related to the general history of the country. In order to begin this integrated procedure, I will limit myself to linking an internal periodization, solidly fixed to the *technical characteristics* of the plans, with the principal laws that have modified the *institution* of the plan in Italy.

¹ See: <http://www.planum.net/archive/rapu.htm>

² *Piani urbanistici in Italia. Catalogo e documenti dell'Archivio RAPu*, edited by Patrizia Gabellini, Bertrado Bonfantini and Gloria Paoluzzi, Maggioli Editori, Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna 2007; see the presentation in: <http://www.planum.net/showspace/bookreviews-08.htm>

³ It is Bernardo Secchi who, in the 1980s, affirms the need to study urban planning from within (*Il racconto urbanistico*, Einaudi, Turin 1984). My own book, written about ten years later (*Il disegno urbanistico*, Nis, Rome 1996) follows this line of research in that, when considering Italian urban drawings, it selects the drawing as being the documentary component of the plan containing the densest and most persistent amount of technical elements. See: <http://www.planum.net/topics/secchi-diary.html>

As Chiara Mazzoleni briefly describes in the Catalogue⁴, with reference to the Italian laws that have influenced the institution of the plan, it is possible to identify in substance “three phases of modification, revision and development of the legislative framework relating to urban planning. The first, *from 1865 to the beginning of the 1900s*, is characterised by the use of rules and procedures that provide a certain stability and conventional legislative instruments, which are adapted to the actions of regulating the development and transformation of areas of urban aggregation. In the second period, *from the beginning of the 1900s to 1942*, new types of regulations are developed in particular areas and there are special laws for specific cases that anticipate the contents and layout that will become the characteristics of the new form of planning prescribed by the national urban planning law. The third period, *from 1942 until the early 1970s*, is the phase of application of urban planning law which gives an organic order to the subject, at least on a theoretical basis, but which will give rise to numerous problems over the years in its implementation, some of which will be dealt with through the experience of reconstruction plans”.

The approach of the legislators reveals the change that is taking place in urban phenomena, in the problems generated by it and in the way that experts and local communities perceive and describe them. But above all, it reverberates through the plans, leading to the production of documents and collections of documents that are notably different in the three periods identified.

In the first of the three phases, recognised as providing the basis for Italian urban planning (1865-early 1900s), two laws are promulgated which have particular relevance to the form of the plan. The expropriation law of 1865 makes a distinction between the *planning scheme* for existing cities and the *expansion plan* for new cities. Subsequently, the law of 1885, following the cholera epidemic that hit the city of Naples, focuses attention on the relationship between the characteristics of the residential area and public health and establishes the *recovery plan*. The last of these (recovery plan), although there are few examples, is an early form of *integrated plan*, which had to deal with the problems of improving the existing city and at the same time of creating new districts in order to compensate for the reduction in housing capacity. These themes together provide an overview of the territorial area and the activation of different practices and procedures, with techniques that are used by the planning scheme and by the expansion plan.

The period of architectural and urban competitions in the 1930s, the post-war reconstruction and the large-scale growth (more or less coinciding with the other two phases identified by Mazzoleni), provide extraordinary opportunities for experimentation and for consolidating technical knowledge, acting as “bridges” between the period before and after the *general municipal planning scheme*, a new measure that is recognised and confirmed by the urban planning legislation of 1942. The architectural and urban competitions produce an expansion of themes and the articulation of textual forms, reconstruction plans with their “reduction down to the bare bones”.

⁴ An expanded version of the writings of Chiara Mazzoleni was published in issues 128/2005 and 129/2006 of the magazine *Urbanistica*, under the titles: “Trasformazioni dell’istituto del piano regolatore ed evoluzione della disciplina urbanistica. Parte I e Parte II”. See: <http://www.planum.net/journals/menu.html>

The plans over the subsequent decades introduce a fundamental change in themes and forms. The passing of jurisdiction in terms of urban planning to the Regions, at the beginning of the 1970s, opens up a new chapter in the history of the regulations – both internal and external - marking a major turning point which, with the second generation of regional laws in the 1990s, proves irreversible and leads to the dismantling of the planning scheme. The breakdown of the integrated plan (which lasted for more or less half a century) leads to the adoption, in the Regions that have done new planning laws, of solutions that are conceptually similar (distinction between structural plan, operational plan and urban building regulations), but rather different in form, insofar as the three elements, identified with different names by each individual regional law, rearrange in different ways the large number of provisions that had been loaded into the planning scheme, and interact in different ways with supra-local plans, building regulations, sector plans, implementation plans and combined programmes, bringing together their themes and techniques in various different ways.

Mazzoleni's text in the Catalogue also describes the jumble of measures and, as a result, the construction of an intricate and at times contradictory series of regulations. This partly explains the fundamental "confusion" in references that appear in the planning documents and which become clear from the legends. On the other hand, various substantial operations that are relevant and indispensable in order to give form and organisation to the urban space, ensure that the effect of the legislation in the plans is refined, that it undergoes a process of metabolisation to a greater or lesser extent. For these reasons the two periodizations – those relating to urban planning documents and to the production of legislation – broadly overlap but do not coincide, and both refer, in various ways, to certain phenomena that concern the whole area of Italy.

Although more indirect and loosely related, relationships can and should therefore be established with the periodizations used in relevant disciplinary fields, with reference to political and administrative events, and to the economic and social dynamics that affect the whole of Italy. Certain views of Italian urban planning, in fact, seem more easily ascribable to external events than to any developments in regulatory theory and practice. It is for this reason that the use of mixed criteria can support an operation such as periodization, which is always provisional and interpretative.

Eight profiles

What follows, therefore, is an attempt to recognise various principal periods in the production of urban plans in Italy, beginning with the form of the documents and from what was regarded as the central themes, and considering these themes as *a key* to certain principal external facts.

The first hypothesis is that the thousands of plans produced during the one and a half centuries that separate us from the unification of Italy (1860) can be grouped into eight main periods: plans from the nineteenth century; from the early 1900s; from the 1920s and 1930s; reconstruction plans; plans from the 1950s; from the 1960s and 1970s; from the 1980s; and finally from the 1990s until today.

The second hypothesis is that from these groupings two main turning points can be recognised. The first of these took place in the 1930s, culturally sanctioned by the publication of the Athens Charter and legal formalised in Italy with the Law no.1150 of 1942. The second turning point occurred between the 1970s and 1980s,

motivated by a radical change in construction processes in Italy (like in Europe), brought about by a profound crisis in urban planning instruments, confirmed by a cultural and legal revision that is still not altogether complete.

Second half Nineteenth Century

During the second half of the nineteenth century, “general” plans, in the stricter sense of the term (in other words, covering the entire municipal area) were to be found in isolated cases, for cities that showed phenomena of consistent growth (Florence, Bologna, Milan, Rome...), and they almost always bring together in one single plan the various partial operations (even those carried out in previous years) for the construction of the modern city or, more simply, for the process of maintaining the old city. Most, in fact, are plans for works over existing areas (the “planning schemes” provided by Law no. 2359 of 1865) and more rarely, over new areas (the “expansion plans” provided by the same law) and both of them are generally for infrastructural works.

The *Building regulation and expansion plan for the city (Piano edilizio regolatore e di ampliamento della città)* of Bologna, of 1889, documented in RAPu, provides an interesting example showing the form of the general scheme in a nutshell. The documents include early studies of the processes taking place; a report setting out the strategy for developing the city; an economic and financial report dealing with compulsory purchase costs for building roads and public works, and also for low cost housing for workers; a series of drawings of varying scale and type; design studies for “structural” operations (improving and widening historic roads, a link to the railway station); basic rules and models for road sections and housing.

This plan, along with other examples documented by RAPu, many of which appear in the textbooks⁵, make it possible to identify the characteristic elements of nineteenth century plans:

- analytical rudiments
- a general report that sometimes proposes territorial and administrative strategies
- an economic and financial report relating to expropriation of property
- a variety of drawings: large and small-scale plans, elevations, sections, lists of alternative solutions
- basic rules, sometimes completed with graphic solutions.

The diversity and mixture of the technical solutions adopted, which are more or less detailed according to the circumstances (though nineteenth century plans are on average quite detailed), deal with three major themes associated with operations of demolition, reconstruction and new building developments:

- i. *infrastructures*: the modern city takes shape through the construction of an impressive infrastructural support
- ii. *maintenance of existing areas of the city*: the historic city, which is often walled, has to adapt to the needs of modern life. Renovation and decoration, in addition to safety and public health, are emerging questions

⁵ This is a period that has enjoyed the attention of most academics and for which it is also possible to refer to the printed publications of the time. See the ample coverage of Nineteenth century Italian urban planning by Paolo Sica (*Storia dell'urbanistica. L'Ottocento 1*, Laterza, Bari, 1980).

- iii. *expansion of the city*: unlike the improvement of existing city areas, this aspect relates only to cities that are economically more dynamic and affected by the first signs of immigration from the countryside.

Early 1900s

Few plans were produced in the early decades of the Twentieth century. In fact, large and medium sized cities had already adopted an urban plan. An important example is Milan's *General building regulation and expansion plan (Piano generale regolatore edilizio e di ampliamento)* of 1912. This was the second of its kind for modern-day Milan, which envisaged the development of the city beyond the railway line and the creation of a third urban area, in addition to the first area inside the Spanish walls and the second area within the ring roads that had been laid out in the Nineteenth century plan. The plan is scant, consisting of one single map and concentrates on the problems of acquiring the land which were so great, due to the scarcity of resources, that it was necessary to ask Parliament to extend its validity until 1947 (which had to do so with a specific law).

The form of plans in the early decades of the Twentieth century consists of:

- a general report reduced down to the operational dimension: expropriation in order to build new roads and urban areas
- an economic and financial report, following naturally from the above
- highly selective general planimetry, with road layout and rudimentary zoning
- few regulatory provisions.

The subjects covered do not vary much from those of the Nineteenth century plans, but there are signs of a slow and sure change of emphasis: proposals for new urban areas become more common and, although few local authorities adopt a general urban plan, it becomes "normal" to plan the entire city and to have a single overview of the partial measures to be taken. Therefore:

- i. *infrastructures*: reorganisation and improvement
- ii. *works carried out in parts*: alterations to the existing city and new urban developments
- iii. *the "outline" reorganisation of the entire territorial area*: the distinction between outline plan and executive plan is sanctioned for the Milan plan itself by Law no. 866 of 1912⁶.

1920s and 1930s

A period during which there are many competitions and the first large scale production of plans, even for the foundation of new cities (see the 1935 *Planning and expansion scheme/Piano regolatore e di ampliamento* for Littoria), as well as rare recovery plans (see the 1935 *Recovery plan for Bergamo Alto/ Piano di risanamento di Bergamo alta*). This extension of the field of application favours a wide amount of experimentation with forms of plan that were entirely new, showing the first substantial gathering of technical expertise.

RAPu widely documents these years and makes it possible to identify an extensive and complex form of the plan that is well demonstrated by events in Como - these began with the *Competition for an outline study of the Planning scheme for the city (Concorso*

⁶ The outline plan, in general terms, has as its object the entire residential area of a municipal area and/or areas of proposed expansion and contains proposals for layout and urban development of the area; the executive plan refers to all of the works that it is thought possible to carry out in a particular context and within a given period of time.

per uno studio di massima del Piano regolatore della città) in 1933 and concluded with the *Planning and expansion scheme for the city (Piano regolatore e di ampliamento della città)* of 1937. The plans for this period include:

- investigations covering several aspects, already organised to some extent with visual representations and tables; the traffic problem is paramount (in the *Outline general planning scheme/Piano regolatore generale di massima* for Naples two maps are dedicated to “Railway reorganisation”)
- reports that reflect the wide range of topics and sometimes refer to previous urban planning documents, making comparisons with the past
- numerous drawings, of different kinds and scale (of interest are those of the *General building planning and extension scheme/Piano regolatore generale edilizio e di ampliamento* for Udine)
- a general plan in two forms (planimetry and zoning) and divided into numerous sheets in order to deal adequately with the scale chosen and which tend to cover the whole municipal area
- zoning that segments the territorial area into numerous parts⁷, distinguishing above all the residential areas: by type of building or density
- zoning and regulations that are more detailed and clearly linked together: each area has its own series of regulations
- planning regulations integrated with the administrative building rules
- posters as further publicity in the competitions.

The three major themes still include matters relating to the maintenance of the existing city, but there are also questions linked to the particular historical moment in time (formation of new cities) and, for the first time a widespread consideration of questions connected with “major” growth. So:

- i. *improvement of the existing city*: systematic works on the old city are carried out with varying degrees of intensity and attention to links with the city in expansion. There is a conception of improvement rather than mere maintenance, of decentralisation rather than desertion of the city centre. While on the one hand it indicates a process of theoretical and technical refinement, on the other hand it prepares the ground for special treatment of what is beginning to be called the “historic centre”
- ii. *foundation of new cities*: it is an extraordinary act that provides an occasion for “designing” the relationship between the city and the surrounding territory
- iii. *new concept of an extended city*: the general plan for the city and its districts covers a wide area, where the presence of the countryside and areas that are not built upon but included within the urban area become “visible” and problematic.

In 1929 the first Italian urban planning exhibition is held and Luigi Piccinato describes it by emphasising its richness and confusion, positions that are out of date and innovative⁸. In 1934 Gustavo Giovannoni states that the “new Italian School of Urban Planning has been formed.... It has been created beginning from various centres, originating to some extent from study, practice, technique and

⁷ In its evolution, the visual language of plans shows great paradigmatic changes over these years: from their figurative nature which continues the Nineteenth century style of iconic design, to the introduction of an abstract design leading to an observation and interpretation of the activities that are carried out in the physical space of the city.

⁸ L. Piccinato, “Il ‘Momento Urbanistico’ alla Prima Mostra Nazionale dei Piani Regolatori”, *Architettura e Arti decorative*, fasc 5-6, 1929.

spatial art, and has developed its own characteristics, which blend together and are concordant if not unique”⁹. Each of them recognise the vast, varied and also contradictory output from this period, which marks a fundamental watershed in relation to the past (the universities begin the first courses in urban planning)¹⁰. The competitions, which through channelling energy and resources demonstrate the need to deal with entirely new and/or difficult problems, provide another occasion (together with exhibitions and publications) to display the state of the art and create discussion which encourages emulation, therefore circulation and accumulation of ideas as well as their refinement and selection. The expanded form, even if on the one hand it seems necessary in order to correspond with the broader range of contents (renovation, development and increase in scale of phenomena, foundation of new cities...), on the other hand is also ascribable to an absence of indications as to the nature, contents and procedures for drafting plans, to the uncertainty of the discipline for areas outside the urban space, to the controversial interpretation of restrictions on expropriation, and to the separation between the planning scheme and building regulations, the two systems provided by legislation to deal with urban problems.

Reconstruction

The reconstruction plans, established by Legislative Decree no.154 of 1945 and repeatedly extended (the last extension being in 1957), mark another period in Italian Urban Planning, in many cases eating into the space of the general municipal planning scheme set up by the “new” urban planning law no.1150 of 1942, especially in small local authorities where for a long time Presidential decrees satisfy the requirements to expand urban centres.

As emergency measures, their documentation is reduced to a minimum: only in a few cases do the reconstruction plans become an occasion for reorganising the overall urban layout.

The large quantity of documentation held by RAPu shows the expeditious and confirmative nature in relation to the large number of techniques tested out until now¹¹ and makes it possible to examine their formal characteristics:

- short reports, in some cases exemplary and technically significant (such as in the *Reconstruction Plan/Piano di ricostruzione* for Fidenza)
- table of the current state with analytical survey of war damage and attention to important buildings, identified as points of reference for memory and for public life
- a single general planimetry that indicates new “masses”
- perhaps further studies on work to be carried out and (optionally) on public spaces, within the urban area or in new areas, near or far from the damaged area.

⁹ G. Giovannoni, “Urbanistica italiana alle soglie dell’anno XII”, *Urbanistica*, n.1, 1934, p.7.

¹⁰ For this period as well, the background is built upon studies and research. See, in particular, G. Ernesti, edited by, *La costruzione dell’utopia. Architetti e urbanisti nell’Italia fascista*, Edizioni Lavoro, Rome 1988.

¹¹ See C. Mazzoleni, B. Bonfantini, (editors) *Cento anni di piani urbanistici. Archivio piani Dicoter*, Triennale di Milano-Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, Edizioni della Triennale, Milan, 2001, in particular the article by Bertrando Bonfantini “L’Archivio piani Dicoter”. See also the site where the plans are published:

<http://www.infrastrutture.gov.it/sites/anpr/index.htm>

The single theme of the reconstruction takes the form of the choice as to how and where to rebuild, and the plans respond to this with three options:

- i. *internal reconstruction with rebuilding* (Fidenza)
- ii. *reconstruction in addition to expansion or foundation of an external urban nucleus, a separate city-suburb that makes it possible to create a new relationship with the surrounding area, which is difficult for existing centres that are usually built in defensive positions* (*Reconstruction plan for the town in a new position/Piano di ricostruzione in nuova sede dell'abitato* for Cassino, but also the *Reconstruction Plan/Piano di ricostruzione* for Macerata)
- iii. *reconstruction as an opportunity for the complete reorganisation of the urban area* (the *Reconstruction plan/Piano di ricostruzione* for Pescara, and also that of Arezzo).

1950s

The plans – or more accurately, the “general municipal planning schemes” - for the 1950s are another characteristic series in that they put forward a sufficiently standardised and refined technical code, after decades of “trials”, first of all in dealing with the formidable change in urban processes (1930s) and then with the destruction and traumatic effects of the war. This is a brief period which does not include the whole decade, due to the major impact of reconstruction plans and the premature crisis brought about by the legislative reforms of the early 1960s. It is a period that is fairly well documented, due also to the *Urbanistica* magazine which offered readers wide selections of original documents, redesigning with graphics that were standardised (but remaining faithful to the terms and hierarchical order of the original legend), the general tables (“new” zoning), reproducing them in colour and in large scale format in a way that had never been done before. These plans are well known and widely discussed, perhaps also because of this broad circulation, and are compared with each other and with contemporary plans from other European countries. This makes it possible to observe their “moderately” rational character, which is, moreover, similar to that of the urban planning law that supports it. In Italy, in fact, the Athens Charter is viewed critically (in the same way that the Italian representatives taking part in the work of the CIAM were critical) and the zoning on a functional basis - i.e. which the Charter identifies as “reformed zoning” - is revised and reconciled with a hybridised historical and morphological form¹².

The RAPu collections include three plans – for Bergamo, Pordenone and Mantua – which make it possible to highlight certain particular aspects.

The *General planning scheme (Piano regolatore generale)* for Bergamo shares some interesting points of comparison with the plan for Amsterdam in 1932, which was the origin of many of the ideas in the Athens Charter and was well known to Italian urban planners thanks to the detailed article published in *Urbanistica*¹³: selective urban growth along main roads, organised in districts and structured according to the road system, districts “designed” with the centre of life at the heart and a residential construction, with decreasing density from the inner area towards the countryside. The General Planning Scheme for Bergamo, like few

¹² Argument of my article *La tecnica nella Carta d'Atene*, in P.Di Biagi (editor), *La Carta d'Atene. Manifesto e frammento dell'urbanistica moderna*, Officina edizioni, Rome 1998. See also A.Belli, *Immagini e concetti nel piano. Inizi dell'urbanistica in Italia*, Etaslibri, Milan 1996.

¹³ G. Astengo, “La lezione urbanistica di Amsterdam”, *Urbanistica*, n.2, 1949. See summaries and indexes of *Urbanistica* in <http://www.planum.net/journals/ns-uri.html>

others, linked the principal area of expansion in the south to an infrastructure crossing the barrier created by the railway line, including the proposal that had been examined ten years earlier.

In the *Outline planning scheme for the city (Piano regolatore di massima della città)* of Pordenone, a proposal is set out to link the main urban centre with the surrounding districts by way of expansion, using diagrams that provide “comments” upon the zoning. In this way and by other means that follow the logic of functional relationships, the plan contains an examination of the uncertain and elusive “form” of the city in expansion, namely of the criteria to be used in order to guide it, and the different compositional procedure invoked by an urban planner who seeks to organise the physical space indirectly, through the arrangement of functions. In this same plan, however, there appear techniques that are well tested, such as the careful arrangement of important buildings carried out through operations of “isolation”.

The *General planning scheme (Piano regolatore generale)* for Mantua confirms the attention to great infrastructural works: here the expansion of the city has to be developed beyond the lakes which ensured the military defence of Lombardy and Veneto, an operation of territorial importance. Here the territorial framework that the plan proposes is regional: the map, entitled “Mantua in the region”, on a scale of 1:100,000, pays uncustomary attention to the role of the city. Two unusual maps, “Panoramic and landscape aspects” and “Monumental buildings to be respected”, transform into planning documents the obligation to observe the laws protecting the historic and natural heritage that had been proclaimed in 1939.

The salient characteristics of the plans in the 1950s are, in fact, ascribable to:

- presence of a specific space for analysis: censuses of the population and of the buildings
- specific treatment, in the analysis and in the project, of certain facilities (schools in first place) with reference to their size and distribution (the urban planning law of 1942 requires that service areas be identified in the plan)
- final affirmation of zoning as the only project plan, in relation to the entire municipal area, on different scales and with different degrees of detail, now always drawn out on more than one sheet
- presence of a map indicating the territorial context: the plan works on various scales, “telescopically”, presuming continuity and consistency between the various planning levels
- gradual disappearance of the city centre from the general zoning plan, because it is dealt with in a separate detailed plan (which, in fact, acquires its own autonomy in relation to the general plan for which, according to urban planning law, the detailed executive plan should provide subsequent definition)
- regulations now only in written form, relating to zones and quite distinct from the building regulations whose prescriptions had accompanied those of the plan for decades¹⁴.

¹⁴ There is a variable relationship, of inertia and anticipation, between the technical elements that describe the plans and the laws that regulate their formation. In part, this is connected with the biography of those producing the projects: who are trained and have worked during the 1930s and continue to put forwards (or at least abandon only slowly) certain ways of operating. Plinio Marconi and Luigi Piccinato, for example, maintain the building regulations linked to planning norms, at least for all of the 1950s (see P. Di Biagi,

“Boom economy”, the term with which it was usual to describe the phenomena that had marked this decade in Italian history, has the advantage of emphasising the abnormal and unexpected dimension of the processes with which Italian urban planning had to concern itself. The theme of growth is obviously central and, as with the reconstruction, it is a matter of identifying, through the plans, its extent, localisation and characteristics. Three options are therefore recognisable through which the expansion is developed:

- i. *expansion outside the centre*: work is carried out only or mainly outside the existing city, creating districts that are “self-sufficient” in that they have their own basic services
- ii. *expansion along with maintenance of the centre*: it is sought to connect the new city with the existing city
- iii. *expansion with safeguards*: it is sought to reconcile the growth with pre-existing features, including landscape, in order thus to find new compositional criteria for the overall urban area.

1960s and 1970s

I propose to consider the plans for these two decades together, distinguishing them from those of the 1950s. This is due to their fundamental importance as a point of transition in that gradual reform over stages (as “compensation” for the lack of reform in the earliest years of the 1960s) which has continued to make additions and adjustments, gradually making the legislative framework more uncertain and confused. In these plans one finds a definite wearing down of technical criteria which, with the urban planning legislation of 1942, were anchored in the modern urban planning culture.

These were not simply general plans, but more often general Variants upon plans that had been produced earlier, sometimes being combined with zone plans for low-cost popular housing, plans for production zones, detailed plans for historic centres... The urban planning, in fact, begins to fill up with instruments, each of which sets up its own procedures, in some cases refining techniques found in rudimentary form in the “historic” instruments.

Due to this wide divergence of procedures, I will describe only the form of the general planning scheme (ignoring the distinction from the general variant, which is only bureaucratic), the last example of an integrated urban plan before the crisis and its “deflagration”.

The main characteristics of plans during this period can be summarised as follows:

- broadening of the field of analysis and of related documents (with particular attention to social and economic phenomena)
- central importance of zoning and its “breaking up”, due also to the introduction of urban planning standards provided in Law no.765 of 1967 (standards to identify cartographically and to be calculated)
- specific discipline for historic centres or reference to that of detailed plans
- broadening of the normative apparatus in relation to the multiplication of zones and partitions linked to zone and sector plans. The countryside,

P. Gabellini (editors), *Urbanisti italiani. Piccinato, Marconi, Samonà, Quaroni, De Carlo, Astengo, Campos Venuti*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1992).

recognised as zone E, begins to be studied and broken up into sub-zones, with a procedure analogous to that used for zones in urban areas

- forms of representation that are entirely conventional, appropriate for shifting attention from the physical forms of the city to settlement processes, therefore the central role of the legend for reference to the norms (the table of the plan is, in fact, a map of the regulations)
- a single plan consisting of many sheets, each of which, on large scale (usually 1 / 2,000) details the prescriptions. The impossibility of reading the plan with a general overview, which previously emerged sporadically, is now generalised.

The theme of expansion remains central, but finds new forms, gradually more problematic and critical:

- i. *expansion with strengthening* of road infrastructures and the system of social services, in order to support urbanisation and recuperate the deficit in post-war growth
- ii. *expansion with restructuring and/or reform*: the concern about widespread growth is answered by decentralising the polarising functions (such as moving tertiary activities to a new business district which, in Monza, is as large as the city centre), sometimes by proposing a development model that goes against the trend, based on an alternative structure (in the *General planning scheme/Piano regolatore generale* for Reggio Emilia, the development is organised on a new axis running at ninety degrees to the ancient Via Emilia; in the plan for Rome the “Eastern Business System” provides an alternative model to the formation of a single centre and, contrary to previous planning decisions that chose business development towards the coast, it is linked to the eastern side of the Ring Road)
- iii. *expansion with safeguards*: new districts of low-cost popular housing, but also a morpho-typological attention to the historic centre.

1980s

Although in the 1960s and 1970s signs were emerging of an attention towards processes of internal transformation within the urban area, only in the early 1980s, along with phenomena of demolition of industrial buildings, are transformation plans clearly put forward in contrast to expansion plans, recognising and describing the characteristics of a new form of plan¹⁵. After a phase of commitment towards controlling the development of cities in all directions, there is another phase which expresses the need to reconnect and qualify those areas that had developed discontinuously, which sometimes takes the form of “citadels” and at other times of a single diffused city.

It is a period that produces disappointing results that encourage many people to demand more policies and fewer plans, more architecture and less urban planning, more projects and fewer regulations. At the Congress of the Istituto nazionale di urbanistica (National Urban Planning Institute), held in Genoa in 1984, there is an important disagreement among Italian urban planners, many of whom believe that the plan is unable to provide aspects of quality and form for the city and there is a

¹⁵Bernardo Secchi, as from 1982 in the columns of *Casabella* and then editorials in *Urbanistica* (all collected together in the book *Un progetto per l'urbanistica*, Einaudi, Turin 1989) and Giuseppe Campos Venuti, in *La terza generazione dell'urbanistica* (F. Angeli, Milan 1987), recognise the beginning of a new season of transformation bringing urban quality.

need for an urban project, using for example the experiences launched in several European cities. There is a return to reading *L'architettura della città*, the book written by Aldo Rossi in the early 1960s, and use is made of the contributions of the Venetian School in order to give a scientific foundation to the study of urban form, to describe “parts morphologically complete”. The word “fabric” gradually replaces the word “zone”.

The plans of the 1980s, which are put forward as a reformist alternative to the autonomy of urban projects, mark a clear change of direction from the past: the recovery of certain traditional techniques generates eclectic forms. The experimental, tentative, expansive character, the presence of design expressions shows a certain similarity with the production of the 1930s. An “omnibus plan” emerges, which incorporates projects and regulates the general quality with specific norms, in contrast to individual transformation operations that elude regulation¹⁶.

The new form of plan is recognised for the presence of:

- new documents: programmatic, preliminary and draft decisions, project albums, operational guides
- stratigraphic relief plans and morpho-typological readings of cities and countryside in order to rediscover and recognise once again the material dimension of the space after the period of economic and social surveys
- iconic tables that “patch together” existing areas set aside for open space projects
- first appearance of project explorations with morphological requisites translated onto the tables of the plan and placed within the regulations with appropriate drawings (specific norms that indicate the ideal types of solutions, setting out prescriptions using project schedules, giving guidance through example projects)
- detailed land uses
- appearance of “systems” (infrastructural, of green space and services, environmental and central areas...) to replace zones
- first diagrams used to portray the overall meaning of the transformation and of the urban project.

The general theme of the transformation seems to combat dispersion, reconnecting the urban fringes, defining the margins, rebuilding continuity, distributing polarity and centres of quality, therefore:

- i. *urban quality* as returning to a form, in some cases a nostalgic view of the pre-modern and nineteenth century city
- ii. *diffusion of the city effect*, creating centrality on various scales
- iii. *re-composition of the districts* through completion and improvement of connections, in order to identify the latent structure and/or plan the restructuring.

1990s and 2000s

In the first half of the 1990s there is a change of scenario for territorial government. The laws changing the organisation of autonomous local authorities

¹⁶ Following the first national review of urban planning, the magazine *Urbanistica* documents the production of new plans (issue 95 of 1989) and dedicates extensive space to the plans for Bologna, Florence, then Siena (issue 99 of 1990), which is emblematic of this period, marking the height of technical features that bring the project into *the plan* governing form and aspects of quality. See: <http://www.planum.net/journals/menu.html>

through the setting up of provincial and subsidiary territorial plans (Law no.142 of 1990) are followed by those that introduce integrated programmes (Law no.172 of 1992), urban redevelopment and improvement programmes (Law no.493 of 1993) – complex measures that bring together urban policies with social, fiscal and environmental policies, breaking down disciplinary boundaries.

For more than a decade we therefore witness “urban planning operations” within which urban plans can also be produced, but not necessarily so, and not as the dominant function. After the hyper-plan of the 1980s, we find the weak contingency plan of the 1990s and 2000s, almost always accompanied by programmes and projects, a combination that is motivated by the overall character of territorial conditions: not so much physical and morphological characteristics as much as the dynamics of local development, resources and interests mobilised, operative networks, activism of administrations, trajectories and advancement of the urban planning process, civil cultures and traditions. The sensitivity of urban planning operations to the territories, to processes and to the function of the political system is what gives urban planning operations a clear contextual connotation¹⁷.

The dismantling of the model and malleability of the form are nothing other than the explicit acknowledgement of the behavioural aspects that have been imposed on urban planning practice in order for it to respond to ever new and varying planning processes. What emerges is the profile of an urban plan that pays attention to listening, learning as work progresses and interpretation, that lost its original form.

Contemporary urban planning form involves¹⁸:

- various technical products, including non-formal products, which cover and accompany an urban planning process that includes a and scenarios (structural plans, strategic plans and background documentation with the value of providing political guidance and direction), regulations relating to the use of the land (operational instruments, general and sectorial, of legal value), projects and programmes of various degrees of significance, complexity and physical implication
- tendency for the general report to become increasingly complex, to become an illustrated book with the task of arguing and justifying the entire operation
- economic and financial reports, environmental impact assessments, equalising procedures, drafted by specialists, who are involved in estimating the sustainability of plans and projects from various points of view
- the project is presented using the combined language of text and pictures, in forms that are many and varied, including multimedia, to support different communication strategies

¹⁷ An example is documented and commented upon in A. Di Giovanni, M. La Palombara (editors) “Jesi: un’operazione urbanistica che costruisce politiche”, *Urbanistica*, n. 128, 2005.

¹⁸ Useful reference can be made to the documents presented to the National Urban Planning Exhibition held in Venice from 10 to 20 November 2004, in the National Urban Planning Institute's 5° *Rassegna Urbanistica Nazionale. I casi in rassegna. Catalogo della mostra*, cd rom, Venice 2004, edited by C. Giamo, V. Fabietti (see https://www.planum.net/showspace/V-run_info.htm), and those collected in the cd rom accompanying the manual *Progettazione urbanistica* (Maggioli, Milan 2002), edited by F. Oliva, P. Galuzzi, G. Vitillo.

- abstract designs that re-establish a distance from the forms of the space and looking at broader and diachronic timescales: various types of schedules seem useful for describing structuring elements in the territorial area, strategies and guidelines.

Environment, economics, society and policies have returned to dominate priorities and language. Many aspects that have been regarded as distinctive in strategic planning have entered into urban planning operations. In place of disciplinary concerns relating to the spontaneous densification of the cities, there is now a sort of anxiety about the residential dispersion¹⁹, about processes of growth that produce an area that is completely urbanised where historic areas, open spaces, suburbs, infrastructures and metropolitan fringes are all jointly present in one general phenomenon of “bigness”²⁰. It is a single, entirely new kind of space, where equally new practices are being adopted, which in the 1990s brings about a myriad of detailed and refined descriptions. Less attention is given to form and more attention is given to the relationship between things, to structuring and sustainability:

- environmental sustainability* due to the widespread exploitation and deterioration of resources
- economic and financial sustainability* in order to reduce public spending and to involve private operators
- social sustainability* due to the spread of new forms of poverty.

¹⁹ See B. Secchi, *La città del ventesimo secolo*, Laterza, Rome- Bari 2005.

²⁰ There is an effective description by R. Koolhaas in *Bigness, ovvero il problema della Grande Dimensione*, in (by the same author), *Junkspace. Per un ripensamento radicale dello spazio urbano*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2006.