



TeMA

This Special Issue of TeMA - Journal of Land Use, Mobility and Environment, collects twenty-seven contributes of international researchers and technicians in form of scenarios, insights, reasoning and research on the relations between the City and the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic, questioning about the development of a new vision and a general rethinking of the structure and urban organization.



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Special Issue

Covid -19 vs City -20

scenarios, insights, reasoning and research



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COVID-19 vs CITY-20 SCENARIOS, INSIGHTS, REASONING AND RESEARCH

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The cover image is a photo collage of some cities during the Covid-19 pandemic quarantine (March 2020)

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Special Issue

COVID-19 vs CITY-20

SCENARIOS, INSIGHTS, REASONING AND RESEARCH

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Covid-19 and simplification of urban planning tools. The residual plan

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Abstract

This paper aims to develop an initial reflection on the Residual Plan can be. The Urban Plan has always coincided with the offer of public power, leaving deliberately aside the continuous 'dynamic of the real', mainly coming from the private component of our society (The demand plan).

In the transition from Modern to Postmodern, the environmental question undermined the consolidated certainties of the Offer Plan; opening up increasingly consistent operational gaps with the Residual Plan, which could represent the urban plan coherent with Postmodernism.

Covid-19 is further complicating the fate of the Urban Plan, increasingly complex, uncertain and unable to regenerate itself according to the new paradigms of the organization of the territory. In this sense, at least in the Covid-19 transitional period, the Residual Plan could be experimented to understand its real capability of answering to the dynamics of the organization of the territory.

Keywords

Simplified operational tools; Urban and territorial planning; Post Covid phase

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1. Introduction

A relevant part of our discipline (of town planning) tried to understand how space has changed over the time, to identify more or less recognizable roots that may possibly represent elements of continuity and support for the present era and, may be, a sort of future projection.

Certainly, we don't miss the complexity of this investigation and often the frustration of remaining with a few cognitive fragments capable of projecting ourselves into our task of organizing (planning) the urban space over the time.

Time is one of few axioms of our discipline, it's the main actor of all spatial transformations and of the organization of our in becoming civilization, a rewarding certainty to which we can lean on with confidence. Time is a certainty of sequential connection, questioned almost exclusively by utopian instances, almost always borne as inevitable corollaries, which sooner or later would have adapted at the "right time in / in the right space".

The revolutionary thought of modern relativism has introduced unknown paradigms, indecipherable with our ordinary disciplinary tools, but which require at least an effort of "conceptual adjustment". It is necessary to probe complex cognitive levels in search of absolutely innovative factors, generators of new and different spatialities, not consequential but merged in the space-time dimension.

The gratifying and understandable series of the "spatial figuration" of the organization / planning of our urban space has been irreparably endangered by the new dogma of temporal and spatial relativism.

Then, how is possible opening new paths in the unexplored forest of our future state? How is possible to look for new approaches and tools that can, at least, try to re-generate our discipline, with a minimum of coherent scientific assumptions?

Almost dramatically: how to understand, organize and govern our liquid society?

A challenge that we must inevitably take up, with immense patience and intelligence. We have to establish a simple starting hypothesis: the awareness of having reached a point of "no return", but more intense and meaningful than others, considered as such, encountered during our long journey¹.

The past instantly loses (or must lose) its operational value, to become a cultural reference of collective memory, to which historical elaboration can attribute appropriate value.

2. The mantra of Simplification

Not only in our discipline, the "simplification" is a theme and an objective now considered fundamental, essential, absolutely transversal to the various operating levels, and especially in the regulatory and procedural subsets.

For a long time and from several parts, the simplification of building and urban planning regulations, but also of the related administrative processes, of the entire procedures, of the same final checks and ex-post controls, even the same technical-scientific disciplinary language. This language, unfortunately, is too often self-referential, "incomprehensible" to the same users: whether they are administrators and/or public or private decision-makers, whether the same "representative citizenship" than has now become an active subject in the decision-making process through "participation"².

The Covid-19 tsunami (still in progress) seems to indicate precisely the "simplification" as a possible (almost certain and necessary) reference to which to attempt to anchor the complex and difficult subsequent "reconstruction".

¹ The thought runs almost instinctively to the "seven messengers" (see: Buzzati, 1968).

² We refer to the Italian situation where the "active participation" in the decision-making process of urban planning is a recent compared to other foreign situations where is widely practiced and consolidated for some time.

In this specific situation, we will limit ourselves to carrying out some technical-scientific reflections on the urban planning context and, in particular, on the contents of the "urban plan" in the era of Covid-19, and in the necessary suborder of reference, its structural and morphological regulatory framework.

3. The plan of the offer (the offer plan)

The (urban) plan³ in "modern urbanism" represents the purpose and instrument of our scientific-disciplinary work, in its countless forms and contents. Referring in particular to the Italian situation, the urban planning community hasn't certainly skimmed on studies, analyses and plans which, over the years, have achieved pachydermic features and forms, where the plan/project has transformed itself into a "Double-faced Janus". On the one hand, the normative quagmire, unfortunately often blurred in some of its fundamental components; on the other hand, the centrifugal force, gradually increasing, of the reproductive centralities of cognitive analysis that are multiplying at all levels. Too often the culture of the Plan has tried to rest firmly on the utopian solidity⁴, which has always been practiced with ups and downs by the constituted power. Fixity, certainty, security, uniformity - but also: dirigisme, collectivism, geometrism, perfectionism, fixism, etc.⁵. - are just some of the founding elements of the Plan that power offers to itself and its subjects. Changes are always dangerous, harbinger of questioning, of interruptions, of disconnections, of dangerous confrontations, not contemplated in the structure of the Urban Plan. By its own nature, the Plan is incompatible with the dynamics of reality. The effects and instances of the real (unquestionably variegated and complex even in its dynamics) are looking for new balances, but they are absolutely incompatible with the constituted power, which bases its preservation and its identity precisely on its static, immovable, unquestionable and therefore immutable balance (as much as possible, at most in very small doses).

The Urban Plan has always incorporated in itself the utopian components that were functional and necessary in a specific moment and in those spatial situations, sometimes in a not very conscious way.

In the introduction of a multi-handed publication on the "Utopian Presences", Giordani specifies: «Unlike the past (pre-industrial and paleo-industrial) during which, in general, the utopian drives were "lateral" to the corporate context (usually clearly distinct or even opposed), in the contemporary and, in particular, in the governance of the territory of our country in the last thirty years, the aforementioned impulses are frequently filtered through institutions, appropriating to varying degrees the public opinion, the prevailing mental constructs, settling into the positive norm and policies, coexisting - albeit between oppositions (but without obvious traumas) - with the coordinates and the becoming of the system.» (Giordani, 1996, p. 9).

Historically the urban plan is mainly a design and representation of the "offer" of the power of reality «...leaving to the individual and private liberties an increasingly restricted area» (Leoni, 2008)⁶. Without forgetting the legislative component that "formalizes the plan", which, due to its actual inflation, has made the Plan its less light, comprehensible and feasible. Unfortunately, the urban plan is now too often a traumatic dogmatic prefiguration of abstract collective interests.

³ It would be necessary to specify what is meant by town-planning and a town projecting. In our meditation, we will refer mainly to the Plan and only partially to the Project, as we believe that in this specific case it is sufficient to consider the urban project as an integral part of the "planning". It may be useful to refer to a definition by Giordani: «In the broadest sense, the project presumes anticipation, underlies the projection of (any) intellectual production. A creative path –ideative and operative– proper to the individual, to the subject; which, in this way, is exteriorized into a result. In particular, the architectural or urban planning project has, as a final result, the creation of a space, respectively internal or external; in fact, an identity, as one is resolved in the other. [...] in a dynamic space, [...] marked by quality.» See: Giordani, 2001, p. 12.

⁴ Starting from the Ruyter's classic definition: mental exercise on possible side effects. Moving on to Trousson's observation (paraphrased by Giordani) that utopia is in an immutable present that knows neither the past nor the future. See: Giordani, 2001, p. 13 and p. 16.

⁵ Elements of the utopian genre (see: Giordani, 2001, p. 15).

⁶ In our observations, for "individual freedom" we want to mean everything that has some main connection with the "plan question".

If we should analyze the vicissitudes of the Italian story of the urban plan, it would be enough to have punctual confirmation of this. The enthusiasm for the young national unity acquired is mainly embodied in the Plan of the capital, which arrives from Turin to Rome via Florence. And it is precisely the Poggi Plan that seems for the first time to link Italy to the European industrial modernity, playing more on the prefiguring form than on the dynamic contents in progress. Despite the distortions of self-exaltation, the Fascist period certainly caught the rationalist lesson, elaborating, in a significant way, the fundamental principles and obtaining concrete and positive results especially in the field of territorial planning (agricultural reclamations of vast national areas and related urban foundation systems).

This long beginning of national unification finds its first moment of coagulation of the Plan ("of the offer") right at the beginning of the Second World War, once again as a two-faced Janus, perfectly distinguishable. On the one hand, there is the inevitable condensation of late-romantic thought, still prevalent in Italian culture (B. Croce), which finds its automatic exemplification in the two laws of 1939.⁷

On the other hand, there is the law 1150 of 1942 (the fundamental urban planning law in Italy), absolutely stubborn, in a manifest attempt to put itself on a par with the other European advanced countries, even in the awareness of the lack of its socio-economic support of concrete reference.⁸

Analyzing with attention, without disciplinary prejudices, we would have the possibility to verify, without great difficulty, the structural permanence of the utopian immanence in the fundamental urban planning norms that inevitably refract in all Italian planning practice, at all levels. Utopian continuity that is punctually found in all the urban planning norms of the following decades and in its main product (the Plan) until the "fall of the wall" (by convention now widely accepted and shared).

In recent decades, and especially in the transitional period between Modern and Postmodernism, the Plan has inevitably had to include the "environmental question", which has represented (and still represents) the real main element of the crisis of the Plan itself. In this sense we can at least hypothesize that the "environmental question" may represent the main cause of the inevitable value decrease of the Plan in terms of "offer" and the corresponding complementary growth of the "question" component.⁹

Hargrove argues that the "environmental question" (or «environmental ethic» as he defines it) is first of all to be sought in an incomprehensible lack of Western philosophy, if not in a deliberate and stubborn mystification. If the environmental theme had taken other directions and contents within the Western philosophical and scientific thought, we could say that the same urban plan would have had very different trajectories and paths and that almost certainly the history of the (town planning) plan would not have been merely an imposition of the offer of power. In continuity with Greek and Roman thought much of Western culture up to Descartes and beyond: «...the human soul was, once again, permanent and indestructible» and furthermore «...since the existence of physical matter depended directly on the exercise of God's power, an appropriate context for human involvement and interest was still lacking. Changes in nature, good or bad, were simply manifestations of God's will and therefore beyond human control» (Hargrove, 1990).

The absence of the "environmental question" in main body of philosophy and science must be sought, precisely, in the persistence of this incomprehensible distinction between «...primary and secondary properties. The observations made by geologists and biologists focused on secondary properties – colors, tastes, smells,

⁷ With the law 1497/1939 for the first time the landscape spatial Plan is introduced as the only instrument (absolutely utopian) for "protection of natural beauty" (and its landscape).

⁸ Demonstrating once again, and perhaps more than in other cases, the natural utopian propensity for Italian norms and urban planning. The simple proof, irrefutable, lies in the implementation (in space and time) of the law itself, including its countless integrative adaptations, as well as its implementation and procedural overturning with respect to what was established (initially foreshadowed): we refer to the pyramidal system for consequential levels of prescribed planning, completely disregarded in practice, if not completely "overturned".

⁹ Recalling that is a complementarity and it certainly cannot be directly transferred equally in absolute terms, mainly because of the greater degree of complexity of the environmental issue.

sounds – that were considered and perceived subjectively rather than objectively. [...] this interest in secondary properties means that naturalists were often closer to poets and painters than physicists and chemists» (Hargove, 1990, p. 51). It seems paradoxical understand the mystery (and perhaps the inevitable related doubts) that Darwin captures in his attempts to base his science solely on fact and the same time: «The loss of aesthetic tastes implies a loss of happiness, perhaps it damages the intellect and more likely it damages moral qualities, because it weakens the emotional part of the personality» (Hargove, 1990, p. 54).¹⁰. Unfortunately (as Hargrove maintains) «...the philosophy of science has constantly invalidated the legitimacy of the natural and environmental sciences; in full awareness» (then, and today in an even more alarming and urgent way) that: «The environmental crisis is certainly the most serious problem facing civilization today» (Hargove, 1990, p. 57).

3.1 The Demand Plan (the plan of the demand)

«Minimalism, flexibility, public-private negotiation, radically transform the animus of the plan. The plan becomes a “demand plan”, a strategic interpreter of the becoming of society, instead of a plan-offered prefigured by the public, authoritative and discretionary (as in the past), a genesis derived from society as “operative hive”» (Giordani, 1996, p. 45).

Few clear elements, such as those just mentioned, allow us to make some important considerations. The “minimality” should be understood not so much as a diminution of the Plan, but rather, as its operational necessity. The Plan, still too unbalanced on the public-administrative offer side, has acquired a really complex mass (of contents, normative references, prescriptive levels and degrees, relational links, etc.) to be (correctly and effectively) transferred into practice, but above all to be a sure reference both in the authorization and implementation-management phase. Minimality, therefore, must be also understood as careful and correct “simplification”, perhaps the only “instrument-method” on which we can really count for the same recovery of value (and credibility) of the Plan itself. We have to accept the challenge of having to face considerable efforts, both theoretical and analytical, for the identification of new innovative paradigms to support the new Plan, where simplification can be correctly combined with the effective increase in the ability to govern complexity, without altering its constitutive, shared values.

Flexibility has always been, with the various graduations in time and space of reference, one of the main enemies of the “plan offer”; it is therefore easy to understand, if not automatic, that this represents a fundamental instrumental objective of the “plan demand”.

Only recently, the public-private relationship has found significant spaces within the Urban Plan. The “invisible hand” has always tried to break through the various phases and seasons of the Plan (“offered” by the power of turn, however definable “public”), almost always with laughable results, certainly not recognized for obvious power relations. The absolute necessity to research for new and more complex levels of balance (stubbornly stable) of the Plan has entailed (and involves) the indispensable contribution also of its “private” component, decisive pawn for the definitive passage to Postmodernism. The (postmodern) Plan has the absolute necessity to certify that the “private” component, after its long formative path, has finally become (in its whole variegated and dynamic) main actor of the urban plan. In the continuous negotiation process between public and private, flexibility is an inalienable factor, as in the DNA of the private, but also as the main matrix of the “development”. Flexibility perhaps represents the main objective of the private component (and its “plan demand”) ¹¹.

It is precisely in these terms, as we shall also recall later on, that the same “minimal plan” – interpreter of the evolutionary process of reality, aimed at development [which] in order to be feasible [must] necessarily be

¹⁰ Hargove recalls Darwin, 1980, p. 77.

¹¹ Development is by its very nature transient, precisely of the ineluctability of becoming, therefore of the continuous demand for coherent transformation.

flexible [i.e.] a transformation plan in continuous updating (Giordani, 1996, p. 45) – can be understood, first, as a determining component of the same “request plan”, but also, subsequently, as a determining component of the constituting “residual plan”. The analytical-propositional reflection of the whole environmental question remains, in our opinion, still absolutely insufficient and inadequate within the content lexicon of the “plan question”, even if interesting cues in the international scene do not seem to be missing.

4. The complexity

The degree of complexity of our discipline grows over time, in inevitably varied forms and ways. In the panorama, which is the subject of our present reflections, we believe that the “environmental theme” represents a fundamental knot of the path we are practicing. The need to deal with the environmental issue in analytical and scientific terms within the (urbanistic) Plan has entailed and involves a substantial revision of the procedure and of the theoretical and implementing, practiced or practicable contents. Contents and operative practices related to the “territory” and the “landscape” have found their adequate and coherent spaces within the (urbanistic) Plan itself, at least in terms of recognizable historical-cultural value, because they were sufficiently consolidated and shared.¹²

With the introduction of the environment (and its many corollaries), a surge (perhaps unexpected, certainly not foreseen) in the complexity of the Plan is manifested. The “environmental theme”, in a short time, has led to the introduction of new scientific paradigms in our discipline and in the Plan (its main workhorse), and among these: objective multidisciplinary innovative experimentations, capable of unhinging (or at least reconfiguring) necessarily languages, styles and processes of urban government now no longer adapted to the new reality. So, this is an action of “opening”, of space-time disconnection, which many tend to identify in the passage from Modern to Postmodern, which could be an opportunity to deal a mortal blow to the utopia of order, of prefigurative geometrism, of political-administrative dirigism. All they are never synchronous with the effective demands of the incessant transformation of the dynamics of reality. Finally, the “seven messengers” will be able to look only in front of them, with the analytical and proactive priority of trying to understand and understand the objective factuality of the present, which day after day is able to condense into a “young past”, directly verifiable; but also they will be able to concentrate with greater strength and determination in the “possible future”, with great freedom and dynamic creativity. If the outcome of the environmental issue (which some even make coincide with the end of the “short century”) has led, as it seems, to new levels of complexity (both in terms of quantity and quality), it seems now well established that Covid-19 is inexorably pushing us into new and more binding levels of complexity of the Plan and the governance of its most innovative contents. Covid-19, even in terms of urban planning itself, only accentuates, and will accentuate, the many grey areas present in the current Plan, due to the evident lack of new reliable reference points to which we consciously, responsibly and inevitably hook ourselves. The increase in complexity due to Covid-19 forcibly forces us to practice strenuous extra time, in an increasingly slippery playing field, where we can invent new trajectories and strategies. It seems appropriate, therefore, to refer first of all to the fundamentals of the discipline, old and new, in order to try to identify a new dynamic balance (hardly stable and lasting) where the surge of emergency complexity (due to the pandemic Covid-19) can very appropriately find significant coherent answers in the Plan.

It becomes therefore necessary to try to identify, with shared technical-scientific precision, the main point of the “environmental question” practiced so far. The time has come (surely Covid-19's accomplice) to realize that the urban planning discipline and his favourite son (the Plan) is coming (or perhaps he has already passed

¹² In these terms we can therefore consider that the joint action of the consolidated territory-landscape combination within the Plan has not led to major upheavals in terms of significant discontinuity of values and degrees of complexity. Highlighting in all this a certain specific incremental regularity.

without his knowledge) those «limits of scientific knowledge so dear to Wittgenstein (paraphrased and reported by Hargrove within the “environmental” discipline) (Hargrove, 1990, p. 200).

And if it is true that the long and exhausting path taken by the “environmental theme” has managed to reach the fence of scientific knowledge, the correctness (and clarity) of the language becomes essential. This is why the “environmental issue” (structural and strategic support of the Plan, recent and future) must necessarily distinguish clearly its main words: territory, environment and landscape. It seems to us that the arguments developed by Valerio Romani can be a specific reference set, sufficiently correct and shareable. In extreme synthesis (in the hope of having grasped at least the instrumental “simplification” of his technical-scientific reasoning) we could associate each individual “root vocabulary” with its own autonomous domain: set-territory; set-environment; and set-landscape. And, always simplifying as much as possible, to think that the single definitions are above all marked by the priority operativeness of the Plan¹³.

The “territory”, in urban planning disciplines, has been traditionally and commonly used in its economic meaning, to the application of the economy to the real space, and «to the problems of the geographical distribution of economies and the consequent settlement phenomena» (Romani, 1994, p. 54). And even more precisely: «The territory is therefore only “surface available”, more or less suitable to satisfy the needs of the economic organization of the space, as an inert support of the anthropic interventions linked to the demographic dynamics, to the processes of colonization, of production, of urban localization and, in general, of distribution of human activities, independently of presence or natural attributes» (Romani, 1994, p. 54).

The “set-landscape” and the “set-environment” are more technically and scientifically complex than the “set-landscape”. And it is precisely to their specification (definition) that several scholars of the “environmental” disciplines have dedicated themselves. Just the “polysemic” nature of the landscape has complicated its understanding in scientific terms. As well as its almost natural mixture (overlapping) with its main derivative: the environment. It is no coincidence that on several occasions today the two root-vocabulary is still used imprecisely, and too often as synonyms. We can say, however, that we are now able and must absolutely strive to use the two terms in an appropriate way in the absolute necessity to govern the “complexity” with the instrumental intelligence of the concrete “simplification”.

The “landscape” for Romani (1994, p. 47): «is a dynamic system of ecosystems in mutation, readable only as an evolutionary process. It includes all the active or inert elements of spontaneous or anthropogenic origin that make-up the ecosphere, as well as their structural and functional interrelationships. This system also constitutes the highest level of organization».

And let’s complete the frame of reference with the definition of “environment” with some initial clarification: «environment is a relative and not an absolute term», unlike territory and landscape which are terms in themselves specifically absolute (at least in reference to their specific unitarity). Moreover: «the environment does not exist in absolute, but only if related to a subject, individual or collective, living or inanimate. Finally, to arrive at its synthetic but effective definition: Having determined a certain landscape P and having fixed a subject S “inside P” [we define] environment relative to S, the set of elements and processes belonging to P with which the subject S has one or more determinable relations, as well as the set of the relations themselves» (Romani, 1994, p. 47). It seems to us absolutely fundamental to close this paragraph with a disheartening warning, but at the same time it can represent a certain reference for urban planning: «how much confusion has been generated precisely because of a sloppy and approximate use, as well as wrong, of terms and concepts that instead take a fundamental role in specialist arguments, in decisions, even in laws, which deal with landscape and environment, so particularly affect our existence» (Romani, 1994, p. 47).

¹³ In this sense, with acceptable approximation, one could configure the three different “root vocabulary” as a simple triad of corresponding matrioske.

4.1 The plan of the remaining

With the usual methodological clarity, already in 1996, Giordani (p. 43) had expressed the need to move without delay to the «plan of the remaining». On that occasion we find all the necessary ingredients to build the new “residual plan” (or minimal or modest as also recalled by the author himself); with a fundamental clarification, which represents the small contribution that I intended to put at the base of my reflection.

With his arguments, Giordani inevitably tends to make the “plan question” coincide with the “plan residual”, as both, in his view, interpreters of the “market”. This simplifies the problem, since, at least in the first instance and with a good degree of approximation, the initial three variables are reduced to two. In particular, the “residual plan” is understood as: «[instrument] interpreter of the market, [...] at the service of the interpretation of becoming (to be understood as an unintended result of a spontaneous evolutionary process), not a virtual anticipation of an alternative deliberate project» (Giordani, 1996, p. 44).

Our reflections have tried to better specify that the “plan question” has its own precise characterization, an unquestionable substantial importance and its authority now widely recognized in practice. We think, instead, that the “residual plan” must and can be the best possible balance between the intersections as much-qualitative of the “plan offered” (finally cleaned and regenerated, in form and spirit, by the innovative and efficient instrumentation of the “simplification”) and of the “plan question”. Reminding ourselves that the scientific clarification of the “environmental question” represents the turning point towards the maturity of the “plan demand”.

The “residual plan”, can represent the concrete solution of the Postmodern Urban Plan, even if perhaps not yet sufficiently equipped, understood and shared.

Covid-19 has unset almost everything: one of the few certainties seems to be the persistence of the Covid-19 pandemic in a certainly not short time span.

So, why not try experimenting with the “residual plan” right in the “transitory” of the Covid-19? By now even the last messenger is about to join us, he will be tired, maybe old, as old and blurry as the information he carries within himself. After a few days of rest, perhaps, we can send ahead him too, like his companions, towards the limit of our present knowledge, and maybe even beyond.

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