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*Paolo Avarello*

If the plan...

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*edited by Manuela Ricci  
Roberta Lazzarotti*

**Problems, policies, and research**

Minor historic centres, the many ways of promotion and improvement  
Regional actions for promoting historic centres. The opposition between town planning renewal and economic revitalization

*Giovanni Biallo*

The national Gis system for the cultural heritage

*Roberto Fiorentino*

The Region of Campania promotes the rehabilitation of its minor historic centres

*Giulia Augusto*

Atessa's historical centre between industrial and post-industrial development

*Claudia Mattogno*

The complex balance of the sites entered on the Unesco list: the case of Lijiang

*Paola Lucia Cannas, Marco Melis*

The Lab.net project. Transborder network for promoting historic urban centres Sardinia-Tuscany-Corsica

*Anna Abate, Rosanna Argento*

Shared policies for the conservation of the features of local identity: San Chirico Raparo

*Iginio Rossi*

Observatory on commercial revitalization measures in historic centres and urban areas

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**Projects and implementation**

San Benedetto del Tronto and the masterplan: a choice, a challenge

*Piergiorgio Bellagamba*

The city model

*Luisa De Biasio Calimani*

The form of the city

*Franco Panzini*

Environmental resources

*Luisa De Biasio Calimani*

Open spaces and collective places

*Roberta Angelini*

The masterplan construction procedure

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*edited by Paolo Scattoni*

Grosseto. Structure plan and the memory of planning

*Marco De Bianchi*

The contents of the plan: the three dimension of sustainability

*Lucio Carbonara*

Urban planning and research

*Lucia Gracili, Pietro Pettini*

Territorial plans and structure plans

*Carlo Alberto Garzonio*

Geology and urban planning

*Luca Favali*

The plan, Agenda 21 and environmental certification

*Manuela Ricci*

A plan and its possible memory

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**Profiles and practices**

The Urbanistica prize

*Paolo Avarello*

Presentation

*Massimo Cavallaro*

Romagnano al Monte (Salerno): a contract of quarter for an historical centre under used

*Sebastiano Steffinlogno*

Green by-pass, study for the requalification of the territory crossed by the Passing of Mestre

*Elisabetta Piacentini, Alice Marie Soulié*

Eastgate Park, Portogruaro (Venezia)

*Luca Panizzi*

Perugia, Monteluca project

*Francesco Suraci*

From the sea-shore to the hill: and the front-city of Reggio Calabria

*Franco Zuliani*

Verona, Consorzio Zai

*Riccardo Barbieri*

Parco Europa at Cesena

*Olimpia Niglio*

History, landscape and sustainability. The seaside holiday camps of Calambrone

*Manuela Barducci, Roberto Cavallucci*

City of Forli: feasibility study of the ministerial project system centro-nord

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*Edoardo Zanchini*

**Methods and tools**

Conflicts in a networked territory

*Francesca Governa, Gabriele Pasqui*

Local development weak areas

*Paolo Pileri*

Preventive ecological compensation for a new planning way

*Francesco Ventura*

Planning as a problem

## Regional actions for promoting historic centres. The opposition between town planning renewal and economic revitalization

Roberta Lazzarotti

The activity of the Regions is always an interesting test bench for experiments urged by the theoretical debate; this basic conviction has led to conducting a selection of the most recent regional initiatives regarding the promotion of historic centres either in the form of a law or competitive bids. The regions identified are in all nine (for a total of fourteen initiatives), distributed fairly uniformly throughout national territory. A first important aspect is that of the delimiting of historic centres for the purpose of admitting them to financing; only Sardinia and Campania have made their own original definition, while elsewhere they limit themselves to making reference to the A zones delimited by the Masterplan. In other cases, lastly, it is preferred to draw up special lists (indexes, inventories, catalogues). The experiences investigated share a vision of the historic centre as a vulnerable richness; this is proved also by the fact that the maximum dimension of the municipalities is determined in as many as six of the cases with the clear aim of halting the process of demographic and economic impoverishment in progress. The most frequent goals of the initiatives regard the conservation and the enhancement of assets and the improvement of their use for purposes of tourism; urban renewal and support for cultural, tourist and economic development should also be pointed out. The will to 'strengthen social cohesion' (Sicily) and that of rehabilitating historical building for purposes of 'limiting the consumption of

territorial resources', to be pursued through the re-use of empty dwellings (Sardinia), are peculiar but significant in the local condition.

The range of action typologies admissible may be represented by means of a classification based on increasing complexity:

- a first level can comprise initiatives including only building works on historic assets;
- the second level refers to measures on open spaces, often also outside of the perimeter of the historic town walls, above all for reorganizing mobility and improving the general conditions of accessibility;
- in the third level are complex programmes, based on the principle of integration between action typologies, functions and public and private resources;
- the fourth level includes initiatives in which there is a particular attention to territorial scale (Sardinia), seen in the choice of addressing the bid notices to networks of municipalities, which are required to draw up a strategic document in which the actions foreseen must have significance and coherence.

Corresponding to the increase in the strategic dimension of the measures is the progressive waning of the vision of the historic centre as an asset in itself, in favour of a vision of belonging to a broader territorial and cultural space. This certainly has to do with the evolution of the concept of safeguarding the landscape, but it is also in connection with the growing awareness of the necessity to act first and foremost on the conditions of liveability of historic centres, as an inevitable factor of economic and cultural survival.

The really discriminating aspect in the experiences analyzed is that of the strategy through which the

objectives are pursued.

The initiatives may indeed be distinguished between those specifically turning to the municipal administrations for rehabilitation actions, or to private partners in support of economic activities; the entity of the two groups is still quite unbalanced in favour of the former. The logic thus still prevails of the (physical) measure on the container rather than the tangible one on the content; but there should also be a reflection on the reduced space assigned to the public-private relationship. The bid notices that expressly foresee the participation of private partners in fact represent only half of all the notices examined, nor in this sense was the lever used of the criteria of assessment of the proposals, the majority of which refer generically to the quality of the design. Only in four regions is the accent placed on the integration of public and private resources; other important criteria concern the degree of concerted discussion and participation, technological innovation and energy saving, synergy with other renewal initiatives, feasibility and the impact on employment.