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Urbanists and the Environment Between Technique and Politics: The Case of Italy from the Sixties to the Present

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Beginning in the Sixties, a trend in town-planning studies known as “reformist” developed in Italy, largely revolving around the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (national institute for town-planning studies). This trend marked a deep change in land management concepts. Its adherents sought to “reform” – rather than merely rationalize – the economic growth to limit its negative social and environment impact. This was to be achieved by controlling the real estate market and the regulation of land rent processes. Thanks to the strong ties they formed with public administrations and left-wing parties, many exponents of this trend became leading figures in the public debate on cities of the Seventies and early Eighties, and were responsible for many institutional decisions adopted in this period at the national as well as the local level (e.g. the land law of 1977 and the ten-year housing plan of 1978). In the Eighties and Nineties, in spite of the spread of a private conception of urban planning – the so-called “contrattata” (negotiated) urban planning – the exponents of this trend were still able to carry out programs and plans – e.g. in Bologna, Roma, and Naples – aimed at safeguarding the physical integrity of the land. This was achieved through a juridical and legislative evolution (as in the case of the Galasso law of 1986 and subsequent measures) that provided public administrations with new instruments for the protection of natural resources and the landscape, even within urban areas.

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Gabriella Corona

During the second half of the 1980's, the evolution of legislation provided urbanists with normative support for the protection and sustainable use of non-built-up areas in the Italian territory. Notable examples include Act no. 183 of 1989 on soil defense and Law 10 of 1991, which ruled that the urbanization plans of towns with more than



50,000 inhabitants should include a section about the use of renewable energy sources.

These laws had a significant impact on town-planning. The real turning point, however, was the passing of the Galasso Act (n. 431) of 8 August 1985, entitled “Urgent measures for the safeguarding of areas of special environmental interest”. This law grants the environment the character of a public resource. According to the previous legislation, which dated back to an act of 1939, the exploitation of an individual resource having landscape or environmental value could be limited, for example, by restricting building. The Galasso law, instead, put whole portions of the Italian territory under protection as intrinsically and globally valuable, and placed a general restriction on building along sea and lake banks within three-hundred meters from the shoreline, along the banks of rivers and torrents, on the highest slopes of mountains, on glaciers and volcanoes, and in archaeological and forest areas. Furthermore, the Galasso law found application not only in landscape plans approved by the Regions, but also in town plans with special emphasis on environmental concerns.

Thus, following the approval of the Galasso law environmental themes began to play an increasingly important role in town planning, and the law was featured more and more often in the public debate and in the theoretical and historiographic theories developed by urbanists. A remarkable example is provided by the cultural and planning politics of the National Institute of Urbanistics. In his introduction to the Institute’s eighteenth congress, held in 1986, its president, Edoardo Salzano, discussed environmental subjects and stressed that urbanists cannot uphold a conception of urban development as indefinite expansion. Planning policies, argued Salzano, should regard land as a resource for growth, and the historical and natural qualities of the environment as values to be preserved and promoted to help society to grow. On the occasion of the institution of the Ministry of the Environment in 1986, *Urbanistica informazioni*, one of the two journals published by the National Institute of Urbanistics (the other was *Urbanistica*), published a debate that revealed the high degree of environmental awareness of a significant part of Italian urbanistic literature. The editorial of the July issue of

the same year stressed that environmental politics should permeate public action all over Italy.¹

Planning against the destructive consequences of the market

This awareness of environmental problems that spread among urbanists in the second half of the 1980's was actually the outcome of a long and complex evolution, which eventually intertwined with certain aspects of the public debate on cities. From the Sixties onward, a trend in urban studies designated as "reformist" arose in Italy. This trend – whose representatives were mostly affiliated to the National Institute of Urbanistics – reflected a major change in conceptions of land management. The approach that had prevailed up to then aimed at rationalizing urban growth without challenging it and without addressing the structural causes of the damage and distortion it caused. Advocates of the new approach, instead, intended to reform the process of urban development. Notably, they sought to limit its negative impact by controlling the real estate market and the process of rent formation. The rise of this new approach to planning was to lead to a deep cultural change in conceptions of land management. To quote Federico Oliva: "The cultural conception of the discipline, which so far has been seen as an essentially technical discipline, and neutral as regards politics, has assumed a more political and cultural dimension, as well as an ethical one, and adopted a more open attitude, and one that is more responsive to the needs expressed by society".² In the second half of the Seventies and during the Eighties, thanks to the strong ties they established with public administrations and left-wing parties, many exponents of this trend of urban studies

¹ "Politica dell'ambiente o politica del territorio", Editorial, in *Urbanistica Informazioni* 88, year XV, July-August 1986, p. 2.

² The quotation is from F. Oliva, "Le città e i piani", in *Cinquant'anni di urbanistica in Italia, 1942-1992*, G. Campos Venuti, F. Oliva (eds), Laterza, Roma-Bari 1993, p. 57.

(Guido Alborghetti, Felicia Bottino, Pier Luigi Cervellati, Giuseppe Campos Venuti, Edoardo Detti, Vezio De Lucia, Edoardo Salzano, Alberto Todros, and many others)³ became the protagonists of the public debate on cities and played an important role in many institutional decisions taken both at the national and the local level.

From the Seventies onward, the urbanists of the National Institute of Urbanistics began to take direct action to promote the approving of urban development plans wherever they had not yet been approved, and to oppose projects favoring profiteers. After the Bologna congress of 1970, presided over by Edoardo Detti, the National Institute of Urbanistics had entered a new phase marked by a more resolute approach to social and labor problems. Indeed, it is only in those years that awareness began to grow that the reconstruction plans adopted in towns – especially the big ones – after the end of World War II had resulted in the tearing down of historical centers, the privatization of panoramic areas, the expansion of suburbs, and the building of automobile routes to the detriment of railways.

Urbanists adhering to this trend began to realize that the “use of land for building” had been the motor of Italian development in the years of the “economic miracle” and one of the main factors in the alteration of the country’s environmental balances. The gradual concentration of population and the increasing demand for building areas made the construction sector one of the most lucrative.⁴ Thus, in postwar Italy urban agglomerations expanded without the least regard for collective needs, the impact of demographic density on land, or the social function of areas that still retained their natural features. According to Giuseppe Campos Venuti, the expansion of Italian

³ Guido Alborghetti and Alberto Todros later became members of parliament, Felicia Bottino a chairman of the committee for urbanistics of the regional government of Emilia Romagna, Giuseppe Campos Venuti and Pier Luigi Cervellati city council committee chairmen in Bologna, Edoardo Salzano a city council committee chairman in Venice, and Vezio De Lucia a city councilor in Lazio.

⁴ See G. Dematteis’ fine essay “Gli anni del “miracolo economico”: il territorio polarizzato”, in *Storia dell’Italia repubblicana*, 2, *La trasformazione dell’Italia: sviluppo e squilibri*, 1. *Politica, economia, società*, Einaudi, Torino 1995, pp. 661-709. See also F. Indovina (ed.), *Lo spreco edilizio*, Marsilio Editori, Venezia 1972.

towns of the economic miracle followed a perverse trend that Italian rationalist architects called an “oil stain pattern”; they spread, that is, in all directions, extending all over the countryside without reserving the necessary space for parks and services within their perimeter.

In the urbanistic debate, the “environmental question” – understood as the need to limit the destructive effects of an urbanization that did not take account of natural equilibriums and landscape – mainly appeared in the context of discussions on the planning and regeneration of towns. The failure of an urbanistic reform introduced by the minister of public works Fiorentino Sullo in 1962 had left land, a fundamental resource, inadequately protected by the law and hence to the mercy of distorted and harmful uses.⁵ Besides causing political rifts, notably in the Christian Democrat Party and the Italian Socialist Party, whose members did not share the same views about the law,⁶ its rejection had a deep impact on Italian public life and contributed to the reinforcing of the individual and familial models of acquisition on which contemporary Italian society was to found itself to make up for the State’s growing incapability of satisfying and regulating collective needs.⁷

Over the following years, the theme of urban reform remained central in part of the national public debate. The discussion on this issue – which in subsequent years began to go hand in hand with that of housing – extended beyond the restricted milieu of urbanists and the National Institute of Urbanistics to significant parts of Italy’s political world, institutions, and civil society, such as the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the three national unions, and the Association of

⁵ The law modified the land ownership regime, ruling that only part of the built-up areas would remain private property, while the towns would appropriate the remaining building and prospective building areas. The towns would then grant the land to private individuals for the uses provided for in the urban plans. On the contents of the law, see E. Salzano, *Fondamenti di Urbanistica: la storia e la norma*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2003, pp. 119-122.

⁶ A. Becchi, “La legge Sullo sui suoli”, in *Meridiana. Rivista di storia e scienze sociali*, 29, 1997, pp. 107-134.

⁷ G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta*, Donzelli, Roma 2003, especially pp. 28-29.

Italian Municipalities. Their exponents demanded the legal separation of property rights from building rights and the reserving of the latter exclusively to public actors – municipalities, regional governments, and the State –, who were to regulate it through planning.

Far from being mere doctrinal exercises, these debates had a strong impact on reality and became part of the cultural background of many young people. Textbooks illustrating the debate on planning as a public activity were being studied with increasing frequency, along with the classics.⁸ They were used in architecture faculties and became the focus of many university courses during those years. *Amministrare l'urbanistica* by Giuseppe Campos Venuti, a beacon for most reformist urbanists, became one of the most influential textbooks for the young people who took courses in urban planning at architecture faculties. The book, published by Einaudi in 1967, analyzed laws and planning methods in Italy, and is strongly influenced by the views held by many Italian urbanists in those years. It argued that urban policies should not merely strive for a balance between functions and specializations. They can also help to make up for dysfunctions in the real estate regime and address the problem of land rent, which had attained dramatic proportions in Italy. At the time, the real estate regime was inspired by the principle of absolute property rights: owners had the right to freely exploit their property and any attempt to limit their rights was to be regarded as illegitimate. Many Italian urbanists and jurists joined forces against land rent, as did the left-wing parties, for which it was to become a major terrain of political struggle in the years to come.

As early as the Sixties, politically committed students of architecture had strongly advocated the creation of new professional figures, more rooted in society and attuned to the new needs of local institutions. This request reflected the rise of a new culture, the quest for a knowledge with deeper roots in the world of labor and striving for a deep change in life conditions in towns. In the early Seventies,

⁸ To mention only a few, M. Weber, *La città*, Milano 1854. H. Bernoulli, *La città e il suolo urbano*, Milano 1951. L. Mumford, *La città della storia*, Milano 1963. J. Gottmann, *Megalopolis*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1964.

the curricula of urbanistics courses in university adopted a cultural and teaching approach inspired by a radically changed vision of the architect's role in society. Rather than self-employed professionals or creators of monumental works, architects were now seen as operators in technical and political structures whose role was to transform and manage a given territory. This change was not merely a result of the need to implement the new regional laws, and of the renewal and reformation of town administrations; it also, and above all, reflected a new awareness of environmental problems. An awareness stemming from the crisis of some of the central myths of industrial society, such as that of the inexhaustibility of natural resources and the coinciding of economic growth and the improving of social conditions.

Indeed, under several regards the problems of towns were part and parcel of the political and institutional debate of the 1970's. The conception of urbanistics as public practice was grounded in the trust that the Social Democrat reformist tradition placed in politics as a means to correct the destructive tendencies of the market. The economic programs adopted in this decade – as outlined, for example, in the *Rapporto preliminare al programma economico nazionale 1971-1975* or the *Progetto 80* – were aimed at re-establishing the balance between areas of the Italian peninsula with different growth rates; a balance that was no longer seen merely from the standpoint of economic development, but also in terms of the management of urban growth. The new national planning models strove to outline “town systems” to attenuate the most serious consequences of spontaneous urban expansion.⁹

Furthermore, in the postwar period the “southern question” had increasingly been represented as a “territorial question”, i.e., as an ensemble of economic, social, and environmental issues arising from

⁹ Salzano, *Fondamenti di Urbanistica* cit., p. 216. In a recent interview, Giorgio Ruffolo, one of the main promoters of Progetto 80, argues that “one of the fundamental elements of our programming was ‘land’, which ten years later one began to call ‘environment’. We of Progetto 80 had said very clearly that Italy needed land politics to keep market decisions from destroying and devastating the environment”. (“Riformismo e programmazione. ‘Meridiana’ incontra Giorgio Ruffolo”, in *Meridiana. Rivista di storia e scienze sociali*, 50-51, 2004, p. 216.

the crisis of a centuries-old system of relations between rural and urban society, between town and country. According to authoritative opinions, the environmental degradation of large urban areas – along with unemployment – was the main problem of southern Italy, and one that could only be solved through the intervention of the State. Martin Melosi defines the rise of the metropolis and the end of rural society – an epochal shift that affected all of the Western world from the 1950's onward – as the “urban crisis in the age of ecology”. This transformation, while it regarded all of Italy, had a more violent social and environmental impact on its southern regions, due to the imbalances and belated development that had long characterized their history. In the Italian south, people had abandoned the mountains and hill agriculture. Infrastructures were inadequate. The managing of hydraulic resources was problematic. Many had migrated abroad. New urban aggregations had formed, mostly spontaneous and unplanned (in 1978, only 193 southern municipalities out of 2522 had an urban development plan). All this had highly destructive repercussions on society and the environment.

The recovery of historical centers

The public character of territorial planning was only one of the elements in the national debate that attracted reformist urbanists' attention. There was another one that exerted a strong influence on their approach. A new conception of the city was being evolved, one that was no longer founded on unbridled expansion, but on restoration and reclaiming. The issue of historical centers was drawing special attention. Until the mid twentieth century, the safeguarding and reclaiming of town centers had been essentially viewed in terms of adapting their urban fabric to the needs of modernization. To this end, neighborhoods were torn down, cut through, or thinned out, and buildings of special historical or artistic value were isolated and granted the status of “monuments”. This conception of town centers, shared by Italian urbanists as well as large sectors of the Italian public opinion, changed drastically in the Sixties. In their introductory speech to the meeting of the National Association of

Historical-Artistic Centers held at Gubbio in 1960, Antonio Cederna and Mario Manieri Elia proposed the extension of the concept of “monument” to the whole historical fabric of town centers. Urban development plans, they argued, should provide for the removing from the old parts of towns of all activities that will alter their structure. The “Carta di Gubbio” (Gubbio Charter), as the motion approved at the end of the meeting was called, advocated an even more extensive approach. The safeguarding of a historical center, the document stated, should not merely regard buildings, but also those who live and work in them. Reclaiming plans should guarantee the survival of the social structures of a neighborhood by allowing its inhabitants to return to their renovated buildings after being temporarily relocated. The modes of action envisaged by the Carta di Gubbio soon met with many obstacles, such as long durations and the inadequacy of ordinary administrative tools to allow the temporary relocation of the inhabitants of historical neighborhoods and their activities. Still, the Carta set down fundamental guidelines for the “culture of heritage protection”, which Salvatore Settis indicates as one of the prime achievements of Italian identity.

During the Sixties and Seventies there were quite a few instances of political actions reflecting urbanists’ new interest in the safeguarding of territories, although these actions were limited to certain specific features: notably, historical centers and their surroundings, hills, and rural landscapes. It will suffice to mention the many cultural and political struggles to prevent the demolishing of historical centers; Ranuccio Bandinelli and Luigi Piccinato’s planning of the historical center of Siena and its surrounding slopes; urbanist and committee chairman Edoardo Detti and Giuseppe Campos Venuti’s plans in defense, respectively, of the hills of Firenze and Bologna; Giovanni Astengo’s plan for Assisi; the plan for the reclaiming of the historical center of Matera; the Venezia area plan; and the Fori project in Rome.

The real beacon for the new culture of heritage preservation, however, was the plan for the reclaiming of the historical center of Bologna carried out by Pier Luigi Cervellati, chairman of the town housing committee since 1970. The plan for the historical center of Bologna was adopted in 1969 as a variant to the general urban devel-

opment plan of 1958. It was entirely drawn up by Pier Luigi Cervellati, Roberto Scannavini, and Felicia Bottino in the offices of the City Hall, and approved in 1971. The philosophy informing this plan was the opposite of one envisaging the tearing down of buildings and the relocating of the population. The plan opposed wasteful building and affirmed a concept of urban development that did not necessarily coincide with an increase in the consumption of space and land. This conception was founded of a view of historical town centers as “inhabited organisms”, an integration of population and artifact. A historical center is all that remains of a pre-industrial city, and it still has what a contemporary city lacks. The restoring of historical centers was prompted by a need for stability and historical continuity in the relationship between society and the urban environment.

The method followed in the reclaiming of the city center of Bologna was inspired by Saverio Muratori and Gianfranco Caniggia’s studies on typological analysis. According to this approach, a territory is not the casual result of spontaneous construction and transformation, nor a sum of individual unrelated actions. Rather, it is the result of an environmental structuring process. It is the urbanist’s task to analyze and decrypt this process to adequately plan reclaiming actions.

This approach – and therein lies its distinctiveness – takes account of the fact that the urban fabric is stratified, being the result of a historical process, and hence avoids creating caesuras in its diachronic continuity.

Plans based on this approach were also an alternative to the logic of the real estate market and put a curb on speculation. Pier Luigi Cervellati’s plan for Bologna, adopted in 1977, strove to include nature in urban conservation and salvaging. It was informed by a conception of cities as an integration of nature and artifact, environment and society.

Cervellati’s plan was conceived in the context of a wider debate on urban regeneration that had its roots in the urbanistic culture of the Sixties, but showed innovative aspects. In those years, a deep change was taking place in the conception of historical town centers. Rather than cultural heritage, they were now being seen as a living resource. By this time, the issue of historical centers had gained prominence

outside of specialist milieus, taking on a wider political and cultural significance. To speak of “historical centers” was to speak of historical and environmental identities, the laying out of urban areas, housing politics, and the quality of living conditions in cities. Pier Luigi Cervellati pointed out that not only the building of new houses did not bring any benefit to the Italian population, because far more were being built than needed; it also determined a rise in rents and triggered processes that led to the destruction of historical centers.

The issue of housing was a hotly debated one in those years, and remained deeply felt during the whole decade. We should not forget that everywhere in late-Sixties Italy there had been a coming together of urbanistics, politics, and social struggles around issues such as high rents, public residential building, services, and environmental quality. This coming together marked a possibly unique phase in the history of the Italian republic, one that witnessed great popular mobilization, more or less violent forms of conflict, and a stronger participation of the people in the political decisions of town administrations regarding land management and the use of local resources. The urban struggles that broke out in various Italian cities, such as Milan, Turin, Rome, and Naples, were aimed at the improving of living conditions and a more equal access to collective property. These struggles were a reaction to the structure of the town-land system as determined by processes of economic growth in the postwar period: from industrial polarization to the concentration of migratory flows, from urban expansion to the discrepancy between a high demand for middle and middle-low rent residences and an offer prevalently consisting of luxury homes. Besides having recourse to more violent forms of urban struggle, such as the occupation of houses or the “self-reduction” of rents, the housing movement pressed for the application of existing urban legislation. The movement, which was directed and organized by neighborhood committees, often pushed town administrations to comply with the law, building affordable housing and setting up social services. The urban struggle movement was influenced by the contemporary student and union movements, which in this period were going through a remarkably conflictual phase. Notably, at Turin the protests of shack dwellers and squatters had significant connec-

tions with workers' struggles in the city. More in general, the Italian 1968 movement and the "hot autumn" of 1969 had been marked by the unions' special attention to housing issues such as high rents, the struggle against building and real estate speculation, the need for new State-funded housing, and more efficient town-planning policies.

Important legislation was passed in those years to address these problems. Act 865 of 1971 on housing carried further a reform already begun in the previous decade, with Act 167 of 1962, by regulating the programming of public action and expropriation for reasons of public utility. Although positions differed, all agreed that intensive building was not a solution for the dramatic social and territorial imbalances that movements for housing rights were denouncing. There was a strong gap between the demand and supply of housing. The 200,000 homes built, on average, every year were mostly holiday or luxury residences, and were not located in areas where demand was most urgent.

Urbanistics and austerity

The struggle against the expansion of towns converged with that for the reclaiming of existing buildings, and with a trend dubbed "Urbanistics of Austerity", inspired by Communist leader Enrico Berlinguer's politics. Berlinguer did not find a wide and long-lasting consensus within his Party, although he was inspired by approaches already advocated previously by some leaders of major Social Democratic parties north of the Alps.¹⁰ Still, his political proposal stands as the loftiest and most convincing attempt to outline an alternative model of development to face the crisis of a system based on the boundless increase of individual consumption; a crisis determined by the coming to the fore of former colonial peoples and countries on the global scene. Berlinguer argued that the Italian economic development could no longer be founded on the mere growth of private consumption. He advocated, instead, an austerity politics inspired by the principles of maximum general productivity, ration-

¹⁰ F. Barbagallo, *Enrico Berlinguer*, Carocci, Roma 2006, p. 295.

ality, rigor, justice, and the enjoyment of authentic resources, such as culture, education, health, and nature.¹¹ Those were the years of the energy crisis provoked by the rise in oil prices that hit all the main industrialized countries, including Italy, in 1974 and 1975, bringing on a phase of intense recession. Berlinguer's approach was connected to the quest for political legitimacy that he had been engaged in during the previous years, when the Communist leader laid the cultural foundation for the "historical compromise" (*compromesso storico*), seeking to find a common ground between the culture of 1968 and the popular components of the two larger Italian parties in the critique of the degenerative aspects of capitalism.

Berlinguer's political line was not merely one of various reactions of advanced capitalist societies to the imbalances of the world economic order in those years, of which the energy crisis was the most visible aspect. It was based on an in-depth critique of the capability of capitalism's quantitative expansion to improve the working conditions of the poorer classes and level out Italy's deep social and territorial inequalities, which capitalism had accentuated and, in some cases, even caused. In other words, Berlinguer's politics was meant as an instrument of social justice and an anti-capitalist solution to the economic, social, and ecological problems of those years. Given its aims, his politics also addressed in depth the issue of public morality.

Under this respect, Berlinguer's political line found strong political consensus and intellectual support in part of the Italian urbanistic tradition. Indeed, the theme of austerity, as we have seen, had long held sway in the Italian urbanist debate and in analyses of the effects of land rent. The defense of historical centers and natural resources, the support to public transportation against the expansion of private transportation, the struggle against the marginalization of the popular classes within the urban space, and the opposition to wasteful spending for luxury houses and holiday homes, had been the tenets of "territorialist" literature in Italy ever since the early postwar period. The

¹¹ This passage is in a speech that Enrico Berlinguer gave at a workers' assembly held in Milan on 30 January 1977 (P. Della Seta, E. Salzano, *L'Italia a sacco*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1993, p. 63). Barbagallo, *Enrico Berlinguer* cit., p. 513.

encounter of Berlinguer's austerity politics and urbanistics, however, placed the emphasis on the social and economic costs that a growth founded on the wasting of environmental and land resources was imposing on the collectivity. Thus, Italian environmentalist thought attained the peak of its clarity and maturity through its encounter with Berlinguer's politics of austerity and the urbanist debate. Thanks to this encounter, rather than being bound to a merely conservationist logic, it embraced a broader conception based on the notion of a balanced relationship between human activities and natural resources. This relationship was explored especially by Giuseppe Campos Venuti in his book *Urbanistica e austerità*, published in 1978.

Towns as ecosystems

The plan for the creation of the "Sistema direzionale orientale" in Rome's eastern suburb, put forward by the Communist party and certain components of Italian environmentalism, also played a significant role in the transition from a conception of towns founded on reclaiming to one viewing urban reality as a complex system of ecosystemic relations. The plan had been presented by a group of urban development specialists during a seminar of the Roman chapter of the Communist party. Its general aim was to give Rome's east suburbs a central role by relocating there offices and services in the city center. This would have determined a general reorganization of the city, decongesting the historical center and rescuing the east suburbs from their isolation by including them into a wide fabric of relationships. The project included a crucial section on the safeguarding of vital areas. It was not so much a matter of increasing the green areas of historical villas and parks, which accounted for a significant percentage of the total available green areas per inhabitant (5.77 sq. m out of 8.56), as of expanding neighborhood green, which accounted for a smaller percentage (2.82 per inhabitant), by reclaiming non-built-up areas. The general objective was to reorganize the whole territory of the city by creating a new extensive and disseminated green-area system. The debate on the Sistema direzionale orientale project witnessed the coming to maturity of a culture of land management where town-

planning merged with environmentalism, taking a different perspective than one of mere protection. Thanks to the combining of these different approaches, the environmental question was now beginning to be seen as a systemic issue, spanning the relations between society and nature, the functioning of urban realities, and a different conception of urban growth. The fundamental principle inspiring the project was that issues of urban sustainability arise from processes of expansion where natural resources are regarded as inert matter rather than resources, and per-capita land consumption increases at a rate that has no relationship with actual demographic growth. As regards Rome, per-capita land consumption decreased from 36 inhabitants per sq. m in 1954 to 218 in 1991; a frightening negative rate of growth that appears unaffected by the demographic slump.¹²

The plan did not envisage the reserving of isolated green areas within unlimited urban expansion; rather, it regarded land as a resource for urban growth. This conception of the city had very important political and cultural implications, because it no longer isolated environmentalism by opposing it to the world of production and the social and political forces representing it. Economic growth was no longer seen as incompatible with the safeguarding of the environment; rather, a sustainable pace had to be found for it.

The most significant example of the coming to the fore of an ecosystemic conception of system was the case of Naples. Going counter to the trend prevailing in other Italian big cities, in July 2004 Naples approved an urban development plan founded on the safeguarding of the physical integrity of its territory rather than on the principle of regulated expansion. The plan was the final outcome of a long and complex process that started with the adoption, during the previous decades, of a planning model founded on a conception of towns granting great importance to the productive character of nature and its deep synergy with society. In Naples, ever since the Seventies the environmental question had assumed more dramatic

¹² E. Capannelli, "Lo spreco delle aree non urbanizzate e le attività agricole", in *Roma. Il piano delle periferie. Materiali per un dibattito*, VV.AA. (eds), Edizioni L'ED, Roma 1993, p. 50.

proportions than in other Italian towns. Atmospheric and marine pollution was high, green areas were scarce, the city's territory was almost totally covered with buildings, and there were frequent phenomena of hydrogeological instability. Thus, the environmental question appeared as a matter of finding a sustainable balance between human activities and natural resources.

The historical phase that led to the adoption of the urban development plan can be traced to the drawing up of the "piano delle periferie" (plan for the suburbs) between 1978 and 1980. This plan was implemented during the early years of the reconstruction that followed the earthquake of November 1980. The continuity of the town administration's action from the late Seventies to the present day essentially reflects the continuity of its group of experts. Many of the urbanists who were involved in these plans still work for the town. During the 1980's, more than 13,000 homes in ten towns in the hinterland of Naples were renovated according to criteria aimed at answering a broader demand for the improvement of living conditions rather than the housing problem per se. Historical centers were renovated allowing the permanence of resident communities. Parks, kindergartens, and schools were established.

Although in the second half of the 1980's the political window that had allowed the carrying out of the plan for the suburbs shrank, it opened up again during the early decades of the 1990's. The principles that had inspired the plan for the suburbs were taken up again in a model of urban management that found its fullest expression in the *Indirizzi di pianificazione* (Guidelines for Planning) drawn up in 1993 by Vezio De Lucia, who was urban planning committee chairman in the early years of the first city council led by mayor Antonio Bassolino. The *Indirizzi* envisaged an ecological reorganization of the city of Naples dealing not only with the problem of urban reclaiming, but also, more in general, with environmental quality and the physical integrity of the city territory; that is, with issues such as air, water, and land pollution, resource management, waste disposal, and keeping hydrogeological instability in check.

In the following years, the *Indirizzi* found concrete realization in two modifications of the urban development plan: the "Safeguarding

Modification” of 1995, and the Modification for the Northwestern Zone of 1996, also known as “Modification for Bagnoli”.¹³ As regards specifically environmental aspects, both modifications called for measures to reduce land consumption and building, and to favor inner mobility to reduce recourse to automobiles and public transportation.

The real innovation, however, was the restricting of further building *sine die* on the remnants of these areas that were still free of constructions; a total of 4000 hectares of agricultural, uncultivated, and natural areas. These restrictions were aimed at creating a number of parks. One of the principal ones was the “parco metropolitano delle colline di Napoli” (Metropolitan Park of the Hills of Naples), which extends over 2,215 hectares, or 20% of the city’s parkland. The institution of these parks was not aimed merely at preserving the environmental, naturalistic, and landscape qualities of these areas; it was also intended to guarantee the regular functioning of ecological processes throughout the town. Action taken in the older areas of the city also reflected a wish to guarantee urban sustainability without increasing building areas.

As regards transportation, in 1997 the City Transportation Plan was adopted, in compliance with the Safeguard Modification, which envisaged the boosting of railway transportation. The *Indirizzi di pianificazione* already viewed transportation issues in Naples as an essentially urbanistic problem, insofar as they concern the structural insufficiency of public transportation, especially on rails. Indeed, it is estimated that during the 1990’s 70% of air pollution in the city was caused by automobile traffic.

The specific character of the public urban policies adopted in Naples from the late Seventies to the present day is due to a combination of factors that have created a favorable context for a management of the city’s territory that we may qualify as “sustainable”. These factors include a group of experts adhering to the trend of national culture that has rejected, ever since the Sixties, the notion of boundless urban growth; a housing rights movement prioritizing

¹³ “Variante di Salvaguardia”, and “Variante per la zona nord-occidentale” (“Variante per Bagnoli”).

the quality of living and environmental conditions; the coming to the fore of a “Neapolitan environmental question” in the national cultural and political debate; and the opening up of political opportunities for public control of transformations of urban landscapes.