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EDITORIAL

New Perspectives for EWT

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This issue of EcoWebTown will close the first phase of the magazine which up to now has aimed at exploring the effects sustainability on projects. Now sustainability permeates (or rather should permeate) every attempt to transform that which is. We have long reflected on how sustainability should be understood, a question which becomes more elusive as we try to more clearly define its constructive dimensions, as the complexity of our natural urban metabolisms entwine with its economic and social dynamics, up to and including bio-policy, the Guattarian dimensions of existential territory that refer us back to our way of living and perceiving the world we have built.

We have become more aware how much the linearity of the cognitive and projective procedures of a positivist origin that flood the literature on sustainability fall short both as respects the fertile laboriousness that must be part of the planning process, called on to perform a critical reconciliation of the reasoning of sustainability with those of our senses, and of the quality and the feasibility of our intervention for the city and the territory. And we also realise what extent *Sustainability Sensitive Urban Design* is in debt to the totalizing acceptance of the project, that cannot and must not be hollowed out by a constant introduction of the omnipotent technologies of sustainability, whose only aim is to improve the city's functional and environmental performance, as the increasing attention of the Web, to the interaction between the physical and digital worlds accompanied by the unstoppable extension of the Internet of things, cannot, in absolute, substitute the critical nature of the design stage, though this takes on the noble objective of contributing to increasing the spread of intelligence allowing for more informed and aware participation in the processes.

With the next issue we shall open a second phase in which there will be a more accentuated focus on the theme of the urban planning, though it can be taken for granted that the principles of sustainability and those of the effective management made possible by *data-driven* digital

systems will continue to be important and these latter will allow for the direct monitoring regarding the effects generated by the interventions.

The fact is that the time has come for a deep and total rethink of urban planning. The deep crisis that has recently struck, in Italy and elsewhere is clear to all. I feel one can safely say that the crisis is largely due to constitutive defects, such as excessive rigidity, cumbersomeness and formalism, aggravated by a prolonged economic recession that has discouraged medium- and long-term urban investment. For this and other reasons urban planning has become increasingly less adept at seeking consensus and the operative necessity of political realities which are more and more influenced by the economic situation and tendentially addressed to favouring projects move into the operative phase immediately regardless of whether they are compatible with any overall program.

For “Urban Projects” to recover credibility, opposing the eclipse of a method which is still indispensable in conferring added value to the transformation of cities, one must critically revise the thought system as well as the instruments used in its implementation. It is necessary now to assume a more realistic perspective of *very small projects*, with a multiplicity of separate interventions of small- and medium-sized dimensions, built up from the base rather than ambitious large scale projects and entire portions of cities promoted by central authorities or by global financial markets. From this perspective one must favour as far as possible *processes to gradually adapt* the existent, through which one can absorb without too much fuss the momentous changes brought about by incumbent technological, social and economic innovations of the cities of the third millennium.

So Urban Planning should be reconfigured into a flexible strategy supported by a medium-term overall vision, agreed on and capable of giving an overall sense to the transformation of the existent but not it must not be coercive. Moreover it should be articulated into a variety of conjunctural interventions varying in scale, congruent with the vision and determined according to changing circumstances and the several opportunities offered by the context. Even more realistically, we should keep in mind the growing inadequacy and the insurmountable difficulties in recent Italian policy which is clearly incapable of synthesizing the several positions concerning the city, all are in sterile conflict among themselves and increasingly disinterestedly aware of measuring themselves with the future. The scenario for urban planning tends toward even further changes. For the medium- and long-term future vision must do without advance prefiguration, the price to pay for having to do without an initial agreed on coherent framework will be very high. This unifying vision will have to be constructed while the work is *in progress*, adapting at least the most significant interventions in the program (those on which sufficient consensus was found) with the overall picture, thus acquiring an open guiding image, which cannot be predetermined, but one to refer to while discussing future interventions. New projects will however need to determine their relations with the whole, explaining the possible added value or on the other hand the divergence and the contradictions that generate the inefficiencies and waste for potential development.

The nature of urban planning is also undergoing a definite change, moving from a prefigured projection of the future rigidly defined in an authorial and sometimes even despotic way as championed by classic modernity or a misunderstood imposition of sustainability, to an *operative and morphologically qualified stimulus*, through which we can dialogically initiate a multiplicity of transformations in the existent urban landscape, tendentially *autopoietic* and *self-balancing*, framed in an overall, dynamic and adaptable vision, built co-evolutively as respects the development of the city.

Urban planning, in this new perspective of *self-catalytic city* (De La Pena 2013), tends to further redefine itself preferably as *a multi-sectorial, multi-actorial and trans-scale strategy capable of bringing about a flexible combining of infrastructure networks and high quality enzymatic spaces that will trigger a variety of strategic interventions of differing dimensions accompanied by an set of complementary micro-actions that will bring about the changes in the landscape* (Clementi, Pozzi, 2015). But these interventions will generally be of very heterogeneous dimensions: large (few), intermediate (many) and small (very many). All, as far as possible, will aim to improve the conditions of the functionality and the quality spread through the context, offering more equal access to local social welfare and to a more stimulating use of the public spaces.

At any rate, any new Urban Planning will be called on to breakdown into their various parts the several ways in which the principles of sustainability of development will be carried out, reconciling the needs of environmental, social and economic sustainability in its transformations and reflectively valorising its coherence as regards the final objectives of quality settlement and landscape of the urban transformations. In some cases the multiplicity and the complexity of the dimensions in play will favour using the extraordinary operative potential of the new digital technologies. These will be useful in better calibrating solutions that have been selected because they are more functionally efficient, more socially accepted and will provide more fertile effects on the local economy.

In this perspective, the new form of urban planning comes into being at the operative junction of Sustainability Sensitive Urban Design and Land Smart Approach, to congeal finally as EcoWeb Urban Design capable of incorporating critically its several constructive dimensions that, as we have stated previously, go well beyond the environment and digital technology. Among the many consequences of this way of understanding Urban Planning is the need to change conventional city planning, currently mired in procedures and concepts that are too slow and bureaucratic, that dampen planning and above all have shown themselves incapable of instilling the expectations and hopes for the future that looms.

New Urban Planning must become the expression of a sustainable development strategy that looks to our cities' future with trust, promoting wherever possible agreement on the few urban projects which will, at one and the same time, be important for urban planning, landscape, social and economic goals and as they guarantee the sustainable development of existing heritage. Rules will be well understood and easily followed both in their imposition and in their evaluation of the interventions in question.

Zoning Plans, both strategic valence and at the same time conformative, will as a consequence tend to take on the form of a Dynamic masterplan of prioritized urban projects, correctly inserted in the landscape, accompanied by preliminary technical, administrative, economic and social feasibility studies. Together with Urban Projects conceived to be adaptable and evolutive, there will be prescriptive and appropriate norms to regulate the transformation of the existing, aiming at an overall quality in the interventions and with carefully chosen and easily applicable implementation directions.

These themes will be at the center of the second phase of the EWT Magazine. Our aim will be to look into their significance and above all the fertility of the research on new types of urban planning for the cities of the 21st century.

So in this issue we will present a variety of material to initiate our discussion on urban planning with a case study that is particularly interesting for many reasons. We shall look at Ljubljana, an emerging city which received the European Prize of the Urbanists for its

project to requalify the banks of the Ljubjanica, the European Prize for Urban Public Spaces and above all, the important 2016 European Green Capital Award. Choosing to place the well-known architect Jurij Kobe high in the local administration with relevant responsibilities for policy was not Ljubljana's only secret, Barcelona used a similar move in its glorious 1980s with Oriol Bohigas as the city prepared for the Olympics, but it has allowed them to draw intelligently from the resources of architecture to imagine and give form to the future of the city. They have also demonstrated that the themes of sustainability can be refined with renewed sensitivity as regards architecture and city planning, precisely by placing the need for quality at the center of the urban transformation, together with pleasure and the healthiness of the living environment, the strategy adopted tends to complete the design laid out almost a century earlier by the great architect Jože Plečnik.

As Domenico Potenza, the editor of this issue, has noted, in Ljubljana "urban planning is realised starting from an unceasing work of architectonic planning (...) and the interventions of reorganising planned by Plečnik, seem to constantly send one back to a wider design planned for the city, as if they were autonomous parts of a large scale urban program constantly searching for its overall equilibrium". It is the proof that one can take the road advocated by EWT, a road where the culture of planning is capable of bringing together the quality of architecture and the current social demands for environmental sustainability. It can also allow us to reconnect the threads of centuries of visions and ideas about the city which are still current, notwithstanding the profound metamorphosis of contemporary cities. And finally, the relationship between the overall vision and the single interventions need not always have a derivation in a single direction, these interventions can become occasions to experiment unusual reciprocal interdependent relations that enrich both.

So a large part of this issue is dedicated to the reconstruction of the paradigmatic story of Ljubljana, interpreted by the main actors that operate inside the municipal administration and the prestigious local school of architecture. Then there is the section on studies and research, in which Filippo Angelucci concludes his voyage through Italy's universities, completing his reconnaissance on the state of technological research in the area of sustainability. The inaugural balance that emerges is very interesting, above all for the willingness demonstrated by all the academic groups to give a transparent account of their activity and of the results they have obtained, thus establishing a horizon of common respect along which it becomes possible to identify the strong points of current research and future progress in the field.

Let us hope that in the near future it will become possible to extend this critical evaluation to architecture and urban planning, so far apparently not very concerned with sustainability questions.