



## Urbanistica n. 126

January-April 2005

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Received books

## A strategy for being effective

Bruno Gabrielli

The always weak credibility of urban planning has produced new instruments, or, perhaps, new names: diverse families of strategic and operative plans, of urban design imported from France and numerous other sources.

Beginning from 1998, the municipal administration of Genoa has given life to the 'City Plan': another name for identifying the same object, which is the plan, or its strategic/operative phase. As for myself, I think it is opportune to refer to this experience for its usefulness to the theory and practice of urban planning, having the benefit of being a privileged observer as the Assessor of Urban Planning for the Municipality.

In Italy and Europe there are various 'philosophies' of strategic plans. While in France and, in a different manner, in Spain, it is a matter of an urban design that comes to be realized, in Italy it is often a long term 'vision', placed in a context of complex strategies, interregional, in which the formation of operative instruments brings about results of unverified (and often un-verifiable) feasibility.

The 'City Plan' of Genoa is a rough but 'effective' instrument, certainly insufficiently sophisticated, that is traced back to hundreds of files of 'actions' almost all brought to completion. It seems evident to me that a Plan so configured is not an alternative to zoning regulations: it constitutes its strategic realization, and therefore the PRG represents the necessary 'frame' for the urban process of regulating land use.

The fact is that the 'City Plan' has not only 'urbanistic' contents, but is an integrated plan whose

operative actions are also social and economic. Below the 'actions' of physical, social and economic intervention, was an idea for the development of the city that called for the gathering of all of the inhabitants' forces, institutional and otherwise. One cannot forget that Genoa, being the seat of State-supported and heavy industries, is the one that perhaps has suffered the most among Italian cities from the post-industrial crisis. One fact is especially telling: in 1966 the Municipality had 847,000 inhabitants, and today there are about 630,000. This loss was barely compensated by a light growth of the metropolitan area. The industrial crisis was followed by the loss of important tertiary activities: Genoa lost headquarters for Eridania, Shell, the Società di Assicurazione, Italia di Navigazione, etc. This crisis has ended, but certainly left serious wounds. The 'City Plan' counted on an involvement that did not take place: the 'Development Committee' formed by the Mayor and of which the Region, Province, Chamber of Commerce, Labours and entrepreneurs associations, and the University were members, did not work.

I believe that one can claim, saving further verification, that the employment crisis, so severe in the 1970s and 1980s, is stopped today precisely as an effect of the administrative actions to relaunch the city, with the fundamental contribution of three great events: the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America with the Columbus Exposition in 1992, the G8 meeting in 2001, and Genoa's being the European Capital of Culture in 2004. While the first event has enriched the city with an area of the highest quality for leisure time (Renzo Piano's project), the second and the third have served to

bring about, at least in part, the 'City Plan'. It regards the activation of a program of large scale urban maintenance, on the one hand, and on the other the carrying out of a program of new interventions, centered above all on the museological reorganization of such sites as the Museum of the Sea and Navigation, the great axis of Via Garibaldi (with the amplification of Palazzo Rosso and Palazzo Bianco, with the annexation of the piano nobile of Palazzo Tursi), to the total remaking of the GAM (Gallery of Modern Art) in Nervi and the maritime museum in Pegli. This program of maintenance has involved above all the historic center with the remaking and pedestrianization of streets and piazzas, and with the 'painted facade' operation (described elsewhere in this publication). What one finds today is a city renewed, with a strong desire to reinforce the results, also through the opening of new, very creative shops and nightspots in the historic center.

If these are the facts visible to anyone's eyes, I believe it is of interest to know the 'inside' story as to how they came about. In the first place was the financing. It is necessary to say that the Municipality was very prudent to participate in all of the public (Urban 1 and Urban 2) and ministerial announcements (Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Public Works with PRU, PRUSST, Neighborhood Contracts, etc.), thus drawing a notable amount of financing, that was in addition to that allocated earlier by the government for G8 and then for 2004. Also the contributions of 'sponsors' were notable (in particular by the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo and by the Cassa di Risparmio di Genova e Imperia, as well as private contributors).

In the second place there

was the organizational municipal 'machine': a nucleus of city officials that did all they could in an exemplary manner and were therefore of fundamental value for carrying out the work. In the third place the collaboration between the Region, the Province, the Chamber of Commerce, etc. produced together a great productive effort. It must be added that the contributions of the Superintendency, the Office of Public Works (especially during G8), and the various builders associations were fundamental to the outcomes. Also, the direction of the Prefect with regard to the work for G8 was essential in its turn. Finally, an awareness of the urban heritage was a significant factor in all of the projects carried out, so that it was possible to obtain quality results without committing too many errors during the realization of the work.

The City Plan has privileged the historic center, so much that an *Integrated Operative Plan* was drawn up and has been carried out in large part today. It reflects a conscious and broadly accepted choice that the city in its totality is not able to recover from the crisis that culminated in the 1980s, if a process of renewal is not begun within the historic center, considered simultaneously a serious handicap for the entire city due to its degradation, and a box of treasures enclosed within the heart of the city due its structure, history, and substance.

While in many other European cities the operations of improvement have taken into account interventions of urban restructuring, and therefore of demolition and reconstruction, in Genoa it is a matter of urban interventions of 'revealing' an inexhaustible cultural heritage. The strategy of

restoration has principally treated public space. The parceling of ownership has suggested the adoption of the Barcelona method, in which improvement of public space encourages private intervention on the buildings. This has included the paving and illumination of streets and the creation of an extensive pedestrian area, while there remains to be realized a pedestrian route that will go from the Lanterna to the Brignole train station (over 6 km). The public space work has addressed also the facades of the buildings, that while belonging to private persons, constitute the most important part of the public 'scene'. Funds of 35-45% were given to the private proprietors of the buildings, obtaining extraordinary results with the improvement of the frescoed facades. The theme of accessibility has represented the most consistent call for spending. The historic quarter is not passable by private means, even if their polluting presence is in most parts tolerated. The only accessibility possible is public and there is no doubt that the realization of the subway that is underway, and of which four stations are planned in the historic center, will give a big impetus to the historic quarter itself. The line will go to the Brignole train station, and then continue toward the east (S. Martino hospital) and toward Valbisagno (the stadium and Staglieno cemetery). The socio-economic interventions were constituted in the creation of an incubator of business, that has given generous incentives for the opening of new commercial and artisanal businesses. One of the most worrying aspects of the deterioration of the historic center is the presence of too many shuttered storefronts, especially in the traditionally commercial streets, and

therefore the numerous reopenings owing to the role of the incentives offered by this incubator has revealed its decisive role in the rebirth of the historic center. Finally, the verification that the mechanism on the whole has worked is given by the increase in property values that, as depressed as they were, have risen unexpectedly. If their rise was hoped for, the measure of the increase is certainly worrisome, given that the countermeasures of which the public administration can avail it-self are substantially weak and therefore insufficient, being scarce enough the resources of intervention in the field of economic and public housing. This last annotation serves to conclude that each time an urban project is designed and realized, it requires careful evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages, or, if one prefers, the benefits and the costs that are involved.