

Environmental planning as tool for place memory evaluation and as valorisation strategy of territorial context

Anna Maria COLAVITTI, Nicola USAI
University of Cagliari
School of Architecture
Department of Regional and Urban Planning
Piazza d'Armi, 16
09123 Cagliari - Italy
amcolavt@unica.it - nicola_usai@yahoo.it

Abstract. The paper aims at finding out inside the regional and urban planning plans elements that could be useful to build up a planning reference model suitable to favour historic-cultural environmental values.

Is it possible to find out the spirit of place in the regional and urban plans that bind built territory? Can planning science research the fundamental development conditions of the territories and populations through new territory governance instruments aware of the place's value?

During the current *fourth generation planning age*, after the coming of *environmental plans*, can be noticed a rearrangement of the regional planning knowledge framework that privileges the environmental dimension nearby a new code of values, taking into account the characteristics of different territorial contexts.

The conclusions are twofold: on the one hand, the need of building a scientific discipline framework to verify the nature of the approach to historic-cultural environmental values; on the other hand, the coding of a model to evaluate *ex ante* the historic-cultural environmental values that define the immanent sense of place.

Introduction

After the Eighties (of the 20th century) season, nowadays can be noticed a critical renovated reflection on *environmental planning* that involves different practices in a relevant theoretical debate about the technical implications of the territory transformations. Environmental

planning has at present reached a turning point because it needs to reconsider its conceptual and technical apparatus in relation to the so called *ordinary* planning. Comparing past experiences, it comes clearly out that the environment planning issue needs further in-depth analysis, but so far the landscape approach is the best conceptual application. Under this point of view, it is worth to think about the environmental contents of the plans because they can be considered useful tools to implement development policies and urban and territorial regeneration, tools able to incorporate and to express values characterizing these policies (Delort, François, 2002a).

Which Contexts for Which Territory. The Western City Model

Whether were born with pre-ordered act, or spontaneously, the cities have always been a place where the values of different civilizations were historically ordered and developed as unitary cultural expression of settlement process of human beings in a given territory. Hence, the cities became the leading centre for exchange and cultural, spiritual and economic production, political and administrative organization of the whole society. A balance between city and countryside has been reached every time were set complementary functions: on one hand countryside was linked to productive use of the geographic space, on the other hand the city coordinated agricultural functions and displayed cultural development functions (Nicolet, 2000b). The knowledge of the historic conditions through which were developed relationships between city and territory is essential to evaluate the dynamic and to avoid the risk of disturbing the delicate balance on which is founded the survival and the development of the spatial entities and the related social community. The city was not more a simple residential centre. The city has been the seat of institutions expressed by a society to rule and order its own spiritual and material life. The ancient civilizations faced the problem to build in the cities attraction points where to live wide and complex experiences. The Agora and the Theatre, the Gymnasium and the Temple, the Forum, the Basilica and the Baths, the Cathedrals and Town Halls, the Market and the Guilds, the Piazza and Porticos, the High Street and the Avenue, the Garden and the Park, and then the Skyscraper and the Ministry, the Storehouse, the Railway Station were and have been the monuments and the symbols of the society aspirations and the display

of its cultural and functional structure. The city is the place where are developed the fundamental experiences that compose a civilization, but the city has also the task to hand down those past experiences, merging them with the new ones in the permanent process of the cultural production. Nowadays the problem is to fulfil the traditional cultural gap between city and territory, to widen at the whole geographic space the advantage of a controlled and ordered development and to recover functional and figurative structure. The whole culture of our society has to solve this problem through the commitment of all modern scientific disciplines; but since now it has to be defined a model that could be a reference point for cultural action giving society a clear direction. Modern culture is committed, since the origins of the 19th century industrial civilization, on searching new urban models. The Anglo-Saxon culture has mainly contributed to the study of the environment for the industrial civilization when the romantic-naturalistic population of the architects joined that one humanitarian and moralistic of the sociologists, like Chandwick and Engels. For example, can be cited the new utopism proposals of the first half of 19th century or that particular aspect of Anglo-Saxon modern urban culture known as Owen's "Victoria", evolved then in the "Garden Cities" of Howard, in the American "Green-belt Towns" and in the British "New Towns" in the second world post-war period (Fera, 2001). The Anglo-Saxon culture has always been aware of the natural landscape and rural tradition, and tried to look for urban models that could mediate between built environment and rural and natural one. For instance, the Italian cultural tradition and research only recently is trying to integrate the city and country realms. In Italy the study of the environment was originated from *town planning* discipline to which was tried to oppose a *rural study* discipline. Also in Italy the problems of modern development have highlighted that it is necessary to adopt an environmental planning as an integrated whole, and recent studies concern with planning of urban macro-structure such as megacities or city-regions. The city growing process of industrial civilization, typical for its concentration in a few urban centres of population and all business and executive cores, is now assuming the shape of big *conurbations* originated from the spatial and functional binding of previously separated centres. Big metropolitan areas are now configured as a broad urban structure, a built agglomerated area where

there's a continue circulation and mobility based on a transportation network that is the very true characteristic of these huge shapeless urban masses. The transportation network capacity and economic and social cost of communication means seem to be the only one limit for metropolitan areas growth. Overcoming those limits means to reduce the possibilities of cultural and material production, which is fundamental for modern metropolitan areas. The binding of different metropolitan areas can originate the *megalopolis*. A kind of reaction to megalopolis is the birth and intensification of middle urban centres, with more differentiate functional models. These are the *urban galaxies* or *urban nebulas* that are consuming always more land and natural territory, destroying the rural aspect, cutting the access possibility off for urban areas inhabitants that would like to enjoy nature and rural environments. The countryside and nature reserve access and enjoyment make more difficult the modern way of life choices and alternatives. To contrast urban agglomeration, contemporary researchers have analyzed, on the one hand, the inner city growth mechanism, on the other hand, the relationship between countryside and the city. It has been observed that if the urban middle centres facilities and services are working in a proper way, they spread their influence on a bigger area where the economic and social conditions tend to become similar to those of the major urban centres. On this idea is based the *city-region* theory: an urban organism spread over a broad area where all the urban centres and the productive areas are functionally differentiate but also linked under the social, economic, cultural point of view. From this arises a kind of common level of equipotentiality for the whole territorial realm that corresponds to the city-region. The present proposed model is the only one alternative that avoids the citizen alienation from the city, the city destruction as historic creation, the territory destruction as culture and nature reserve (Farinelli, 2003). To realize and to implement this model it will be necessary to have new cultural tools and new operational equipment. The experiences and the studies of Kevin Lynch, Gyorgy Keepes, Donald Appleyard, Steven Carr and others have showed the importance of the fundamental elements that constitute the city and make it easily perceived and understandable through the senses, the previous experiences and the environment *shape*. Lynch in particular has underlined that in the urban environments the delicate psychological relationships between the

persons (the real users and protagonists of the city) and the urban environment are regulated by the immediate orientation possibility.

Planning the New

As in the past, at the present too the society has the need to control not only the development phenomenology but also the figurative and spatial environment values (McNeill, 2002d). In the new dimension of the spatial continuity, the architecture alone is not able to guarantee the right level of *aestheticity*. Today is a duty to acquire all elements that form the environment figurative value to create the new city shape. An urban design not more intuitive, but rather organic and rational, able to adjust and to place every element, new or ancient, to create a new organicity for the urban and territorial *continuum*, that could be plenty of art value. Art as reality, not as conceptual abstraction; art as expression of real poetics, as enjoyment of a truly attractive product. Art as figurative expression, such as the city has always been and will come again to be when the *aestheticity* conception will be extended also to physical environment. To explore this possibility, it is useful to analyze the values of the ancient urban space according to three different categories: functional values, spatial values, linguistic values, but always remembering that these values should find a comprehensive synthesis in the design and in the project.

Functional Values

Before speaking of functional values, it is useful to clarify how to include the ancient urban structures in the future city structure. This is the first point to evaluate, depending on historic and aesthetic value of the ancient organisms and on future development strategy for a given territory. It will be not always desirable or conceivable to recover or regenerate an ancient organism to be included in new integrated functions and coordinated in a new functional dimension (Carver, 1993). It will be not desirable in those cases in which to restore an ancient organism means to modify the *status* of a structure that is ending, or is almost going to complete, its life and productive cycle. An ancient village, a castle, a church, a monastery of particular figurative, historic and testimonial value can not be transformed easily in a tourist centre or in a hotel or resort. These high-level interest

resources must be conserved intact at the moment they have ended their productive function and must be preserved through conservative restoration, as precious and irreplaceable evidence of the historic and cultural heritage of the past. Museums have the task to collect and conserve objects and art works that constitute these evidences. But in the new territorial regulation, also environmental evidences and witnesses that it is not possible to gather in a museum have to find place. These witnesses, ruins and remains must be included in a pre-ordered and adequate environmental framework able to enhance their values and to make their enjoyment and visit impressive and concentrated as those of the museum visitors. For instance, historical centres have worked and can still keep on working if they can conserve their vital potential as place of maximum concentration and acceleration of the complex reactions that make evolve a community. The evidence of this is, on the one hand, the positive examples of historical centres that are still keeping their exchange function with the surrounding territory (through productive, business and commercial activities); on the other hand, it is confirmed by apparently negative examples of the speculative forces that try to settle business centres near the historical centre to take advantage from the pre-existing infrastructural organization. Hence, we have to consider incompatible with historical centres all functions that concern specifically with business and productive activities and ask for completely new and free spaces in terms of scale and relationships. It is proven that historical centres can not more sustain business and service activities at the modern dimensional scale of the metropolitan structure. The real characteristic thing of the historical centres is the *scale* tailored to a specific kind of enjoyment. The quantity and use frequency, the speed and moving intensity and the kind of technology of the modern metropolitan civilization is characterized just for the *scale jump* originated with the industrial and technological revolution (Hobson, 2004). In the historical centres, what it is needed to be enhanced, for the functional values, is the catalyzing capacity of the urban and territorial texture and a specific cultural communication that come out from an organic evolution of the true values of the society tradition.

Spatial Values

The study and the analysis of the ancient building textures supply a vast experience field and suggest different intervention methodologies. Firstly, the urban texture tends to conserve the structural order rather than the typological one. Numerous Italian cities still today have kept the original Roman age road patterns, the buildings layout and the ancient volumetric organization on which different stratifications and building reconstruction occurred in succession, transforming along the ages their original destination and function. Thus, the focal issue is the determination of some criteria that make possible arrangement and restoration interventions avoiding destructions or irreparable modifications of the original textures and of their spatial and functional values. But what is the true meaning of the historical urban textures? We have to distinguish two different aspects: the first one is that the modular and typological continuity that characterizes the ancient wall texture finds its justification in the technological unite of the bearing wall structures up to the spreading of the reinforced concrete; the second aspect is that the spatial and volumetric continuity of the urban empty and full parts highlights different aesthetic conceives and approaches along the time regarding the city and its formal values. The spatial values are more linked to architecture formal languages such as surface texture, modulation and grain, architectural connections and rhythms, materials and colours. The 19th century and modern wrong interventions in the historical environments have provoked fractures or violent break of the morphological continuity and ancient urban textures. The historical, archaeological-topographic examination originated from a planimetric reconstruction of the overlain stratigraphy demonstrates that past interventions have damaged and destroyed the spatial characters of environments that conserved morphological values of the ancient and original urban textures or buildings. For this reason, it is possible to notice anomalous spaces and dimensions that break the original continuity and sense, giving them an impression of spatial disaggregation from the urban context. Under this point of view, the scale will be the base for a more in-depth analysis. The spatial unity of the historical-artistic high-interest places and complexes is originated from the conservation of empty and full volumes within specific and determinate variation range. Inside this variation range, infinite

singular solutions are proposed to reach new relationships but already experienced in the culture of the city (Aristone, Palazzo, 2000a). An in depth-analysis is needed to determinate plan choices to understand which values, uses and destinations have to be preserved.

Linguistic Values

Looking at the architectural language values and its formal appraisal, the only criterium properly right is that of the intrinsic value of the works. The aesthetic high-value works have always valorised the ancient environment with new figurative elements. But the study of the intervention methodology on the ancient environment is not only architecture critics. Researches on some Italian squares and streets have demonstrated that, on one side, it is not stylistically perceivable what is referred to drawings or to the use of decoration; on the other side, they showed the complete failure of every acclimation or better “*environmentation*” attempt founded on imitation or on re-proposing of style elements derived from those ancient (Franco, Massarente, Trisciuglio, 2002b). The modern designer or architect suffers the lack of the proposition and poetics that inspired the ancient styles, and also the mastery of the semantic values. Besides this, the present building techniques make every attempt of style mimetism not only invalid as product, but also in contrast with regard to texture, grain and colors with unitary values of the ancient environment. It is worrying the indifference that characterize the designer behavior facing the linguistic problems of the modern architecture with regard to ancient environment. They comply to utilitarian criteria of the mass culture and of consumption economy and they tend, as some unprepared entrepreneurs, to deny the culture continuity in the past. For the mass culture individual “the past is always more extraneous; the past does not more supply him the wisdom and the rules of life: the ancient values and the great transcendences are pulverized by an accelerating becoming” (E. Morin). So, here it is how is solved today the problem of the meeting between ancient and new: not only a quality problem of the new with regard to the ancient, but mainly a problem of methodology and objectives of the new with regard to the ancient.

Landscape Planning as Result of the Environmental Approach

In a town-planning discipline framework that concerns with the whole territory, the importance of the historical-cultural heritage is not more limited to big and middle urban centres, but it has to concern mainly with the historical, landscaping and territorial texture that is evinced in the persistence of the ancient structures in the modern ones. It has to concern with the smaller urban centres distribution with historical characteristics integrated in the landscape and in the culture of a given territory. It has to concern with, together with the bigger urban centres, the complete witnessing of the whole civilization evolution process. For this reason it is recognised that historical-artistic centres conservation and restoration, as like as the preservation and valorisation of the landscaping and monumental interest areas, must be planned and programmed at those administrative levels to which belong the responsibility of the territorial regulations (Kain, 1981). The preservation of the historical-artistic heritage being not more a specific end, but rather a mean integrated in a modern planning activity, will be not more implemented only with passive and binding tools. The conservation and the use of cultural heritage will be possible if it will be re-integrated among the potentially active values and included in a general process of organization and rational addressing of financial resources (Clementi, 2002c). These programmatic criteria should be implemented through adequate tools and it must be taken into account that, in every case, long times and complex procedures are needed to make working the programming and planning mechanics (Mazzeri, 2003). There is, hence, need to verify, with regard to historical heritage preservation, the possibilities of the advanced proposals for a new regional and town-planning set of rules (Cammelli, 2000a).

Conclusions and Outlook Remarks

In the present society, the general idea of landscape has acquired a plurality of meanings unknown in the past, so much so that today landscape is considered sometimes under the visual-aesthetic point of view as *panorama*, sometimes under the historical-cultural point of view as *palimpsest* and sometimes under the ecological point of view as *set of ecosystems*. This semantic complexity must be seen as a richness because it allows a greater synergic valorisation when facing

the dialogue between requests of use and requests of transformations for the territory (Carta, 1999). There's need to construct an interdisciplinary holistic vision, a new synthesis among nature and culture that allows a general renaissance of values and interests for the landscape both in the society and in the institutions (Pasquinelli, 2005). This synthesis implies the quitting of the idea of *natural beauty* and the promotion of the landscape as a system of ecosystems and as historical-cultural permanence. This means the introduction of adequate planning processes, the identification of the role and the training for professionals, the specification of quality principles, intervention methods and criteria, the integration and co-ordination between the town-planning and landscape planning.

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