

IsoCaRP

AESOP

CEU-ECTP

2004 Genoa Seminar

Planning Education, Practice and Institutions facing Innovation

Session 2: PRACTICE

MUTATION PATHS AND DURABLE REFERENCES

Giuseppe Imbesi

Università 'La Sapienza'

IsoCaRP



1. IN SEARCH FOR A JOINT AND ORGANIC LOGIC OF PLANNING

How much have planning practice changed in the last fifty years?

The planner from a function of urban designer, town and country planner (designer) is evolved in a “mediator”, “facilitator” of social and economic process of spatial transformation.

The evolving social demands have stimulated different shapes of professional skills and this process has changed the complex of actions connected to urban intervention and management.

Parallely the focus on strategies of urban intervention and management have modified our understanding and regulation patterns of space mutation.

Proliferation of levels, scales, fields and tools produces a partitionment of early comprehensive vision of the human action in spatial conformation

Fragmentation and discontinuity in "answers" prelude, apparently, to new shapes of intervention, new methods and techniques which correspond planning's functional specializations often completely unknown each other.

Do we follow the waves of mutations? Do we let planning practices to be partitioned further?

Or do we search the durable elements in order to rebuilding a logic unit for the planner and his approach?

And if the response is affirmative, how to meet the challenge?

2. BEYOND THE PARTITIONMENT

Is the described partitionment able to explain the richness of potentiality and the needs which the continuous planner action expresses on

city, territory, environment?

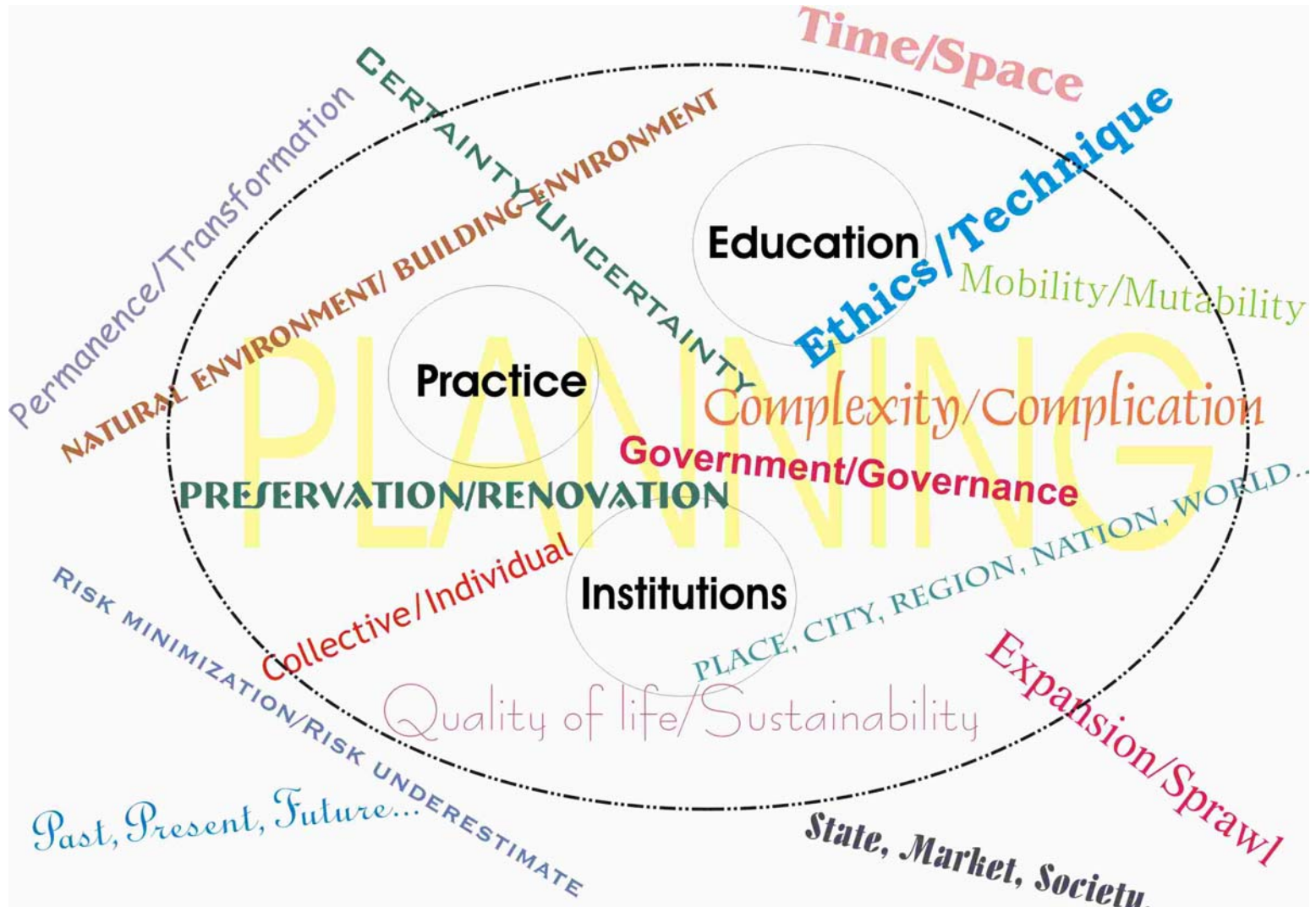
Is it appropriate to seek this segmentation throughout much more hierarchization and conformation as an answer, on the one hand, to the loss both of urban boundaries and ideal model of urban form and on the other hand, to the acquisition of natural environment as a value?

Planner as a System analyst, an evaluator, a landscape designer, an urban designer....

To be faced with innovation, isn't necessary to think again about possible natural integration among different professional profiles, based on shared principles?

3. KEY-WORDS FOREST

I have try to order, through "key-words", themes and topics which characterise planning in relation with our seminar; I have been only able to lose myself in a forest and to make a mess.



4. THINKING ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

A

In order to front confusion of ideas and to define possible paths of theme's elaboration, I have renounced an analytic treatment. I will limit myself to some observation that have been taken from my professional experience.

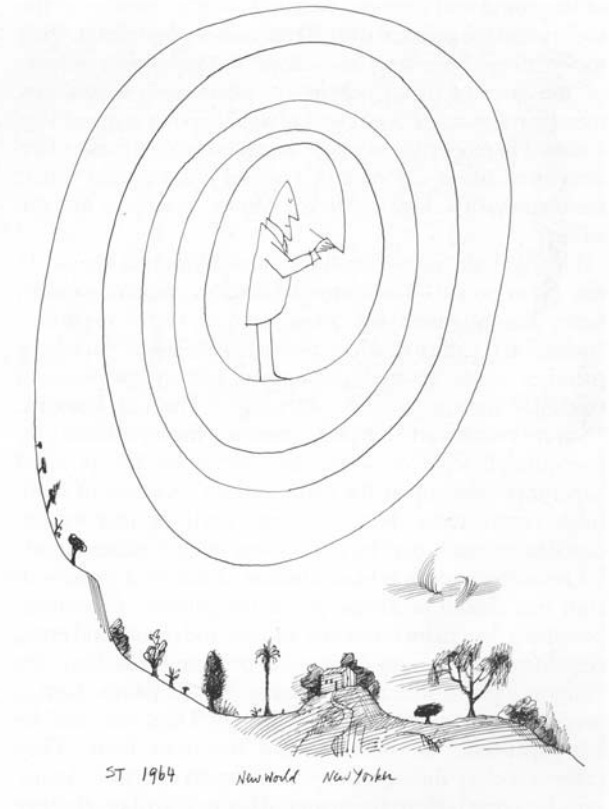
This background, carried on at local and regional level working on projects, plans, viability studies, has been, above all, rich of hope and delusion as happened to every planner.

From this point of view I can communicate only a partial and limited vision, also because it is mainly related to the Italian context. As a matter of fact there is the hazard to not pick, with the necessary wideness, the panorama of seminar's topics.

In order to limit this hazard, we can underline some paths for the planner:

- shapes and ways of ongoing change;
- theoretical and operational conditions;
- relationship with intervention process and project.

At the end I will try to propose, as a short conclusion, some "suggestion for future".



The selfish townplanner



4. THINKING ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

A comprehension key: *Genoa*, with its alleys of the historical centre, the dockland, the sea and the arch of the hills, cultural values of the urban history; Genoa with their inhabitants.



The meaning of our seminars is also “to stay in a place”, watching and not only seeing, in order to comprehend its values and limitations as a starting point for more general consideration.

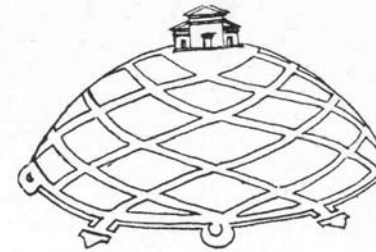
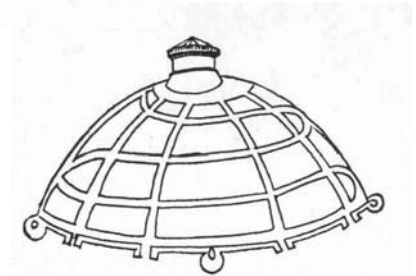
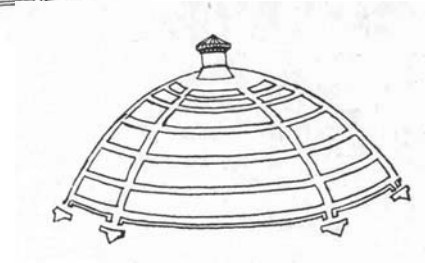
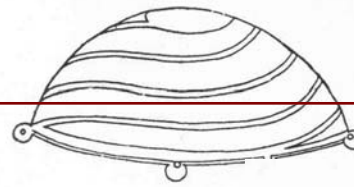
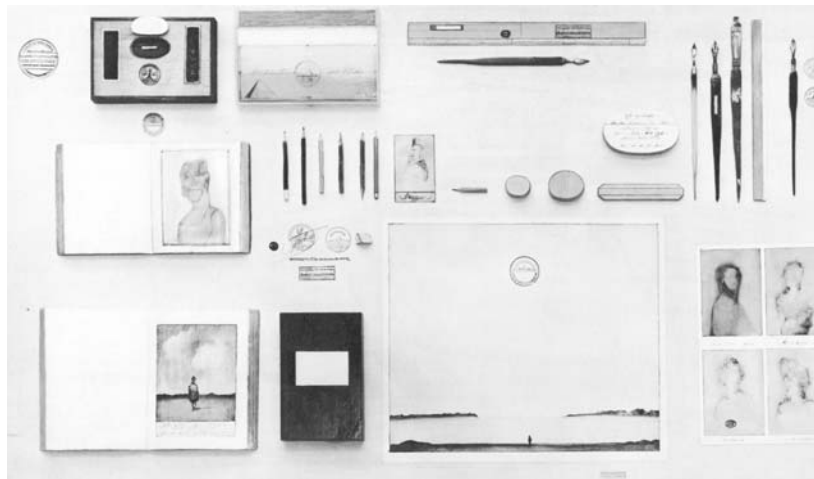
5. TURNS OF PERSPECTIVE

5.1 Changeover of tools

From prescriptive and normative tools to indicative tools.

From master plan to urban project.

From Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).



From an ordinative land plan to the vision.

From fragmented knowledge to redundancy of information.

From pencil drawing to geographical information system (GIS).

5. TURNS OF PERSPECTIVE

5.2 Changeover of space of concern (a)

We are faced with different kind of urban, territorial, environmental forms.

Borders, traditional boundaries, walls, fringes, nodes, are simple symbols which try to describe the relationship between inner-outer city or the relationship between town and country: concepts that are losing significance.

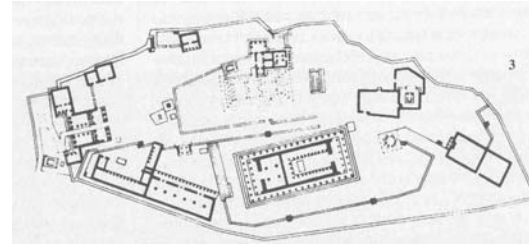
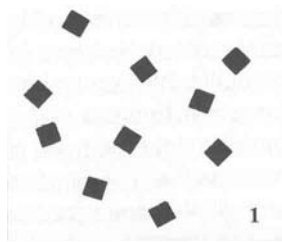


Is it still remaining the necessity of place representation?

5. TURNS OF PERSPECTIVE

5.2 Changeover of space of concern (b)

Hierarchic and ordninate relationship to describe a kind of spatial order seems to be obsoleted.



New updated ideas are emerging: focus is on the relations related to juxtaposition and proximity.

Space expands until it becomes the entire world.

5. TURNS OF PERSPECTIVE

5.3 Changeover of time perception (a)

Time is no more marked by the succession of the seasons.

Conflicting opinions:

Time seems to become an independent variable.

Time seems to reduce itself until disappearing through new physical and virtual links.

Past seems to express cultural values as a reference for habitat.

Past seems to become a conditioning aspect for choices.

Present seems to be the only way to catch the relationships among the physical objects that constitute the city.

Present seems to be the only reference available to solve the problems connected with city management.



5. TURNS OF PERSPECTIVE

5.3 Changeover of time perception (b)

Future seems to pose an heavenly horizon.

Future seems to do not exist any more.

We are involved in a game with no space and time: “The great brother”.

We are afraid of future.



5. TURNS OF PERSPECTIVE

5.3 Changeover of needs

Both social and economic multifaceted needs.

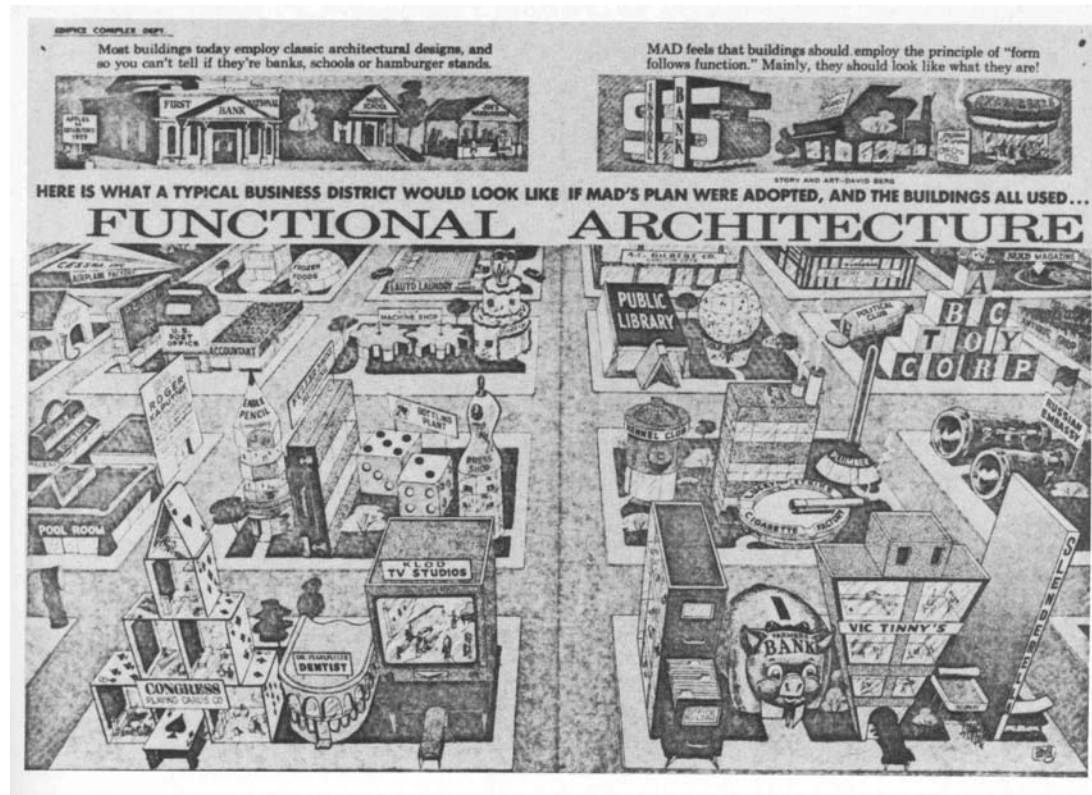
Dialectic among emerging social class.

Mass media conditioning.

Needs and consumption much more complex and fragmentary in the rich areas.

Segregation between the different north and south around the world.

Are the functionalist references **out of date?**

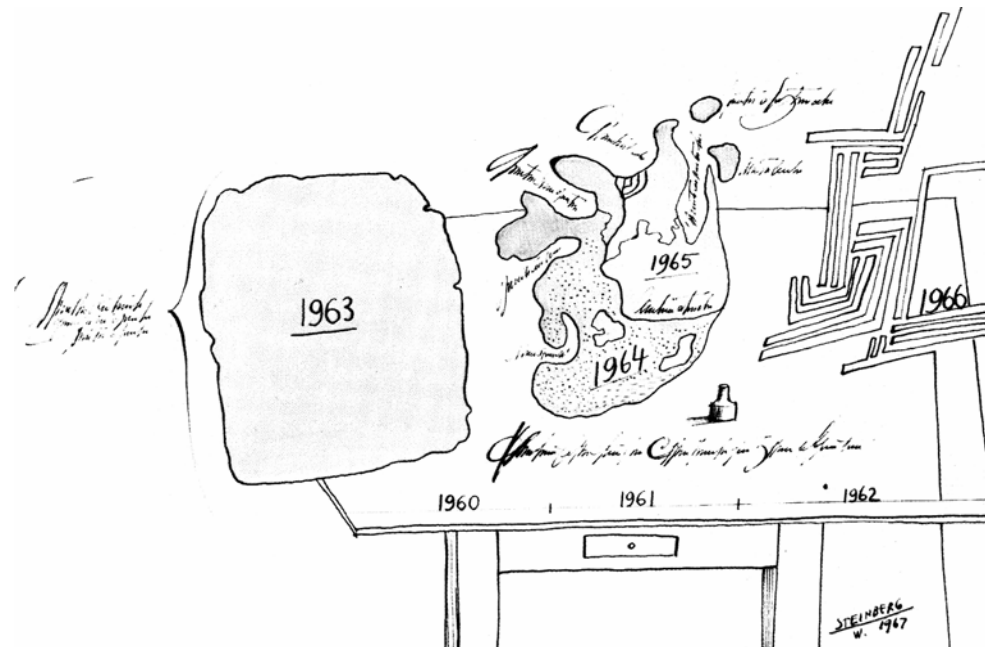


5. TURNS OF PERSPECTIVE

5.4 Outcome: the uncertainty

Against increasing refinement of fact-finding practices there isn't higher confidence about choices.

And also we haven't a substantive background of reference values.



6. ON THE SIDE OF THE PLANNERS

6.1 Action area for the planner

From an illuministic technical expert, whom was able to integrate in its own person the vision of the city-to-be to a multifaceted presence in various technical fields without specific social recognition.

Where is positioned the planner?

In the public administration: *public authorities (town council, local and regional authorities, government departments), public utilities, sector agencies (transport and infrastructure, welfare/social services, industrial localization, environment).*

In the private sector: *Development Private Corporations, Real Estate Private Corporations, Engineering Corporations, Professional partnerships, ITC Corporations.*

- ✓ Is the role of the planner recognised in those work areas?
- ✓ Is there sufficient cooperation and integration?
- ✓ Is there a confusion in languages?

6. ON THE SIDE OF THE PLANNERS

6.2 Ways of doing things (a)

Activities

If planner's purpose is both to give meaning and shape to spaces in which we live, the activities we need to realize this purpose are very diversified.

At present the activities could be divided into two big fields

The first one much more object-oriented:

- ❖ to describe;
- ❖ to design;
- ❖ to assess.

The second field is much more process-oriented:

- - ❖ to comprehend/interpret;
 - ❖ to mediate;
 - ❖ to facilitate.

While giving answers to needs, often, there isn't an interaction among those activities and among subjects who work on those activities.

6. ON THE SIDE OF THE PLANNERS

6.2 Ways of doing things (b)

Tools

Planner's tool-box has included, at first, few, well-defined tools for the control of the spatial transformations.

Today tools are increasing:

master plan;

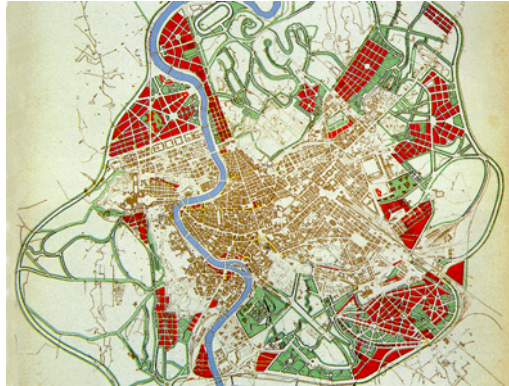
strategic plan;

urban project;

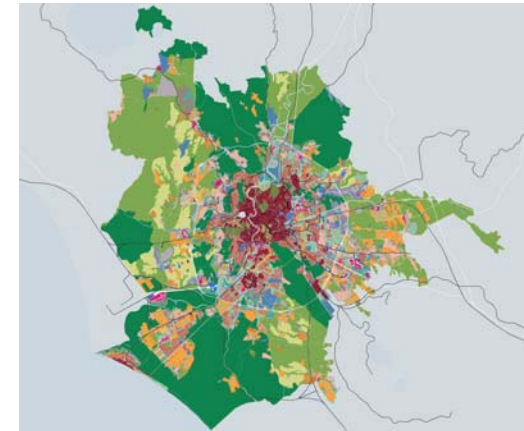
integrated, complex, programmatic plans;

programmes of re-qualification and social development;

comprehensive visions.



Masterplans of Rome across the 20th Century (1909, 1931, 1962, 2003)



Even if planner is easily fired in using and developing those tools, nobody really knows how these tools can dialogue/interact each other, for a successful management of transformations.

6. ON THE SIDE OF THE PLANNERS

6.3 Value of professional ethics

There is a *ghost* into professional ethics.

The political theory-in-action of planner, that is the intention to achieve a societal change, has been the vision core of the planning founding fathers.

This purpose has produced great public projects to organize territories virtuously.

The adverse appraisal of several accomplishments and the ineffectiveness of several tools bring us to a deep review.

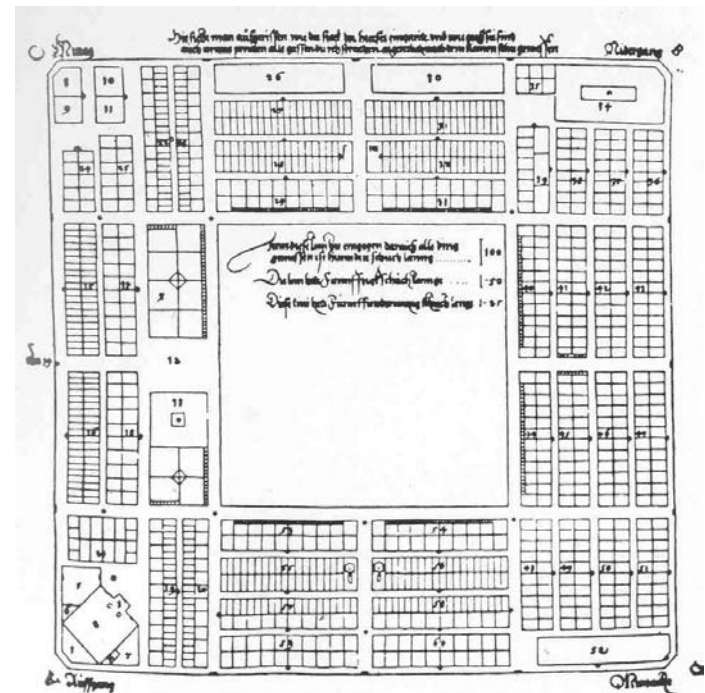
However it is possible to list some unexpressed categories for the action:

Professional correctness

Spirit of S. Louis (pioneering spirit of innovation)

Improvement of quality of life .

Are these categories sufficient in order to define a planning ethics?



6. ON THE SIDE OF THE PLANNERS

6.4 Practice in relation to theory

How much the practice is drawn by the theory?
Let us make a reverse.

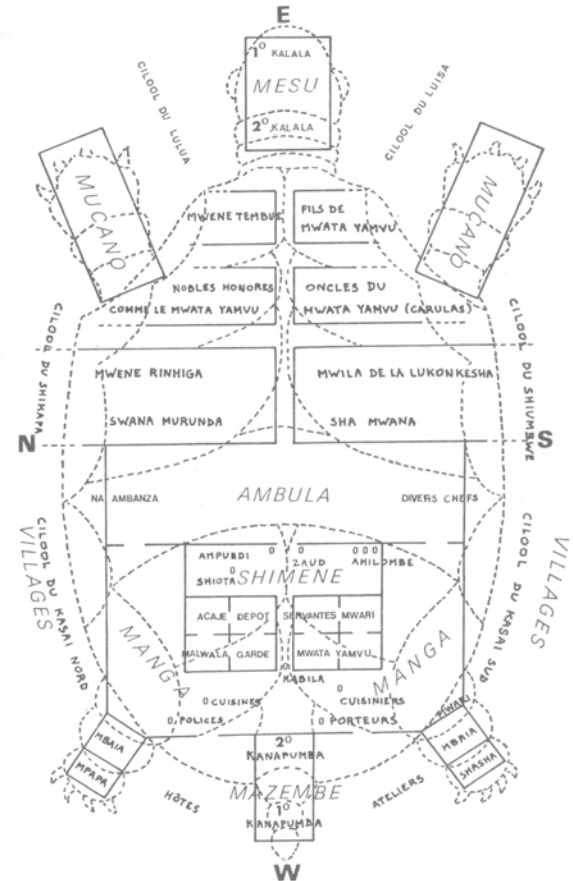
It seems that much of the theory of planning has been drawn by the practice with results that are not always adequate.

To find the theoretical principles, should not we refer to the settlement structure and to the reality of territories?

And how is it possible to do this, with respect to different and innovative forms of settlement?

A more coherent and useful relationship between practice and theory is possible if the theoretical elaborations are connected to a steady verification of the realization in terms of social, economic, and - why not - design effectiveness.

One aims to conciliate global visions of the city and localized interventions



6. ON THE SIDE OF THE PLANNERS

6.5 Practice in relation to the institution

The idea of a great public project for the city and the environment, and the presupposition of *buon governo* have been the basis for planning.

These ideas and presuppositions are in crisis; the complexity of decision-makers, the inadequacy of the public management to answer the social needs and to act as a go-between with the market trust to shape different scenarios:

The following come out as the most realistic conditions to be successful:

- Administrations which are authoritative and full of initiative
- Up to date and efficient technical organizations
- Clear regulation
- Availability of specific public resources (human resources, land, technical equipment, etc.)
- Availability of public funding
- Clear time limits

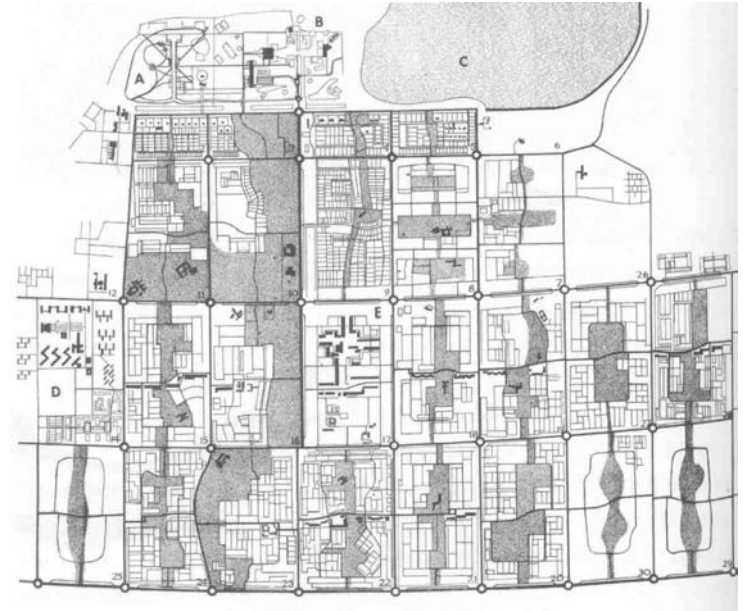


Are these conditions enough for planning, still considered as a public function for the production of a public good like the city is?

7. ON THE SIDE OF BOTH PROCESS AND PROJECT

A

Instead of the certainty of the choices, made in the past, based on principles of instrumental rationality (and social reasonableness), today we have an uncertainty of outcomes.



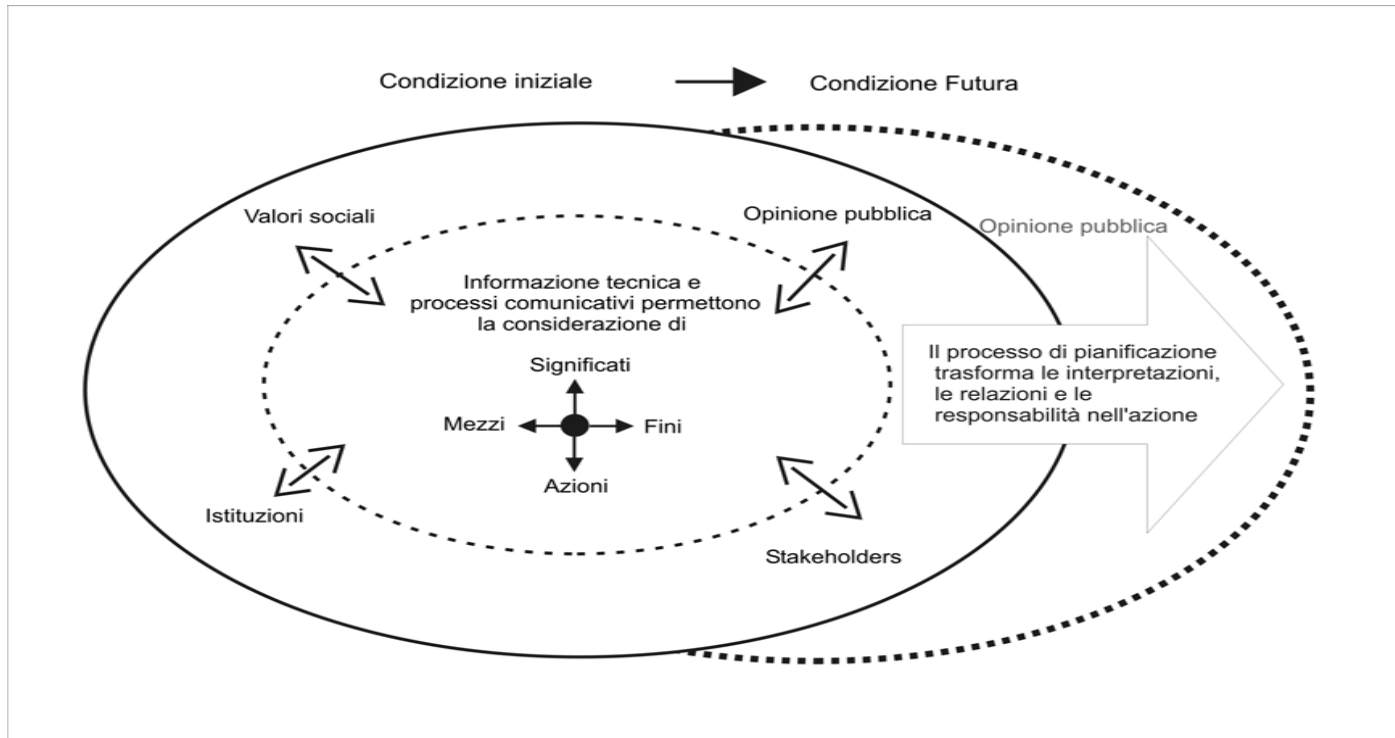
Instead of the idea of a perfect completely defined plan today we have the acceptance of unaccomplished design.

7. ON THE SIDE OF BOTH PROCESS AND PROJECT

B

From vector-design to cycle-design.

From instrumental rationality to communicative rationality.



The thing which characterise the planner action is not the pick-up point where he operate into the process but the kind of relations that he establishes .

So, in this way, the planner plays different roles and different function (mediator, designer, decision-maker ...), in relation with the different plan process.

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

A decalogue of good

1. Time feeling

To assume for the space we live time value in its becoming.

2. Mutability of places and situations

To accept the mutability of places and situations without trying to uniform themselves.

3. Mutability of cultures

To accept the difference among cultures without integralism , to put the persons in the centre of attention.

4. Listening

To learn to listen regularly needs of society and to be responsive in understanding.

5. Integration

To try to integrate several different knowledge starting from comparison of approaches and not from parallel of techniques.

6. Responsibility

To accept liability for its own professional actions without supposed technical impartialities.

7. Uncertainty

To assume uncertainty as inherent condition to operate.

8. “Reversible” solutions

To accept to design not comprehensive reversible solutions instead of hypothetical total solutions.

9. Experimentation

To prefer test method and field-test not models and fixed beforehand rules.

10. Continuity in action

To assume process analysis of spatial transformation to achieve continuity in action.

intentions



A place where
to be alone
in the mass

I wish to thanks
Eng. Angela D'Orazio and
Eng. Estella Marino
who collaborated in the conception
and making of this presentation