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## Towards new strategies for a city in transformation

Roberto Bobbio

Genoa is probably the Italian city that has changed the most in recent decades. The first phase of change was in the 1960s due to the loss of its role as a great industrial center and the progressive paralysis of the port. The second phase was marked by the reaction to the crisis, which began to produce unequivocal results by the middle of the 1990s with the resumption of maritime trade, the redevelopment of the city center, and the reuse of the large abandoned industrial areas. The effects of this double change involved both the image and structure of the city. The articles collected in this section of *Urbanistica* illustrate relevant aspects of the second phase of change and position them within a strategic program. After long analysis of the causes and effects of the crisis, the city sought to encourage new development initiatives. Genoa presents itself thus in the image of a 'mutant city', that cyclically redefines its own role and economy; an image emerging from the study of long term processes treated both in a local (Giacchero 1980) and global perspective (Braudel 1982). A third phase of transformation is beginning that has as its point of departure the renewal of the port and city, but in which a new 'spontaneous' process comes into play, often of exogenous origin. Maintaining the enterprise of change will require reinforcing the outcomes achieved, but also by devising new comprehensive strategies that are able to incorporate actions already in part set in motion, but still requiring a commitment of creativity and coordination. I will try to briefly describe a

few themes of change that seem to me essential for the future of the city.

### Themes of transformation

*The redevelopment of the center.* The strategy that made a mainstay of the quality of the urban environment in the central areas and of the valorization of the historic center has achieved notable results in terms of improving the urban image, increasing tourism, and strengthening the sense of belonging on the part of the inhabitants (Alcozer in this issue). This success is the result of a series of initiatives that, connected with the organization of major events (Alcozer, Gattorna in this issue; Bisio, Bobbio 2004), have drawn together the efforts which have their origins in the 1980s but with variable success (for want of a strategic vision or the lack of the capacity to put it into effect). The unknowns regarding the future developments regards first of all the possibility of realizing new works without special state financing (or the possibility of new acquisitions); but also the peril of success, beginning with the abnormal growth of property values that threatens to drive the inhabitants with modest economic means, the commerce of the neighborhood, and the remaining artisanal activities towards the degraded areas of the city.

*The residence and services.* The directed and 'virtuous' processes of transformations of the 1990s have concerned the central areas, in keeping with the specific strategy of relaunching the city. The priorities of this strategy are well understandable but (Gattorna, Gastaldi), as in any city poorly developed after World War II, in Genoa the problem remains of bettering the poor conditions of the residential periphery. Some neighborhoods are involved

with rather marginal interventions (Balletti, Soppa); the only large work is perhaps the green spaces and sports facilities facing the water realized between the built-up area of Prà and the great dock of the port of Voltri in response to the decades-long battle by the inhabitants. The improvement has just begun of some of the public building complexes that present the most acute problems of discomfort and security, and the initiatives are not yet realized for diminishing the degradation and augmenting the environmental quality of the neighborhoods of private building (the first project remains unrealized that sought to resolve the conflict between residences and the road conditions of the motorway). The theme of the periphery is connected to that of services: the urban plan contains the elements for dealing with the improvement of the systems that have been in large part or totally inadequate until now, such as those for hospitals or schools, but for now the possibility of activating restructuring operations appears remote. *Port and infrastructure.* Renzo Piano has laid out a scheme for the ample reconfiguration of the port and the infrastructural system that includes the transformation of large areas at the periphery of the city.

It is a fascinating design that integrates new ideas with revised proposals for enlarging the port which have been discussed for some time, but that have not demonstrated their feasibility and utility. The start of a new phase of growth of the port (Artuso) seems to have gathered broad support, but input from qualified experts has raised doubts as to the possibility of procuring the enormous financing necessary, and concerns that such ambitious

programs detract from more urgent improvements. However if one considers the connection between the building up of land area by infilling along the sea edge and the realization of infrastructure, Piano's idea acquires another value (Artuso). For more than forty years Genoa has aimed at the opening of a third rail pass toward the north (essential for connecting with the high-capacity Torino-Trieste line) and by more than twenty years at expanding the motorway and shifting it to a higher elevation: essential works to avoid the asphyxiation of the port and city. It was calculated that whoever digs the tunnel would recover their investment by dumping the fill in the sea to create an artificial island, which is being discussed (January 2005) as the site for the petroleum terminal that today represents a risk factor due to its nearness to residential areas. Piano's scheme (which resolves differently the problem of the petroleum port) is therefore useful for determining the conditions in which to carry forward a more limited and concrete design. However what is not being considered is the impact on the city and environment of a work so invasive and, more generally, the meager debate on the choices that affect the whole city: representation by the diverse agencies in the 'technical' committees is not sufficient to legitimize decisions of such importance. *The urban polarity.* The reorganization of trade, setting out late with respect to the other metropolitan areas for lack of space, has taken on the conversion of the abandoned industrial areas in the internal valleys and in the Ponente (Balletti in this issue). The new order of trade means not only greater difficulties for the old distribution network (stores

in both the center and in the neighborhoods are disappearing) but in connection with the realizations in the center for free time, puts in crisis the multipolar structure that has constituted a positive characteristic of the fragmented Genoese urban area and that has until now avoided the ghettoization of the periphery. The interventions executed to strengthen some peripheral commercial systems that are still able to develop competitiveness have obtained some results; yet the process of weakening and slipping of the peripheral polarity continues and should be confronted with decisiveness, even considering other aspects.

#### **A critical point: the role of private stakeholders**

All of the major operations, from those already taken to a good level of completion, such as the redevelopment of the center, to those only begun or discussed, are promoted and guided by the public administration: the City administration is by far the principal player, but also the Province and the Region, thanks to electoral reform and by self-government, have been involved with notable initiatives. It seems instead that it is the private sector that is not interested (or able) in promoting regional development. After the failures of the great property operations of the 1970s (the office districts of via Madre di Dio, Corte Lambruschini, San Benigno resulted in bankruptcies and were completed thanks to the interventions of the banks and the buying in by public agencies), the private entrepreneurs began to address themselves to building rehabilitation; but the operations were taken in tow by the public operations. Recently, some businesses in the building sector made themselves promoters of some

interesting initiatives, taking risks in the design phase but always with the idea of obtaining public financing in the executive phase. The panorama of industrial activities is discouraging. For years a productive restart was hoped for that would be led by the high technology sector, as is present in the Genoese Ponente (the western portion), but the growth programs of Marconi Italiana (to which the city administration responded readily by accelerating the process of approval of projects and even ceding an academic building to the company) failed due to the crisis of the multinational group of which the company is a part. All attention is now on the project for a citadel of technology on the hill of the Erzelli (Miracoli in this issue), a step ahead (but for now only virtually) with respect to the vague discourse that has gone on for years.

Paradoxically, the much opposed program for the restarting of the iron and steel works (ex Italsider) of Cornigliano seems at the current time the only initiative capable of preserving a significant number of industrial work places.

The results reached by the public administrations risk being ineffective in the fostering new development processes if they are not be joined by a more substantial private response.

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