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Governance, natural disasters and town planning

Pier Luigi Properzi

Apart from the tragedy, which affected some 100,000 citizens, the Aquila affair is taking on a metaphorical value, regarding the incapacity to govern and, in particular, of 'territorial governance', in the emergency and reconstruction phases.

Earthquakes, rubbish appearing everywhere, floods and fires have given rise to a costly machine, whose philosophy of action has affected government and its attitudes. But the Aquila affair is heading for a terrible failure of the model of administration by an external commissioner.

At Aquila, the reconstruction process is running aground: – governance is not producing any effective, coherent measures;

– the guidelines of the Mission technical unit (Mtu) have so far addressed only partial themes;

– the resources provided cannot manage to become expenditure, lack-ing approved projects;

– allocating approval and control to two consortiums has 'bureaucratized' reconstruction procedures and kept citizens from direct relations with the decision makers.

The Civil defence agency, instead of using tents and containers for the emergency period, has experimentally erected about 5,000 'permanent' housing units for 'temporary' inhabitants. A model that has worked in the emergency, with 4,850 housing units erected in less than 5 months, on bearing slabs with seismic insulation; but dealing with the emergency cannot work also for reconstruction, which must have ordinary methods, ordinary instruments and shared decisions.

Municipal resources and even those of the Mtu are insufficient, while the solution of the long-term issues (strategies and roles) and those still in the emergency stage (rubble clearance) are very complex. The basic problem is the lack, even today, of a model to deal with reconstruction. This is a matter of controversy, as the Government had decided that external commissioner was the right solution for both the emergency and reconstruction, and has confirmed this decision. In the forthcoming months, therefore, the 'lame' centralized model will run up against a widespread, but still uncertain, trend to bring the whole reconstruction process back under ordinary management at local level; against which there is the inadequacy of the local operative structures, as well as the current social breakdown and the long times required by ordinary processes.

An appeal was addressed by Inu and Ancsa to town planners, to reflect on what should be done (workshop of May-July 2010, Forum), and this brought forth a package of structural reflections, whose aim was not to 'formulate solutions' but to 'focus properly on the problems', presented at Venice on 28 October, in the course of Urban Promo. Town planners, transport experts, urban economists, ecologists and architects noted a sub-

stantial difficulty in defining the main aim: how to plan a small regional capital after an earthquake that has destroyed almost the whole of its historic centre, and an 'emergency reconstruction' that has radically changed its structural, social and economic pattern.

No reconstruction is possible without a plan that is operative with local administrations, as shown by Umbria and Friuli. What has emerged is an odd town planning 'in parts', with no explicit strategy shared with the local administrations, managed by an Mtu that tends to occupy the planning space but has neither adequate powers nor competences.

Framework agreements could be a short way to reach an institutional commitment between a Region aware of having to rebuild its capital, and the Government which considers the solution to have been found. But there must also be technical acts, mainly of ordinary planning. Local administrations can organize themselves in this sense, and perhaps then Italian town planning could produce plans useful for reconstruction, shared strategies, ordinary instruments and adequate technical structures.