

PLANNING URBAN SUBURBS. THE CASE-STUDY OF TURIN

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Introduction

The strong changes under way in the present urbanization processes raise questions of the government and the development of urban areas. There has been a redefinition of the meaning and role of the suburbs in the city and, more in general, in the organisation of a wide territory. The suburbs regeneration has become a basic condition to the development of cities. For that reason, in the last years, the suburbs' theme has become more and more important in the Italian and European debate.

The topic of this paper is urban suburbs. The main objective is to identify the planning skill of suburban areas, supposing that this "discovery" could suggest a set of "grips" for institutional actions and could play an active role in the dynamics of regeneration, development and change of the city. The link between a present local planning (at least intentional) and, at the same time, the ability of connecting planning at urban and metropolitan levels, is one of the basic successful elements of actions and changes within suburban areas.

The paper is divided in three parts.

The first gives some suburbs' definitions. In fact, these town "parts" can be considered in many ways: from districts far-off the city centre, either physical, economic, social and cultural; to difficult areas, with decline, segregation and social exclusion; to "dormitory districts", "non-place urban realm", without any history and life qualities; to, at the end, as "urban resources". The second describes an original and young Italian experience, started in December 1997, by the Department for Decentralization and Urban Integration of the City of Turin, whose outcome was the setting up of the Special Project for Suburbs in order to tackle the risk of physical, environmental and social decay of suburban areas, and as an instrument of promotion of the resources of peripheral areas.

The third part examines on some topics of a recent research appointed in 1999 by the Special Project for Suburbs to the Dipartimento Interateneo Territorio (Polytechnic and University of Turin)¹ to carry out the manner of investigating *local planning of/in city suburbs* as acknowledging resource for the collective action.

1. Urban suburbs: definitions and images

The way of defining, interpreting and describing the suburbs has changed.

Urban suburbs have been define, according different criteria (physical distance, urban quality, functional dependence,...), in many ways (Dematteis, 1998)². The majority of these definitions refer to negative images: *in contrast* to the centre, town parts around the centre, entities ruled by the centre and passive to it, ambiguous areas which are neither real urban nei-

¹ This research, commissioned by the Special Project for Suburbs of the City of Turin, was carried out in 1999-2000 by Graziella Brunetta, Paolo Chicco, Federica Corrado, Luigi Falco, Francesca Governa, Cristiana Rossignolo and Silvia Saccomani (Dipartimento Interateneo Territorio of the Polytechnic and University of Turin).

² For further inquire on definitions and images of suburbs, please consult: G. Dematteis (1998) "Vecchie e nuove periferie urbane", pp. 81-90.

ther real countryside (rural), areas with low quality to the centre, places with serious physical, social and environmental deterioration problems, areas without definite forms and precise boundaries, spaces “without history”, areas of immigration.

Nevertheless, recent urban literature oppose these old negative definitions a new positive meaning. The new suburbs are identify as space of innovation where social and spatial changes take place. Even the old fordist suburbs often produced social, political and cultural models. However, these processes were never recognized. So, the recent shift should be read as a new awareness which recognize suburban areas as changing places and places of potential resources to work on.

The new suburbs' image is very much complex. Each suburbs has a dynamic and evolving structure with its own specificity and local identity. Each suburbs is characterized by a proper economic, social, political vigour and by a specific building history (Paba, 1998).

This new re-interpretation of the suburbs has important results on urban policies and on urban planning.

In fact, the city is composed of many districts, each one with its own characteristics and identity, opportunities and human, economic and cultural resources, which differ one another but are, at the same time, complementary. In this perspective of development of the whole city, the suburbs are the areas which should be supported to develop their potential and their resources by new forms of governance.

The management and development of suburbs become important issues for the development of urban areas in Europe.

As a whole, these seem to have shifted the focus from objectives aimed mainly at urban renewal to objectives aimed at the promotion and support for development; from mainly sectoral actions (especially housing) to integrated, multisector actions.

In the Italian context, this change assumes particular significance and seems to have accelerated in the course of the last decade. In fact, if we consider the evolution of Italian legislation, the nineties appear as the years of change, with the introduction of “new” means of action in the city and region (from complex urban programmes to negotiated planning tools). The contents and forms of these tools would seem to bring the situation in Italy closer to that of other European countries, where for some time now the themes of urban regeneration have been developed by making reference to the integration of policies and the participation of the inhabitants. The change in the means of action for urban regeneration also redefines the role of public bodies, which are increasingly called on to coordinate with a multitude of actors and interests, using partnership procedures, both in the form of public/private partnership, for inter-institutional coordination and cooperation, and public/private partnership. The last ones are mainly intended to increase resources, meaning not only economic resources but also ones of understanding and consensus for the transformation processes. The support role played by the EU is not, of course, extraneous to these changes in promoting action programmes and strategies that give priority to the themes of participation and support for development.

2. Suburbs as “resource”: the Special Project for Suburbs

In 1997, for the first time in Italy, the Public Administration of the City of Turin set up the Special Project for Suburbs (hereafter shorten in SPS) in order to tackle the risk of physical, environmental and social decay of suburban areas, and as an instrument of promotion of the resources of peripheric areas.

The purpose of the Special Project for Suburbs is in fact to enhance these resources (that unfortunately remain too often unexpressed), but which are, after all, the heritage of the city (Artesio, 1998).

2.1. Main goals

The SPS is a proposal for development directed towards the city: to think up, within city, possible methods, actions, projects able to give a “added value” compared to the total sum of single initiatives (Garelli, 1998).

Each local development project of the SPS manages actions that have the following goals:

- integrating physical, environmental, economic and social regeneration to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants (creating opportunities for economic and social development starting from the improvement of local resources: promoting local economic and commercial activities, fostering the creation of workplaces, commissioning of regeneration projects to agencies which will employ local workers, etc).
- Involving and taking part in the process of public and private actors, citizens, organizations of the third sector (like associations, economic subjects, technicians from the local authority services, groups of voluntary workers, individual residents willing to get involved, etc.). Moreover the SPS is an opportunity for redefining the relationship between citizens and Public Authorities.
- Supporting the reconstruction of the feeling of belonging to the territory in which one is resident or works through discussion, comparison to solve problems, restoration of the dialogue between social groups, mediation of existing conflicts and the overcoming of the exclusively one-sided vision of “looking after one’s affairs” to reach the awareness of “the common good”.

2.2. Methodologies

In order to carry out this project, the SPS adopted the technique of the “participative planning”. This method has been used for years, above all in certain European countries and in some Italian cities³, because it exploits the patrimony of knowledge of the residents, the people who work or operate in the territory (social workers, association managers, teachers, shopkeepers, etc.) to build regeneration projects that meet their needs.

Since the Project is based on the participation of the residents and of the Associations of a given territory, the methods for intervention may differ from one area to another.

The intervention of the SPS in the districts is agreed on by the Cir-coscrizioni (municipal districts committees) and activated according to a protocol of collaboration, starting either from complex regeneration programmes (for example P.U.R., P.R.I.U) or from the need felt by the residents to recuperate a space or redefine the spaces which have been left free. Its intent is not to replace the various competencies of the Local actors but, on the contrary, the SPS aims to build a more efficient collaboration and communication among them. The SPS works through integrated planning as instrument for putting into practice its goals. This in the awareness that every structural modification (from dwelling, to common spaces, to the road system) can favour changes in people’s behaviour and increase their access to the various opportunities available. And, at the same time, some cultural or social policies and actions can modify the use of the territory by the subjects requiring, sometimes, a different organisation of the space.

For this reason the SPS has recourse - both in the central structure and in the territorial experiences – to operators appointed from the various Divi-

³ In Italy participative planning is a testing sector of a social dialogue quite recent. Although the projects are increasing in number, the results obtained are limited and unreliable (Paba, 1998).

sions (Planning, Assistance, Environment,...), in order to analyse all aspects of regeneration.

2.3. Actions

The SPS integrates complex projects of regeneration and local development stimulated at different levels (from global to local) in one single “plan”.

The SPS integrates actions promoted at various levels (see map above):

- *Community Initiatives programmes* (URBAN II: a Community Initiative approved in 2000 to regenerate an area with public housing next to an industrial zone).
- *National programmes* (Neighbourhood agreement: is an action whose aim is urban and social regeneration through participated and integrated planning).
- *Regional programmes* (Urban Regeneration Programmes: are projects of regeneration and transformation of three urban areas in Turin implying strong changes involving the residents).
- *Urban programmes* (Participated local development actions: imply the direct participation of the residents to the transformation changes of urban settlements and to the setting up of actions for the social and economic development of the community).



3. “Potentiality of change” of/in the suburbs

Within this perspective and starting from the results of research recently completed by the Dipartimento Interateneo Territorio (Politecnico and Università of Turin) for the City of Turin’s Special Project for Suburbs entitled “Potentiality of change of/in the suburbs”, this part intends to reflect on the methods and practices of urban renewal of/in the suburbs.

Our research aimed at helping SPS’s activities from two points of view:

- by fixing methodologies of analysis and interpretation of local projects and actions;
- by mapping projects (present or foreseen), local subjects, potential actors of local activities.

3.1. Methodological approach

In this research, suburbs have been studied with an approach based on two different levels:

- the first, is a study about the level of change of the areas, from the definition of elements of social, economic, spatial identities that in each context help actions and define the *vitality* of the territorial contexts;
- the second, is the study of episodes of *local potentiality of change*.

The indicators of vitality analysed are economic state, commerce (trade), building activities, estate value and “multi-ethnicity”. Through this choice we wanted to identify whether and how the spatial structure support and stimulate dynamics of local transformation and how these contribute to produce processes of physical transformation.

So, indicators of vitality have taken on a clear transversal feature to show synergies and interactions among phenomena which traditionally belong to different sectors of analysis. The analysis of interactions among different phenomena has helped us to define the features and potentiality of local change, mainly the “hidden” one.

The analysis has been carried out recognizing and, where possible, putting in relation forms of economic-spatial vitality (which have a direct translation in urban changes) with the expressions of social vitality of the different actors.

The features, examined in the description of local potentiality of change, mainly concern the form, the type, the times, the territorial levels involved, the relation at local, urban and metropolitan levels.

The form of the potentiality of change mainly identifies two types: a physical action and other forms of actions (like social, cultural, economic, ...).

The type deals with the differences between the institutional action (the “formal”, in some way designed and ruled) and the social one (the “informal”, spontaneous) which is originated and developed outside the institutions. The features which allow us to make out the differences between the two types are connected with, firstly, the subjects involved (public or private institutions, “non institutional” subjects, associations, ...), the role that these actors play (decision-maker, investor, manager, promoter, solicitor,...), the methods of development of the action and the interactions with other projects (according either proceedings which are fixed and/or through new ways built during the process).

The times identify the differences between the potentiality of change in progress (recognizable in their impacts on the territory, even if at different levels of executions) and the hidden one (“signs” of possible changes, intentionalities and expectations which are emerging, active actors in these processes).

The territorial levels involved recognize both the spatial areas of the projects (where their effects take place of which are potentially interest in their accomplishment), and the level of belonging and the range of action of the actors involved. Bearing this double meaning, the territorial levels and the actors involved can be related to local, urban-metropolitan and supra-local levels.

Interactions at local level describe the existing or potential relationship (integrating, conflictual, indifferent) among the various forms and types of potentiality of actions that the actors have at local level, either within single projects or in the relations among different projects.

Interactions at urban and metropolitan level clear up the involvement of the different forms and types of potentiality of change in the construction of a possible polycentric city starting from the exploitation of the potentialities of the suburbs. The recognition of this characteristic is based on the reconstruction of the relations (existing, possible, lacking) among different forms and types of potentialities of changes in the suburbs and in other parts of the

city. These relations have been analysed from many points of view: in projects (integration, complementary, indifference); in actors involved (opening/closing; competition/cooperation); and in the different parts of the city (centre/periphery relations; competition/cooperation; integration and complementary).

The research on the potentialities of change in/of suburbs has:

- pointed out local specificities, identities in actions in progress or hidden, that can be transformed in stimuli to the development and regeneration;
- recognized if and how settled potentiality of change has had an effect in and on local community;
- identified in the hidden potentiality of change possible tendencies to transformation which do not emerge from analysis of statistical data;
- examined the more and less integrated and participate aspects of the projects and of the proposals of transformation;
- determined the increase of innovative actions and of relationships among actors;
- highlighted the need of space of some initiatives and of active actors involved in the suburbs.

3.2. Open issues

Within the goal to reflect on the methods and practices of urban renewal of/in the suburbs and without entering in the specific case-studies (two areas in the North of Turin⁴), we can make some general reflections on:

- the possibility of considering the suburbs provided with “active” resources and potentiality on which to base change;
- the evolution of approaches of action in and of the suburbs;
- the redefinition of the public operators and administrators involved in the urban regeneration of peripheral areas;
- the methods of analysis to identify the “potentialities of change” in the suburbs, in which the emphasis is put on the intersectoral nature of these potentialities and on the active role it plays in the dynamics of change of peripheral areas.

The first issue concerns the hypothesis on which the research is based: the *local potentiality of change* is not a tie, but a *resource directed to the action*, which can give basic knowledge and support suitable to set out legitimate and shared actions.

The problems emerged from the methods of intervention which follow the hypothesis are:

- first, the need, and consequently the difficulty, of establishing which and how many potentialities of change exist?
- second, the relation, still undiscovered, between the various forms and types of projects (in particular the link between institutional and social actions, and between the projects of traditionally strong actors and those of weak actors).

The problems arisen in the recognition of the hidden and less structured projects refer to the scarcity of methodological references and studies. Altogether, other problems concern the difficulties of encounter and dialogue between an external actor and smaller and more fragmented local projects. A great number of other actors, activities, and small forms of potentiality of change, which altogether set out the vitality of the area, are behind stronger actors.

⁴ The two areas are the area of the P.R.U. of Corso Grosseto and the and the quarter of Barriera di Milano.

A second key-factor concerns the needs to produce *integrated projects*.

Interdisciplinarity is an element always present in the new spatial policies and in the forms of urban interventions. It is seen as planning and executive dimension which relates sectors and different functions of the spatial actions.

To this dimension the multiple interaction among actors (experts, decision-makers, economic agents, residents,...) must be added.

In fact, collective, participative and shared actions can only be built through the integration of actions and the participation in processes of a growing number of interests and actors. The expected result is also, and perhaps above all, an important growth in the knowledge of the local context.

If the knowledge of the context is acquired as a resource of the transformation process, the participation of the local actors takes the form of active involvement. The network of local actors, started by territorial process of change, has a double objective: on one hand to contribute to the spreading of information, on the other hand to activate forms of knowledge and of hidden potentialities of change. Within these two levels, the network has different roles: in the first case, it acts as an operator for the exchange of information, in the second it operates to gather and reproduce resources during the process.

The involvement of private actors reflects both the need to increase private resources providing financial support to the initiatives (without employing too many public funds), and the need to ensure social cohesion (which challenges the abilities of the public subject to converge different interests, sometimes opposed). The involvement of public subjects of different levels seems answer the need of collecting around a single action competencies and powers scattered otherwise in various bodies.

The participation of all these actors rises many difficulties: mainly concerning the starting and the management of public/private partnerships and of the interinstitutional cooperation.

In the experience which identify the cooperation private-public as a founding element, the relations between the various territorial levels appears to be even more complex. The territorial limits of actions is, in this case, subordinated to the interests and to their relations.

All these aspects lead our reflection to the third point: *the redefinition of the role of the public subject* within the action of local development. This subject is increasingly becoming an "animator-starter" of potentialities of change and of local form of self-organisation, as well as a "composer" of differences and conflicts occurring inside each process. Particularly, this final role demands the public subject to recognize the "positive" side of the conflict and to take full responsibility of defining the strategic options (open and negotiable). However the public subject plays a different role compared to the other subjects. The public subject must play his role gathering interests and actors around selected, defined or promoted proposals.

The reshaping of the role of the public subjects requires, at least, a progressive, but substantial re-organisation of the Public Administration. Thus, if the public subject doesn't set up sectoral projects, the traditional organizing body of the Public Administration, particularly the division between the various sectors it proves to be strongly inappropriate.

The complex and integrated projects require a new organisation in networks, which lead to the progressive overcome of the competitive attitude of different sectors of the Public Administration. As we have seen in the SPS, such a new perspective has to face many difficulties: from the traditional divisions of different sectors of the Public Administration to their lacking in communication. This process needs to get over the traditional logic of the competences within the administration, in favour of a more integrated action of the Public Administration around problems to solve, more than definite competences.

Within this framework, the success of the actions comes also from the ability of raising concurrence and starting up self-organising processes of local development, employing explorative principles and methodologies.

To this end, the relationship between regeneration and development assumes particular importance, from the point of view of the different ideas of the suburb, the different methods of analysis, the different tools and the different actors involved in change. Local centrality (and its identity) is the criteria, consistent with the definition given by the SPS, we used to identify suburban areas dealt in this research. Applying this principle, *suburb* is seen as *local system*, provide with resources, rationality and planning unrecognisable from an external to the suburb point of view. Suburb is thus considered as one of the many "specific places" which build our cities and of which we need to single out and to know from the inside not only the uneasiness and critical aspects, but also positive features of energy and endogenous planning. Local planning is therefore not seen as bound of change process, but it is considered as resource, set of actions on which strategies of shared and legitimate acts can be set out.

Suburbs can thus be defined as territorial domains, independent of the city centre that can take part not only to local regeneration, but also they can be *actors of the polycentric development of the city*, through the recognition and appraisal of local features and local planning.

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