



Urbanistica n. 132

January-April 2007

Distribution by www.planum.net

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What is the point ...

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Valeria Di Palma
Laura Forgione
Giulia Rota*

Problems, policies, and research

Demolishing and rebuilding to upgrade parts of cities
City regeneration to Berlin: the district Marzahn-Hellersdorf
The agglomeration of Clichy-Montfermeil, a complex site of *politique de la Ville*
Problems relating to the upgrading of public property through measures of demolition and reconstruction

*edited by Maria Valeria Mininni
Simonetta Volpe
Giovanni Dispoto
Agostino Di Lorenzo
Simonetta Volpe
Ferdinando Gandolfi

Biancamaria Rizzo
Giorgio Ferraresi, Francesco Coviello*

Projects and implementation

The challenges of urban planning in the urban countryside
Added value in the metropolitan agricultural areas of the Campania Region
The countryside's rule in the new master plan of Naples
Rural landscapes and ecological networks in the urban context
The 'Extramet' project and the case study of Campania
Structural works, multifunctional and self-supporting ability of agricultural firms in the urban context
Landscapes and plans: new settlements models and innovative planning approaches
Scenarios of land reconstruction based on neo-agriculture and new lifestyles and consumption patterns

*edited by Alessandro Balducci, Paola Pucci
Paola Pucci
Sebastiano Carbonara, Valter Fabietti
Fabio Manfredini
Valeria Fedeli
Luca Romano*

Preliminary document for a territory to be reconceived
Building consensual scenarios: settlement environments and strategic projects
Towards a definition of a Vas protocol
Mapping projects and policies of the Vicenza Province
An Atlas as a way to approach the territories of Vicentino
The plan as governance of fragmentation: the territory of the Vicenza area

Antonella Manicardi, Luca Martelli

Profiles and practices

Precautionary measures against earthquake: risk representations in the Ptcp (Provincial plan)

Augusto Mercandino, Francesca Cassaro

Cambridge Futures: a referendum on sustainability

*edited by Francesco Gastaldi
Francesco Gastaldi
Simone Ombuen*

Strategic plans in Italy
Strategic plans: risks and critical issues
Strategic planning and governance/government of the territory

Anna Laura Palazzo

Methods and tools

Sustainability and urban form

Scenarios of land reconstruction based on neo-agriculture and new lifestyles and consumption patterns

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We are living in the middle of a territory destructuring going towards a degraded dissemination of urban settlements to cover the land 'space' (where nothing belongs to the city and nothing to the countryside); a spatial form translating the parallel destructuring of the fordist industrial shape of the organisation of economy as well as of its metropolitan organisation.

Thus we are experiencing a change which shows the crisis of the roots of 'a project of modern life' which permeated the last few centuries and based its assumptions on a boundless 'transforming pretension' supported by technology (deriving on its turn from an absolute 'cognitive pretension' typical of the deterministic science). A domination of instrumental reason which has caused discontinuance in the slow and millenary construction of the territory and an unsustainable speed in its change.

The basis was the extraordinary reduction of the complexity of the territory transformed into a boundless space organised by functions.

This destiny has caused a 'genocide' in the world of farming, rural production and countryside culture, the deportation and reduction to a sorry state of the subjects cultivating land while the social value of their work was completely disregarded. This deserted and depopulated the countryside in the industrialised regions and changed the rural land only into 'open space', non competitive as a place for agriculture, thus not self-generating and self-reproductive, merely a

resource of space for the territory of industrialisation and urbanisation.

The degradation of open spaces, resulting in degradation of the territory, is caused by this structural reason.

It has to be pointed out that the 'environmental question' itself and certain well-known accepted meanings of environmental culture and policies paradoxically confirm such a picture (though they want to improve and mitigate it), by assigning to the open space the role of 'extra' environmental compensation for the naturalisation of islands (or systems of elements in ecological networks, which is more advanced) 'in the' model of development that generated the same degradation of self-production of territorial quality in such spaces without discussing that model through strategies and processes of alternative change.

In particular the concept of a functionalist and rationalist park (and its empirical translation) is still prevailing and is very clear. We are dealing with one of the functional scanning of space corresponding to 'loisir' in the 'Athens Charta', the function of refreshment, of remedy as to the degradation of development which prevails somewhere else and extensively in more general terms under the sign of 'production', of 'movement', of 'dwelling' (that is 'loger', the term 'habiter' used by Le Corbusier shall be corrected).

Thus the proposals and experiences concerning the figure of the 'Agricultural park' are essentially based upon awarding again an intrinsic value to the countryside land founded on agricultural production which contemporaneously produces the territory. A scenario of self-generation of the territory, of endogenous exploitation

and improvement, which reconstructs the sense and role of farmland areas saving them from their structural weakness in the soil market that allows the process of destruction and their degradation.

In such a framework a concept of the 'Agricultural park' as a territorial facility based on a deep relationship between 'care and cultivation' of land has developed; or better an intrinsic assumption of care in farming activity, at least in its most strict expressions. Care intended as a tool of expression and action typical of living worlds, of the ecological approach, of the communicative reason contaminating the instrumental rationality of production; production intended as cultivation and culture producing adequate primary goods for the market and collective goods (landscape, environmental quality).

Il parco come cura e cultura e coltura del territorio is also the title of a text (edited in early eighties by the person writing these remarks) containing a wider definition of agricultural park pivoted on this relationship care/cultivation.

It has to be pointed out, however, that the programmatic topic of the Agricultural park as 'good production in the territory and for the territory' has already been translated in various fields and policies into different forms of specific and 'dedicated' park and in other figures, facilities or methods.

The first strict conception and the above-mentioned text constituted the 'gene' of the setting up process of Parco agricolo sud Milano which is the first and the largest Agricultural park in Italy and one of the main parks in Europe, where the topic developed (as mentioned before) as a redefinition of the city/countryside relationship in the process of metropolitan extension in a

large area and in an important position of antagonism as to the peripheral extension of urban areas, through the reintroduction of agriculture as a complex co-production of multiple goods intended for the regeneration of large suburban open spaces.

The laws pertaining the park (promulgated in 1990) and the real formation of Parco agricolo sud Milano show however contradictions in the management, but also strong changes in the facility conception (which will be examined later in more general terms) as the 'farming project' lost its centralness.

As for other experiences of farming projects in open spaces, reference is made to the previous repertory (in *Urbanistica* no. 128) which concerned:

- smaller projects including partial experiences, even in the context of Parco agricolo sud Milano, such as the Ticinello park (1988), the project regarding the historic area of Chiaravalle, a project on water purification and the landscape project of Vettabia valley (2003);
 - scenarios of large-scale strategic reorganisation such as the project of 'reclamation and land improvement' for the basin of Lambro, Seveso and Olona rivers and the relevant specific projects in the valleys of the rivers involved (River agreements);
 - the direct resumption of the Agricultural park proposal in the context of monte Netto and other proposals just started;
 - other projects on agriculture in other regions: Fiorenzuola d'Arda, 'A Countryside for Living', Piacenza, etc.
- A few experiences deal with farming in a structural way as well as with the reconstruction of the territory and leave certain deviations and reductions of other field experiences. In fact, a few regressions

toward the concept of a traditional and defensive park, incapable of assuming the value of new production, have appeared also for Parco agricolo sud Milano and for its management, as mentioned above. They were often cases of morphological, landscape 'projects' and not processes for refounding an appropriate production. Even certain 'strong' projects of reforestation (not mentioned here) contain deviations of this kind which deny the role of agriculture and propose once again the park as compensation for urban settlements. It would be useful, besides these references to experiences and projects, to deal as well, on another occasion, with the recent resumption of systematic research on such themes: in theoretical terms a structural proposal and a new social phenomenology. This essay is part of it, also with reference to the following points. Thus, this project of the 'Agricultural park' constitutes an interpretation, in different ways and contexts, of the relationship between care and cultivation of the territory, which is a recurrent topic. The limitations that marked this process have been identified: ineffective declaration of the role of agriculture, mainly urban or landscape treatment of actions, restriction-regression of the treatment of open spaces. Limitations and contradictions which in reality have revealed the persistence de facto of a subordinate role of agriculture in a process dominated by praxis and by the pervasive ideology of industrialistic, metropolitan, town-centered development. Now we are in the middle of the post-fordist crisis of the organisation of production and land described in the remarks opening this contribution (see the first point of the document). In such a context the

original matrix of the project for a new agriculture reconstructing the land in order to find alternatives to the patterns of growth under crisis, changing the references, subjects and methods of production and spatial organisation, strongly comes out again. Here agriculture can play a central role as a basic component of 'another way' of production and spatial organisation if it is acknowledged that the crisis of the model under way is mainly caused by the unsustainability of consumption and the systematic destruction of land resources (as well as of the long-term heritage of environments, kinds of knowledge, cultures, productive social capitals and forms of civil organisation). And people become aware that it is impossible to overcome the destructuring of land and open spaces if the city-countryside relationship is not recomposed in new terms, giving dignity and self-reproductive capacity to the countryside. In the Italian social context (especially in certain areas and experiences, but the phenomenon is wider and more disseminated even at the international level and assumes different forms) important processes of redefinition of foodstuffs demand are under way passing through the quality, the typicality of goods, the certification of the place of production as well as of the methods used for food production and transformation, which emphasises in reality the expression of a need (of a 'social volition') to redefine the nature itself of food and the way in which we eat. The 'slow food' against the 'fast food', the local product and cooking versus the homologated products of the global market. In many cases even the procedure of exchange, marketing and purchase of products is debated and

practised in another way, going towards a direct relationship with the producer and a cooperative organisation to acquire in chains and social groups. We are dealing with phenomena concerning changes in lifestyles, ways of life and living times and involve as well how and what we eat, how food is produced, found and shared, how a convivial culture is set up. Besides presenting new configurations for dimension and extension, the processes under way tend to create entities structured and organised in new forms of network. These networks are sometime rooted in the popular history but also adapted to the contemporary context such as the 'slow food' movements which are related (through Arci and communist party headquarters) to the historical co-operation of the Italian political and social left together with the environmentalism and components of peasant co-operation. They also develop in completely new forms of network, such as the Groups for joint purchase (Gas: Gruppi di acquisto solidale), the Networks and the Districts of solidary economies related to forms of mutual credit and ethical finance. These networks directly follow routes for social reappropriation of the distributing and trading process (questioning the ruling intermediation agencies) and arrive to tackle even radical problems concerning the nature of production (its contents, its methods and subjects) aroused by redefining the relationship between production and consumption. In the same way the environmentalist components of such experiences tend to redefine the nature of the

product through the process of bioagriculture, but the networks pose the subjects of biodiversity and of the 'differences' in a wider and more radical way. Thus social processes and these networks bring about elements of general theory on economic fundamentals and lifestyles, outlining plans of new economy at least for primary production and its commercialisation. First of all they mingle and they actively collaborate with the cultures which criticise and propose an alternative to the ruling models of development present in the world (in this sense it is increasingly clear that they are leaving their niche). In particular the culture of diversity, of how local and distinctive productions are important and valuable, which permeates the quality research and the experiences of another consumption and another trade, share a fundamental common knot with the 'alter-globalist' social movements that express alternative policy lines to the processes of neoliberal globalisation as well as to the single market/thought structuring them. Thus the change in social subjectivity we are pointing out turns out to be capable of structuring networks resulting in cultures, alliances and relationships that interact with production experimentation and arrives also to define a 'prescriptive route' inside these relationships, which further shows how the actors' networks are potentially capable of covering a non marginal role (deeply rooted in shared rules) in the relationship between lifestyles, critical consumption and local quality production. The prescriptive route concerns a definition and 'decreeing' shared by and between many social, economical and institutional actors certifying the product, its origin, how it is produced

and exchanged. All this consolidated in clear 'codes' that constitute a new rural economy which also expresses a more general and significant 'culture of land' and a better exploitation of the creative work of the people producing on the land, in the territory, as well as an alliance between conscious social networks and producers round municipal spaces to reproduce territorial values and to repopulate and live the territory.

Reference is made in particular to the thought and action of Luigi Vigorelli, an extraordinary figure (already mentioned at the beginning as a 'mark' of reference) and of his working group (unfortunately not his review which is now possessed by very different people) continuing his action through the movement 'Terra e Libertà/Critical Wine' together with the networks which have collaborated with this centre of initiative.

The first foundation of the local product 'statute' is the certification of the production/territory bond, that is the Municipal name. The other hinge of the decreeing, which concerns more properly the process of exchange and commercialisation, is the 'Source Price'.

These proposals and practices, which are increasingly spreading, allow to explain 'the complex system of social and environmental relations which are expressed in the goods' and to search for other responsible and effective configurations in the processes of exploitation of local quality productions carried out in the territory.

Obviously this phenomenon closely relates with the more general and structural topic of land improvement and it is clear as well that the networks of social, economic and basic institutional actors are

correlated in a process of endogenous regeneration of the territory.