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The variability of the urban landscape in Italy*

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1. The urban development and the historical upgrading of Italian cities.

Starting from the early years of the 90's of the last century, the city has been placed at the centre of attention of European community and national politics and of the most recent theories of urban development, inspired by the theme of upgrading and of the new centrality of the historic part of the city, or rather its "historical centre". In these years not only interesting processes of rebuilding and of upgrading of historic areas have been implemented, but also experimental ways and new practices of intervention on the city itself, of unpublished contents, have contributed to the re-examination of the unusual procedures, of a reading of the city and of the territory based on two key themes: the functional organization and the necessity to satisfy the increasingly growing needs of the housing.

The standstill of the great urban growth has produced, already from the start of the 70's, an inversion of trends in the use of the territory. As Giuseppe Dematteis writes in his article "The territorial and environmental transformations", published in *The History of Italy* "if before the expectations and the clash of interests revolved around the external expansion of the urban centres and of the major inland and coastal conurbations now the attention has moved towards the recovery and the improvement of the building patrimony in existence, that is on the inside edge of the built environment"¹. This has happened after a widespread process of massive building which involved all the big Italian cities and that saw what we can define as suburbs, or rather areas that are larger, larger and more anonymous grow enormously. These areas, often lacking in a sense of collective identity, that have enveloped, in the real sense of the word the historical centres and that have

¹ G.Dematteis, *Le trasformazioni territoriali e ambientali*, in *Storia d'Italia*, Einaudi, Torino, 1995, pp.666-705.

represented, from the sociological point of view, the search for a way of modern living on behalf of large slices of the population.

The modernization of the country has therefore taken place first of all with the construction of houses, factories, state buildings, roads, railway lines, transport interchanges, that are all in direct contrast with the environment rather than search for useful complementarity. These buildings and infrastructures, obviously more numerous in the more densely populated regions, are in an awful state of conservation right where the process of modernization has been fast, contradictory and rather painful: it is worrying to know that Sicily hosts one fifth of the Italian buildings that are in an awful state of conservation, followed by Campania and Calabria. Just as it isn't a good sign that, on the contrary, these regions host a considerable number of buildings in an excellent state not so much for their good maintenance but because they are new constructions, fruit of a crazy policy that fosters the phenomenon of the "continuous building site".

That they are new buildings is also demonstrated by the data from the dating of the buildings and on the building material used. The former highlights that Piedmont manages to maintain in a good state of conservation the richest patrimony of buildings built before 1919 in the Italian regions, buildings that moreover still constitute most of its buildings. Sicily, instead, holds the record for the region that has built the most buildings in the last 30 years and more than 70% of its buildings have been built after the second world war. Yet a mitigating circumstance in Sicily's favour, it has this from the second indicator, that is the building material used, it can be noted that this region has a good number of buildings badly conserved because they were built with load bearing walls and they are mainly ground level houses, with additional floors that make them very characteristic but also very fragile. The case of Lombardy is different, which, also hosting a good number of buildings built with load bearing walls, maintains them in good conditions because they aren't mainly poor houses as happens in the case of the southern regions.

The implosion of the suburbs and their being associated with what the cities represent negatively has led to rediscovering the quality of the historic centres and of the relevant processes of socialization and collective identity. At the local level, indeed, between the second half of the 70's and the early 80's, as Dematteis always reminds us, the big cities like Turin, Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Rome and Naples saw some very interesting town planning experimentations, also on a town planning and juridical level, although, all in all, very few plans and studies were actually translated into real works. The Plan of recovery of the historic centre of Bologna is, certainly, among the most interesting experimentation to be quoted, started in 1973 and recognized as a case *par excellence* also on a European level, above all for its innovative job of considering a typical city of the pre-industrial civilization like Bologna not only as a patrimony to

safeguard but as “ a living part of a whole contemporary urban organism” (Dematteis, Idem, pp.685).

These processes then are inserted in a trend of de-concentration and of territorial fragmentation , that will make Bernardo Secchi say half way through the 80’s that “ today the territory looks like a theatre of events among themselves inflexible, that the spatial closeness isn’t worth linking up, articulating or explaining. The unauthorized district, the Peep, the historical town, the industrial plant and the orchard; the change of scale and of size; the tourist nomadism and shepherding; the enormous quantity of interstitial areas, each a leftover of a different story, the incompleteness of the buildings, of the infrastructures, of use; use only in the summer, only in the day-time, only on working days, for a few hours; the visiting of places by parts of the population and unfamiliar groups. Never has the territory seemed so desultory as it does today”². This very word desultory, fragmented, flexible, upgraded, are words which mark the urban evolution of the 80’s and that also symbolize the passage from the paradigm of recovery and of balance to the contemporary one of a matching between upgrading and competitiveness in a promotional key or even, to use a more fashionable concept, in a territorial marketing key.

Starting from the 90’s a certain dynamism has characterized many Italian cities in the scheduling and the planning of proposals for urban upgrading in the sphere of the historical centre, enriched by new rulings tied to values and to the clear social procedures of participation and of ecological and environmental sustainability. This has been made possible by the awareness of the changes introduced in the processes of demographic growth, which are constantly slowed down and by transformation which directs the locating choices of settlements, as well as the desirability , in terms of competitiveness and of the quality of life, used in the historical districts, with the values which express and the suggestions that spring forth in terms of the way of living, or, as the Americans would say, of the “way of life”. Such dynamism is increasingly tied to complex phenomena which determine the potential redistribution of functions between the city-centre, which is specialized in qualified activities and subsequently loses simple businesses and the suburbs, which are increasingly spread out, and tend to create urban dilated systems. Systems which go well beyond the administrative limits and which produce new forms of territory for which new procedures of town planning need to be experimented. The theme of upgrading of historical centres of the big cities, therefore is sitting pretty between an urban policy directed at facing the permanent problems of quality of life and of physical-infrastructural decay, and the need to re-launch the city and its attractive capacity in terms of investments, functions, visitors and new inhabitants.

² B.Secchi in Casabella, 1985, n.512 p.19.

Thus, a new form of intervention in the sphere of the historical centre is witnessed, prompted by guidelines and European Union indications, partly dictated by the necessity to revise on an ecological and sustainable key the traditional actions of transformation of the city and of the territory. The example of some European cities, considered success stories, such as Barcelona and Lyon, becomes important in this journey, which is cultural, administrative and technical. The renewed interest of scholars and technical experts, of estate agents and on behalf of the population towards this territorial area stems from the consideration that the city, as it is presented, is totally unsatisfactory and that a great urban space, like the historical centre, opportunely recovered, upgraded and revitalized, can contribute to satisfying the growing social demand for a better quality of town, better safety, greater prestige, more efficient services and a better urban *décor*.

Moreover, the failure of the traditional urban policies in the big cities, all directed at the sector of the new buildings and to the policies for the home, is symbolized by the decay of the suburbs and of the areas involved in cheap and council housing projects, have induced a growing number of administrators, town planners and citizens to think that it is more useful and convenient to intervene on the existing and/or decaying city and bring those services there, which are missing or those uncompleted works of urbanization. This situation concerns above all the big urban centres of the South but even the most important cities of the Central – North can't be considered alien to these dynamics.

These conclusions on the urban decay are confirmed by data on the green spaces available for the town dwellers of the capital cities of the provinces in 2007. None of the biggest centres appears at the top of the classification where instead the medium size cities come first (the unlucky Aquila with 2942 square metres per person, Pisa with 1523 square metres, Matera with 1258 square metres, Belluno with 532 square metres, Terni with 417 square metres). Even if another data reveals more comforting news for the capital cities of the regions: Turin owns 15% of provincial land destined to urban green spaces and Milan 11%, while in the South Naples has 23% and Palermo 31%. All these complex territorial realities report a green spaces limited to suburban areas of the province and beleaguered by the concrete and by the tarmac of early urbanization. The supremacy of the medium size cities in the environmental field is also confirmed by the data about cycle paths, values of or up to 10km of paths every 100k square metres exist in La Spezia, Pisa, Pavia and Cosenza, while among the capital towns of the regions only Bologna and Florence have no less than 7km of paths per 100k square metres.

We could state, therefore, that the upgrading of the historical centres is articulated not only as action of recovery and bettering of the existence, but above all as a process of innovation of the procedures of planning, of the techniques of intervention and of the processes of involving the

public as well as the praxis of public-private cooperation. Urban upgrading is essentially a supplementary coordinating process among conflicting interests, both public and private, and a new way of understanding urban transformation and the management of the related phenomenon; such ways nonetheless, have often led to privileging short term prospects, which have ended up sustaining the growth of real estate values and private interests of individuals rather than the public's interests of a historical centre qualitatively recovered both from an infrastructural point of view as well as from an economic and social one.

In 2008 Italy attracted foreign investments for almost 90.5 milliard euro which, bearing in mind the disinvestments, give our country, however, a positive balance of 8.7 milliard. Nonetheless this huge sum of money coming from abroad is concentrated in Lombardy (for 70%), Veneto (7%), Piedmont (5%), Lazio (4%) and Emilia Romagna (4%). Tuscany too attracted over 2 milliard investments, but is the only region in Central-Northern Italy to show a negative balance (Florence and Leghorn are the negative protagonists of this performance), a phenomenon that is certainly isn't rare in the South. It is clear that in some regional contexts the history of a single city weighs heavily, this is the case of Lazio, where the enormous influence of the capital city can't be ignored, which does not always tow the development of the other urban regional centres. Also in other regions the positive sign of the regional balance does not coincide with the widespread success of the whole area, as is demonstrated by the data of the rich Lombardy, which records, next to the central role of Milan, a regression of a province like Bergamo and Cremona, and Piedmont, where the success of the economic policies of re-functionalization of the capital city in comparison to the excessively specialized economies of Cuneo, Alessandria, Biella and Vercelli which react badly to the years of crisis, is most visible.

The data about deposits and investments confirm the dynamism of the Central-Northern provinces, where investments way overtake deposits highlighting significant movements for the local businesses. Equally interesting the data on the southern provinces, which record a growth of investments in comparison to deposits between 2007 and 2004. Indeed, while previously most of these provinces showed deposits superior to investments, with some significant exception (for example Catania and Ragusa in Sicily, Cagliari and Sassari in Sardinia), in the most recent years the trend has been inverted, showing a greater vivacity of the urban and economic fabric which, unfortunately, the subsequent crisis has partly suffocated.

Another important indicator of urban vivacity is that related to the hi-tech local units. This data, even if it confirms yet again the superiority of some central-northern regions and of the cities that populate them (Milan at the top), reveals surprisingly that in the time span 2001-2006 the best performance in terms of percentage variations were recorded by the southern regions (Calabria,

Sardinia, Campania and Puglia) which offer greater spaces for the new locations of the most technologically advanced units of national and international firms.

The policies of reclamation and of upgrading in the bigger decaying historic centres, as in the case of the cities of Bari and Palermo, have highlighted very strong risks tied to an incorrect distribution of loans to private individuals; such risks have in their turn triggered off processes of real estate speculation with the related expulsion from the historic centres of the residents of the upgraded areas, and, moreover, has made obvious that the upgrading can never only be of the real estate type or town planning but it must necessarily be an economic-social upgrading and work of virtually linking up the pieces of a fragmented community. The phenomenon of the growing attention to themes of upgrading in the historical centres and the subsequent adoption of adequate policies recorded from the 80's till today innumerable examples that started in the United States have successfully been diffused to Europe and the rest of the world. Presently, in the United States the programs which aim directly at the upgrading of historical centres are numerous: among these we can quote the "Main Street Program" of the Fund for the Conservation of the Historical Heritage, the program of the Authority for the Development of Historical Centres, local programmes like the "Business Improvement Districts" started by the local governments and by traders' associations. Many of these American programs, like many of the British programs have developed very efficient plans of action but they still haven't experimented on field criteria for the measurement of the efficiency of the specific actions presented. The assessment of the effectiveness of the programs, is often entrusted to the intuition of some town planners or to some civil servants. One study carried out by Zenia Kotval, PhD from Michigan State University is entitled "Measuring the Effectiveness of the Strategies of Upgrading in Urban Centres" tries to define some measurable indicators of success of the initiatives of upgrading of the historical centres.

On returning to the case of Italy and thus to the topic of regeneration of the Italian cities, reasoning on the data of a statistical nature has allowed us to formulate some considerations on how the Italian territories have evolved towards a model of a city based on two key concepts of quality and competitiveness. Concepts which intertwine and find direct expression in the data on the state of art of the residential patrimony, on the care for the environment and public green spaces, on technological innovation, on the instruments and on the policies of urban upgrading realized in the cities, on the attention to conservation of the distinctive architectonic styles on the growth and on the degree of attractiveness towards the outside of the urban areas. In other words the information and the qualitative data on the physical changes and on the landscape of the cities is possible to lead them to four macro-areas of investigation, partly examined in the previous pages or rather:

- 1.the buildings (dating of the buildings; building materials; the state of conservation; the juridical figure of the owner and the right of satisfaction; prices per square metres; average house sizes; number of rooms per house);
- 2.the urban environment (the density of the cycle paths and the density of green spaces);
- 3.the local economy and openings to the outside (The GDP per capita, the degree of opening to the outside, the direct foreign investments – DFI, the sum of deposits and expenditure, the number of local hi-tech units);
- 4.the instruments and the policies of urban upgrading (the Program of Urban Upgrading – PRU; the Programs of Urban Upgrading and Sustainable Development of the Territory – PRUSST; the experiences promoted by the European Union like URBAN I and URBAN II).

Nonetheless the changes that occur in the Italian cities and in their historical centres can't only be seen with these essential observations on the aesthetic improvement of the buildings' facades, on the general impression of the roads and through the investments in public services. Aspects that induce without a doubt to a general increase of value of real estate, above all in the historic centres. The study of the positive image that the historic centres reflect, what definitely attracts a growing number of visitors to make purchases and spend there their free time turns out indeed equally fundamental for understanding the attractiveness and the competitiveness of and the urban area that contains them. In order to achieve these objectives the town population continue to improve their public spaces, above all when they integrate built environments with natural ones. Just as another promising indicator of the renewed vitality of the historic centre is the increase of public and private investments aimed at the realization of paths along the banks of rivers and of coasts, public parks, cycle paths and pavements.

In short the study of the “physical variability” of the city certainly needs these and other indicators, like those proposed by Zenia Kotval (index of the use of ground floor premises; differences in the destination of use; improvements in aesthetic conditions, improved capacity to attract the market; improved link between the built-up environment and natural environment). Besides this, points and lines that develop on the outside of the city and that are indispensable for accessing the understanding of the trends of the processes of urban upgrading and urban re-functionalization can't not be referred to here. Points and lines that transmit indispensable information on “goods of context” and on the scenarios in which the competitiveness of a given city is projected: a competitiveness intrinsically tied to the level of attractiveness – not only touristy – of the urban place itself.

On the other hand, it can't be ignored that in the recent years a certain variability of the urban landscape of the city, in developed countries and in those that are developing, is due to the action of single individuals that hold public and private functions, that have wanted to "leave a sign": from Tony Blair in London (with the building of the Millennium Dome and the panoramic wheel on the Thames) to the men in power that have built modern cathedrals in Peking for the occasion of the Olympic Games (like the Olympic stadium with a covering made of wood like a bird's nest) to designers' showrooms spread throughout the world, to end with the mayors of our cities who build and change with theatres, squares and round-a-bouts for the traffic, the face of our cities in the name of some presumed public necessity that covers up their desires of human immortality.

In the paragraph that follows the historical evolution of the experiences of completed projects of urban regeneration is faced, in the main Italian cities then goes on to question on the contribution that such instruments have given to changes and to upgrading in a competitive key for the cities in which they have been carried out.

2. The experience of the complex projects of upgrading and urban regeneration in the Italian cities.

The Italian experience of the complex programs of urban upgrading and the contribution that they have made to the concept of urban quality in the different territorial contexts and in the different areas of the city makes up a useful indicator not only on the state of the historical cities but also of the suburbs of the big Italian cities.

In Italy the programs of urban upgrading, inspired by the approach of integration and of complexity, saw the light at the end of the 80's with the CIPE Ruling of 1987 concerning the public residential building sector that for the first time turns to talk about "integrated programs of intervention". The concept of the residential needs (by now mostly resolved) is substituted by that of urban quality and urban quality is taken on as a national problem to which effective and edifying answers need to be given such as to be able to be transferred to local individuals. In this climate at the beginning of the 90's the first family of complex integrated programs was structured:

- the Integrated Programs (art 16 law n. 179/1992)
- the Programs of urban recovery (art.11 law n.493/1993)
- the Programs of urban upgrading (art.2 law n. 179/1992)

The Programs of Urban Upgrading (PRU) represent without doubt the most complete instrument with which the theme of urban quality and of upgrading of the city spaces according to

an innovative approach in comparison with traditional intervention in the past was started to be dealt with. The PRU foresees a coordinated set of actions aimed at the upgrading of the decaying parts of the city and they follow functional, environmental and physical integration, through the competition of public and private resources. Such programs are proposed to start the environmental, functional, infrastructural and building recovery, of urban areas specifically identified by local government through the community proposal which concern:

- important parts of infrastructural works;
- works of primary and secondary urbanization;
- non residential building work which contributes to the betterment of the quality of life in the area considered and they favour the creation of job opportunities;
- residential building work that triggers processes of physical upgrading in the area considered.

With the first Decree of 1994 the Big Towns were indicated in first place in the area of the beneficiaries of the loans, so much so that for the Towns with more than 300,000 inhabitants 70% of the funds of urban upgrading is reserved. The Ministry received 46 proposals transmitted from Turin, Milan, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Rome and Bari; 45 of these proposals were considered valid for a total funding of 220 million euro out of a total funding of 300 million euro. The use of the national decree has surely favoured competition between different urban areas, all characterized by a significant degree of building, town planning and social decay. Such competition has eased the achievement of positive results but at the same time has led to the lack of participation of those local governments not able to equip themselves with planning skills. They are indeed absent from this funding cities like Palermo, Venice, Naples and Catania that presented scarcely meaningful proposals.

The PRU, in the starting up phase, intervened on separate urban situations that highlight the historical routes of the cities and the organization of the relative local governments, situations which, according to the structured list of the INU (National Institute of Town Planning) and from the Ministry of Public Works, we can identify in:

- suburbs (indiscriminate and with important presence of industrial plants and/or disused services)
- areas around the historical centres
- areas of the historical centre
- areas and districts of state buildings.

The “areas of intervention on the leeward of historical centres” presented a critical state to start off with an important presence of unused urban services, bad links with the historical centre, decay after the loss of function of the containers, so poly-functional centres, avenues, subways, green spaces and the re-naturalization of water sources, multimedia centres and museums of design, auditoriums, technological centres and multi-room cinemas were created. Among the cities involved in this area of planning, some emblematic cases for which the quality of the work done is represented by the city of Bologna (with the upgrading of the ex-tobacco factory) by the city of Reggio Emilia (with the upgrading of the industrial areas of the Twenties and Thirties) and by the city of Parma (with a mixture of coherent works that concern the ex-sugar factory, the ex-pasta factory, the slaughterhouse, the agricultural consortium, the tram car and gasometer sections).

The PRUs concerning the “areas of historical cities” have tried to provide a solution to the state of deep decay of the central areas, caused by the abandoning of dwellings by the residents and by the resignation of the networks of artisan and commercial micro-business. In these areas intervention was made with the starting up of action of betterment of the vitality and attractiveness of the historic centre, with the subsequent re-activation of the residential and non-residential real estate market (such activity differed greatly from city to city). The intervention concerned, among other things, the recovery of historical buildings, environmental reclamation, the recovery and predisposition of plans of fruition of the state patrimony abandoned and/or under-used, the recovery and re-activation of local markets of particular historical and testimonial value. It is a type of intervention which involved, above all, the southern cities of Siracusa, Caltanissetta and Potenza, as well as target operations in big cities of the Central-North like Turin (area Madame Cristina Square), Genoa (the Soprana Port area) and Rome (the Esquilino district).

In Italy the big towns involved in PRU, most of the spending was destined to the residential sector in comparison to that for the work of town planning, nonetheless the interventions were not destined in a insignificant amount to the recovery of the existing city – as one might well think – although the realization of new housing (in double the amount in comparison to the sum destined to the recovery of those existing, with the exception among the big towns of the South of the single city of Bari. The occasions of upgrading have been offered by the presence of discarded areas, above all in the big urban areas of the North (with phenomena of conversion of production or of incorporation of the same areas inside the city) and by the upgrading of the areas of the historical centre of the big cities of the South. The cities have been transformed by the increasing building of a residential type, a phenomenon more frequent in the big towns where there is a greater need of housing. On the other hand, the experience of the PRU did not make the operators and local actors engaged in the management of business and services useful for the town dwellers emerge with

clarity, just as it did not make the most advanced idea of upgrading emerge, often inspiring traditional operations of increases in the cubature to make available for the real estate market. After the season of the PRUs, the Ministry of Public Works in 1998 promoted the adoption and the start up of the so-called PRUSST (Programs for the Urban Upgrading and Sustainable Growth of the Territory).

The PRUSST were thought up with the aim of realizing operations of widening and of upgrading of the infrastructures, of the economic-productive fabric, of recovery and of upgrading of the environment, involving the private operators both in works and projects of private initiative as well as public works and of public interests. Between April 2000 and March 2001 the Committee of Assessment and Selection chose 78 proposals (for a total of 339.6 million euro, equal to one average allocation per program of 4.3 million euro). The PRUSST admitted to funding and which presented as subjects the promoting of capital towns of provinces, are located over half in the North and for the other half in the Central-South, including the islands (table 1).

The PRUSST have introduced, in the frame of interventions of urban upgrading, some factors of novelty related to the aims, to the scale of the works, to the system of actors and of contents. As far as the first two factors are concerned, the PRUSST intervene not only on urban upgrading but also on the strengthening of the territorial competition, overtaking the administrative boundaries: indeed the enormous majority of the programs has a inter-town scale, inter-provincial and at the same time inter-regional. The “vast area” becomes the area of strategic functioning of this type of program. The system of actors in the planning of the PRUSST puts the theme of multilevel governance at the centre. Thus, the leading figures are no longer the mayors and the local public authorities but also private actors who are increasingly involved (repeating the experience of the Programs of Urban Upgrading) and the state-private partnerships which become the central and founding theme of the actions to propose. From the point of view of merit of the contents the objective of matching the achievement of infrastructural works with the starting up of measures to sustain business activity and activity for the care and assistance of people are promoted.

With the PRUSST the chance to integrate the policies of urban upgrading with other resources tied to tourism, to commerce to heritage, to urban transport, to employment, to social solidarity, has opened up while the concept of competitiveness is to assume an important role on the basis of the PRUSST (to have taken account of this dimension has brought these instruments nearer to the strategies of European urban development which are based on concepts of competition and of complementarity (between cities). In such a sense the analysis of spending is important: indeed the funding were divided up almost equally between loans for infrastructures, for the environment, and for social policies.

Nonetheless, it can't be ignored that over the years the use of the funds of the PRUSST has been on the whole modest. According to the data of the Ministry for Infrastructures (National Account of Transport) on 31.12.2006 only 34% of the ministerial funds had been spent (a good 19 PRUSST at that date registered a spending of less than 10% and only 7 over 80%). This can make us conclude that where a mature idea existed of the territorial projects the PRUSST became strategic frames for developing territorial innovation and begin to reason in terms of strategic planning, showing interesting and positive results. In the absence, instead, of a real idea of development the instrument was interpreted and used as a simple "container program". In some cases, indeed, the very large number of projects, badly coordinated among themselves, seems to indicate just this drift (emblematic the PRUSST Civitavecchia that had more than 900 projects).

Table 1 - The PRUSST in the capital towns of the Italian provinces as individual promoters

	PRUSST approved for funding
North (number: 15)	Trieste; Vicenza; Genoa; Milan; Verona; Padova; Venice; Rovigo; Turin; Forli; Savona; Trento; Aosta; Ravenna; Novara
Centre (number: 6)	Rome; Perugia; Pistoia; Ascoli Piceno; Ancona; Siena
South and the Islands (number: 9)	Lecce; Bari; Messina; Catania; Catanzaro; Benevento; Campobasso; Potenza; Caserta

In planning the Structural Funds in the period 1994-1999 and 2000-2006 the European Union set the aim of promoting and developing at a Community level integrated actions of urban development in an attempt to reduce the disparity between town centre and suburbs. In particular in the first period of planning (1994-1999) the Program of Community Initiative was created (PIC), called URBAN, with the aim to stimulate urban innovative projects and strategic action aimed at upgrading, as well as the recovery of the historical-cultural heritage of the city. With this program a good 118 programs URBAN were funded in urban areas (the total European contribution came to about 900 million euro, which was paid to a total investment of 1.8 milliard euro in favour of 3.2 million people in the whole of Europe, for an expenditure per capita of 560 euro).

The Program of Community Initiative URBAN I in Italy created an important occasion for the re-vitalization of urban policies in the cities of the South, as can be seen by the cities approved for funding: between 1996 and 1997 16 Italian cities were approved of and most of them were situated in the Central-South (Genoa, Venice, Rome, Naples, Salerno, Bari, Foggia, Cosenza, Reggio, Calabria, Catania, Siracusa, Palermo, Cagliari, Trieste, Lecce and Catanzaro).

Of these 16 cities a good 10 started up work on the historical centre, also by measures that have concerned the sustaining of the small and medium size firms in existence and the motivation to create new businesses. Indeed, in each of the 16 Italian cities funded by URBAN I, the work was divided in a different way, according to four areas of priority: re-launch social and economic activity; intervention of a social and training nature; infrastructures and environment; program of communication and the diffusion of the results. The 10 cities that intervened in operations of recovery and of upgrading in terms of infrastructure and in social-economic terms of their own historical centres are mainly situated in the South, apart from Trieste we meet Naples, Salerno, Bari, Lecce, Cosenza, Catanzaro, Palermo, Catania and Siracusa, with a quota dedicated to “infrastructures and environment” at times higher than 60% of the total funding (Naples, Salerno, Cosenza and Siracusa). This data reveals that half or more than half the interventions URBAN in areas of historical centres coincides with actions of physical recovery and of upgrading, that put situations of infrastructural and/or environmental decay right.

In the cities of Bari, Trieste and Catanzaro it should be pointed out, besides, a quota of significant funding dedicated to activity traceable back to the re-launching of economic and social activity and, thus, to the promotion of the economy of the areas of the city which had seen over time the reduction in a significant manner of the commercial and handicraft activities. The starting up of sub-programmes URBAN II in the cities of the South has concerned historical areas of a highly symbolic value and of a certain tourist and cultural attraction as, for example, the Spanish Districts in Naples, the island of Ortigia in Siracusa and the historic village of Bari Vecchia, as well as historical districts densely populated like the districts of Cappuccini-Civita-Angeli Custodi-S. Cristoforo in Catania (52,000 inhabitants) and again the Spanish Districts (53,000 inhabitants) or the historic centre of Cosenza (22,000 inhabitants).

With the URBAN II program many southern cities recovered historical deficiencies in the urban policies concerning the betterment of the territory and its cultural heritage. The result has been, on the one hand, the growth of the attractiveness of some parts of the city in comparison to the outside and on the other hand the location of new businesses in areas which had remained without, increasing the added value of the tourist sector and strengthening the urban competitiveness. The re-vitalization of the urban landscape and of the economic-social fabric was made possible, in urban contexts marked by deep social and infrastructural decay, by the adoption of innovative procedures inspired by the integrated approach to urban problems (social and economic aspects that condition the work of upgrading), by efficient forms of partnership, by a changed attention of the town government towards local resources, by capitalization of local knowledge for the laying out and the subsequent starting up of planning activity. On the other hand,

quite a few problems have emerged with respect to the highly innovative nature of the URBAN program on an organizational and managerial level, fields in which the town government have not had much experience up to now, such as the transversal lay-out of projects and the realization of organizational structures capable of achieving the foreseen interventions, without considering the difficulty of adopting starting up mechanisms related to the policies usually run by regional government (eg. Training, incentives for firms).

The Community Program of Initiatives URBAN II started up in the subsequent period of Community planning 2000-2006, on the basis of the experiences of URBAN I. Indeed different innovations were made to improve it's starting up, among which procedures of more expedite management, the extension to small and medium size towns, the institution of a program of network for the exchange of experiences and good practices and the so-called mono-fund management (in URBAN II only the Fund FESR intervenes and not the Fund FSE as well as for URBAN I). Nonetheless it can't be ignored that its impact on the urban landscape was inferior to that of its predecessor, being mostly inspired by the logic of sustainable socioeconomic re-vitalization in the medium-small size towns or in the decaying districts of the big cities, as can be deduced by the criteria of admission of the areas (only 40% of the expenditure foreseen was destined to environmental or material upgrading).

Table 2 - Funding of the 10 URBAN IIs approved of in Italy.

	FESR (million euro)	Total spending allowed (million euro)
Carrara	8.860.000	27.165.000
Caserta	15.020.000	29.258.280
Crotone	15.050.000	25.083.333
Genoa	10.710.000	29.522.459
Milan	10.730.000	26.999.999
Misterbianco (Catania)	15.050.000	25.090.000
Mola di Bari (Bari)	8.620.000	8.620.000
Pescara	4.900.000	12.250.000
Taranto	12.250.000	38.750.000
Turin	10.730.000	28.425.000
ITALY	114.800.000	264.397.653

In Europe 31 URBAN II programs concerned districts in historical centres, 27 in suburban areas, 4 in mixed areas and 8 entire cities. The 10 proposals chosen in Italy concerned 5 cities in the South and the Islands (Caserta, Crotone, Misterbianco; Mola di Bari, Taranto); 3 situated in the

North (Turin, Milan and Genoa) and 2 in the Centre (Carrara and Pescara). It isn't always easy to distinguish between those interventions which are capable of marking the physical-architectonic aspect of the city and those which touch less tangible and immaterial aspects, nonetheless certainly having had an important impact on both fronts, in the area of the ten Italian interventions, those that concerned the historical centres, like the cases of the towns of Taranto, Genoa, and Mola di Bari and to some extent also Misterbianco (in the province of Catania) (table 2). In the other cases work was done for the reconversion of industrial areas or for the re-functionalization of discarded areas, as in the case of Turin and of the large areas of Mirafiori, or even in the suburban districts and on council housing as in the cases of Pescara and Milan. The sub program URBAN II of Crotona, instead intervened on the environmental, landscape and the infrastructural reclamation, of the shore-line and the coast-line.

In Crotona, Mola di Bari, Taranto and Turin more than half of the total funding (with a peak of 78.9% in Crotona) was used for works of poly-functional and eco-compatible re-urbanization of the urban spaces and for actions of urban upgrading. In the historical centre of Genoa, instead, the work of recovery and of urban upgrading was almost equal to the work of socio-economic and cultural revitalization. In the case of Misterbianco, where URBAN II concerned the entire town area (historical centre plus the commercial and artisan area in expansion), most of the spending was directed at operations aimed at strengthening social cohesion, to guarantee more employment and revitalize the economic aspect and the new entrepreneurialism of the area.

Greater physical transformations of the cities can be observed where work was done on infrastructures of upgrading and of reclamation (discarded industrial areas; suburbs and districts of council housing; shore-line and coastal areas), as for example in the cases of Turin and Crotona but also of Pescara, Carrara and Caserta. The case of Milan is to be highlighted separately, where infrastructural works and sustainable mobility in the North-West suburbs predominated.

* Although this work is fruit of the combined research of the three writers, the paragraphs 1 was written by Vittorio Ruggiero and Luigi Scrofani, the paragraphs 2 by Claudio Novembre, while the research about statistical indicators of urban competitiveness has been carried out by Annamaria Altavilla.

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