TOWARDS CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF LA SPEZIA

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The case of La Spezia

1 – Urban evolution and identity

1.1 Urban identity?

["He went to a window and opened the shutters. "*From this window you can enjoy the view of one of the most evocative places in Rome. Look, look at the harmony of storeys…"* The window looked onto an anonymous crossroads with houses built in the immediate post-war period in the wake of one of the many demolitions. The street lights lit up this deserted environment completely bereft of any architectural interest."]
Giuseppe D'Agata, *Il segno del comando*, 1994

One of the constituent characteristics of a city, but in reality of life itself, has been identified by Patrick Geddes in the "endurance of its individuality in spite of ceaseless change" (Geddes & Thomson, 1925). The Geddesian conception of this resistance is intrinsically procedural, far from any attempt to reify a stable identity of the living in a symbolic image. A widespread limit of formulating concepts and pseudo-concepts of identity in the context of disciplinary rhetoric seems to be that of tending instead to transfer onto objects of urban history reassuring projections of a need for harmony and stability. As the same Geddes maintained, identity is not deciphered in heredity, history as unchangeable heredity in which our ancestors determined the reasons for our fate, but in heritage, the deep essence of the social soul, history as a continuous product of decisions, in which it is we who choose our ancestors (Ferraro, 1998). The identity of the city, which is an ambiguous and elusive concept, can be posited as the result of an act – unnatural and always relative to the subjectivity that completes it – of abstraction of a relatively stabile image from an unpredictable and continuous process of change "from which forms emerge and in which they are destined to disappear" (Remotti, 1996). Identity in this perspective is the result of a decision. This result is always full of partiality, conflicts and contradictions in the separation of a mental figure from the continuous and unpredictable movement of things. The narration that follows aims at demonstrating the relevance of these brief reflections in the context of

the case of La Spezia, a small coastal city in the north-west of Italy with a population of about 95,000 that has had a history of changes and discontinuities, sometimes of a catastrophic proportion, that have marked its process of formation, growth, crisis and reinvention.

1.2 The foundation city, the city of the Military Arsenal of the new Italian state

La Spezia – Matteo Vinzoni, 1773 (From: Cevini, op.cit.)

The original nucleus of the city is medieval: in the 14th century a podestà jurisdiction was established and walls were built around the city. La Spezia was a small centre in a wider system of land established in feudal times. Its placement, defilated with respect to large territorial distances lent it a relative marginality for centuries. Only in the second half of the 19th century did the settlement materially acquire a relevant urban dimension in the context of changes in national territorial strategies. The placing of one of the most important naval bases of the unitary state upon the wishes of Cavour, who inherited Napoleon's vision, in the plane beside this small city of not even 10,000 inhabitants led to a sort of re-foundation expressed substantially in the birth and expansion of a new city.

The Military Arsenal ("Sergio Fregoso" Photographic Archive, La Spezia)
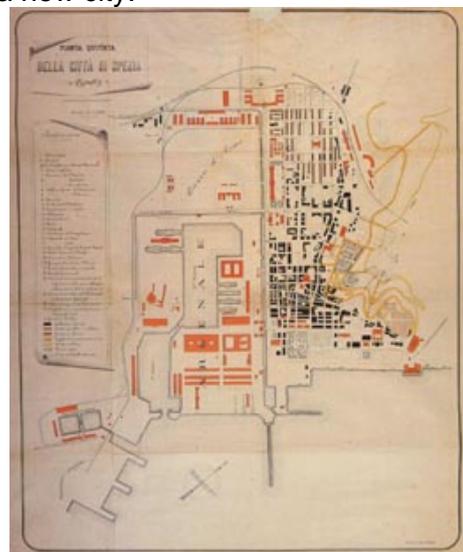
Plan of the city of La Spezia - Amerigo Raddi, 1890 (From: Cevini, op.cit.)

Demographic growth saw the triplication of the population over a period of 40 years after the establishment of the grand military opus, from about 10,000 in 1837 to over 30,000 in 1881. The 19th century urban dimension was the expression of a definitive assertion of the social classes of the industrial era, the bourgeoisie (which was prevalently tied to the military class) and the working class, and was incarnated in some characteristic themes (Romano, 1993): large tree-lined avenues, orthogonal road system, new piazzas, new theatre and a new station.

Views of the boulevards of the 19th century city ("Sergio Fregoso" Photographic archive, La Spezia)

Towards the end of the 19th century demographic growth generated by the arrival of the Arsenal led to the need to build new neighbourhoods for the working classes. Hygienic issues made cogent by a violent cholera epidemic were among the reasons for this necessity. The neighbourhood was settled in continuity with the orthogonal structure of the blocks of the pre-existing 19th century city. The city chessboard at the end of the 19th century was divided in two well-recognisable parts, in which urban forms and social composition are almost identifiable, indicating the cohabitation of two distinct settlements: the city of a new military and mercantile bourgeoisie, made of luxury blocks of houses and the city of the working class, placed in a peripheral position and composed of terraced houses, comparable to the European working class barracks.

The late 19th century labourers' neighbourhood (Comune della Spezia Photographic archive)

If "urban forms are the product of history" and in the city we can recognise "the accumulation of a sum of historical experiences" (Roncayolo, 1978), this new urban dimension certainly found an element of stability during the evolution of the city until the threshold of modernity in the permanence from the 19th century onwards of the orthogonal plant. The military settlement conditioned the size, shape and structure of the city. The size relationship, almost one to ten, between large settlement and small walled town until the mid 19th century is in itself indicative of the territorial and socio-economic upheaval induced by the new plant. The plot of orthogonal avenues that projected the new urban fabric into the planes in several subsequent phases of growth is oriented according to the axes of the 19th century naval base and continued to be so, even defining the line of growth of the city in the post-war period, thus emphasising the role of a generating and ordering element of the spatial structure. From a structural profile, the Arsenal settlement set off of a process of industrialisation that radically changed the slow evolutionary development of the city that had seen the progressive assertion of tourism until the mid 19th century. The visions that had moulded the shape and architecture of the small city since the beginning of the 19th century with the birth of the first tourism infrastructure, were swept away because the superior state interest shifted

the city's fate to that of a military and industrial stronghold (Cevini, 1989). The city became a field of expression of new military and then industrial elites. This turning point determined the affirmation of a new evolutionary trajectory: urban development was definitively conditioned, in the long-term, by the military and industrial role forced on the city and by the affirmation of a new bourgeoisie whose visions of the future formed a background for the urban plans from the beginning of the 20th century to the second world war. The urban imagery was conditioned by the new dominant classes that placed relations between the city and the resources of the beautiful landscape in a secondary position.

The orthogonal formation of the city according to the position of the Arsenal axes (Elaboration: D.Virgilio, F. Della Rocca, Comune della Spezia)

1.3 The first industrial city: urban evolution during the immediate post-war period

At the beginning of the 20th century in the surrounding territory, large industry began to settle and the mercantile port was born and accompanied by a further urban development marked by strong territorial transformations. Among these, was the levelling of a hill to enable the urban colonisation of an agricultural area, mirroring that in which the 19th century city developed. Industrial prospects introduced by the Arsenal settlement were manifested with the localisation of a series of productive plants mainly tied to the induced activity of arms and shipbuilding that even began to compete with the Arsenal itself. New industrial concentrations were progressively affirmed in the naval-mechanic sector and in that of arms production. The latter was affirmed and consolidated until it compensated in the latter post-war period for the crisis of shipbuilding. The new mercantile port was established and rapidly consolidated the rise of its traffic. The guidance role of a bourgeoisie tied to the new production and growth of an industrial system was confirmed. Urban imagery was built around plans that prefigure the doubling of the city with the urbanisation of the plane to the east of the consolidated centre, re-proposing the 19th century orthogonal structure. The large avenues of the historical city pivoting on the lines of the Arsenal were projected on the plane giving shape to visions and expectations of a new industrial bourgeoisie: the dream of a city with unlimited development gained ground in planning circles, a grand axis stretched out from the historical city to the open periphery, breaking the embankments of the 19th century city and projecting itself onto the city-territory. The 20th century plans designed blocks of the new industrial city oriented to expansion into the surrounding areas, with shapes planned according to the orthogonal structure that, by contrast with other European cities, did not however find the strength to impose and complete itself. By contrast, it ceded land and scaled down when it met the more chaotic rural orientation forms of the planes.

In the period between the two world wars, the industrial strength of the city found its aesthetic-cultural celebration in Futurism which had credited strongholds in the 1930s in La Spezia.

The 20th century city projects the axes of the urban plant, an extension of the 19th century ones generated by the Arsenal in the Migliarina plain (Elaboration: D.Virgilio, F. Della Rocca, Comune della Spezia)

The second world war was a high point of catastrophe in the history of the city, which was destroyed by bombardments, and what was left of one of its deeper elements of identity, the medieval nucleus, was devastated first by air raids and second, even more radically, by post-war reconstruction implemented in a de-regulated and speculative way through substituting pre-existing fabrics. The mutilation of the historical centre had in reality already been launched by the 19th century demolitions and in the first half of the 20th century, it was animated by the need for social control, the functional re-definition of space, and hygiene doctrine. However, wounds inflicted by war and the less serious ones of reconstruction deprived fabric and architecture more pervasively.

1.4 The second industrial city: urban evolution in the latter post-war period
Post-war development confirmed the industrial vision born in the 19th-20th century with trust in large-scale state-sponsored development, the progressive development of the port and arms production. Contemporary expansion began and substantially confirmed the 20th century expansionist visions. The orthogonal structure began to materialise the visions of plans from the beginning of the century, initially reproducing typologies of blocks characteristic of the first 19th century expansion, then shattering in the disorder of the periphery of a minor city made of cottages and houses complying with the old rural format, but also of factories and productive areas that found support for organising activities in the old paths of rural origin. The commercial port – born at the beginning of 20th century – underwent a phase of veritable expansion: the progressive moving of ship fitters from Genoa to La Spezia and subsequently, the introduction of container transport led to a strong growth in port space and employees without, however, a corresponding planning of infrastructure or environmental integration activities. Thus a substantially private port without leadership was born without the functional

constraints of other Italian ports, in particular the nearby ports of Genoa and Leghorn. At the end of the 1980s, La Spezia had become the main Italian port for goods container traffic notwithstanding the small spaces of the dock and the almost total absence of adequate rail and road infrastructure. In this framework of unplanned growth, not supported infrastructurally, the first conflicts with the city emerged: while the port became of notably national strategic interest and investments were found for roads and wharfs, the surrounding neighbourhoods underwent the repercussions of this development in terms of overall environmental compatibility.

The process of post-war industrialisation continued with strong territorial dissipations progressively leaving visible waste. The idea of an inexorable and overwhelming industrial fate with respect to the resources of the landscape, sea and their collective use, became increasingly consolidated. In the 1960s a large thermo-electric power station was located in the city thus confirming the economic horizon and conditioning possible strategic scenarios. The tourist dimension had been forgotten and the city presented itself as terrain for industrial expansion. The consolidation of the framework of productive settlements, some of which had already been in place at the beginning of the century and had been strengthened between the two wars, definitively ratified the structure: port, electrical power station, armoury industry and refinery.

The port (Comune della Spezia Photographic archive) and the electricity plant (Photo: D. Virgilio)

1.5 The crisis of the industrial city

From the end of the 1970s the economic system of the city entered a critical period characterised by decline of large-scale manufacturing industry, growth in unemployment, accompanied by demographic decline and a marked aging of the population as well as the reduction of the number of family nuclei. Large industry began to cede ground to smaller widespread realities that spread in the valleys outside the city towards areas in which land availability was less limited and spaces for production were less equipped in terms of accessibility. The city no longer had space for the shape of an emerging economy, that of small and medium-sized enterprises that tend to dislocate in a grid on peripheral, free, isotropic and homogenous land (Huet in Secchi, 1989), locating in centres of a thick network of accessibility and becoming competitive with respect to large productive complexes. The crisis of large industry dragged the traditional related craft activities with it. Surrounding valleys, like Magra in which there was more space, more accessibility and less constraints absorbed the economic energies of the city. A process of demographic decline was set in motion, a downflow from the city to the dream of rurbanisation, the widespread city, the rural non farm (Roncayolo, 1978) in surrounding areas. The crisis of the city was manifest in withdrawals that leave large urban lacunae that are still today unresolved. The urban plant seemed to collapse on the marginal areas that the progressive end of productive concentrations left as a trace of the industrial past. The crisis, principally manifest in the strong decrease in employment, also found a further element of decline in environmental questions. An environmental disaster of significant proportions, that is a dump of toxic waste in one of the most prized hillside stretches in the Gulf of La Spezia, contributed to the

affirmation of the awareness of the crisis thus opening a scenario of dissipation and wild consumption of land as the legacy of the grand industrial season. In the bloody unresolved conflicts between the living dimension, the environmental-landscape one as well as the productive one, the measure of the devastation of resources and the extinction of a possible identity can be perceived. The end of the Fordist-industrialist model of development left in its wake environmental waste and the collective conscience of an image of a degraded city, unsustainable, threatened in its very suitability for human living. A vital cycle seems to have been extinguished looking at the inventory of the environmental threats left in inheritance by military and industrial dominion: pollution of the thermo-electrical power station, still fuelled by coal, the dumps in the hills and in the military Arsenal areas (in which there is an open-air deposit of metals in front of one of the most interesting historical villages of the coast), the bloody cohabitation of movements and relative infrastructure with the peripheral living fabrics produced by a port that occupies increasing amounts of space, pollution of the sea, a sea increasingly farther from the eye of the resident that continues to struggle to find spaces to overlook it.

2 – Towards the creative city

2.1 The museum network and the new urban image

In the second half of the 20th century, in the middle of the post-industrial crisis, a totally unexpected event took place and competes as a decisive factor heralding the birth of a new urban identity hypothesis. The setting off of a new process that in the course of the decade led to a change in the vision of the future of the city was given life, not insignificantly by a member of the industrial elite. Amedeo Lia donated a collection of antique art to the city of La Spezia and ensured the commitment of the municipal administration to put in place a civic museum with the donor's name. In a short time the museum, which was housed in a restored religious building from the 17th century, was inaugurated and opened permanently to the public. At the same time, public works were organised in a strategic manner from the central generator of the museum to sustain the propagation of a process of re-qualification with a gradual but unfailing rhythm to the entire historical centre. The unprecedented proportions and prestige of the collection for the city – that led some to speak of a little "Louvre" – have led to the need to organise an adequate urban background that was translated into a gradual pedestrianisation and re-qualification of some spaces of the historical centre that were until then unknown and degraded. The progressive re-appropriation of spaces was accompanied by a collective recognition of a new urban identity, albeit not without incredulity and conflicts. Pedestrianisation gradually facilitated the proliferation of new commercial activities and services for tourism that began to crop up once again in the city, an unprecedented phenomenon since the post-war period. One after another, other donations were made giving life to the idea of building – in the context of the urban centre – a veritable museum network. To bolster the Lia Musuem, a neo-gothic building was recovered in order to host temporary exhibitions. In the same building, an art library was inaugurated and increased thanks to donations from private citizens. Here a new museum was opened, it too the fruit of private donations that offered the most complete collection of seals in the world to the municipal administration. After decades of closure, the hill-top San Giorgio castle dating from the 13th century was restored in order to host the municipal archaeological collection.

Amedeo Lia Civic Museum (Photo: D. Virgilio)

Contemporary and Modern Art Museum (Photo: D. Virgilio)

The virtuous circuit set off by Lia's donation led to the formation of further parts of the museum network. Following the recovery of an old abandoned oratory in the main street of the historical centre, the same one on which the other museums are located, the diocesan museum was arranged to host reordered ethnographic collections: thus religious and lay culture were side by side in the unitary historical perspective of the city. Therefore, after the restructuring of the abandoned courthouse building, also in the historical city centre, thanks once again to private donations, the last act of this process of museum reinvention of the city was put in place, the CAmeC – centre for Modern and Contemporary Art that gives expression to Martinetti's idea for the city, that of a "house of art" seventy years later. The museum exhibits nuclei of permanent collections but it is also a laboratory on contemporaneity thanks to temporary exhibitions. The picture of this unprecedented museum fabric is completed by the recovery of one of the benchmarks of the city's history, included in the structure of the Arsenal and a further museum, the National Transport Museum which is still being adjusted and re-organised. Overall in a decade the city underwent a general rediscovery of its historical centre thanks to a process propelled by an absolutely unprecedented development factor in its history: culture.

The entity and size of this process which apparently originated in a single event in a totally unexpected way, are totally unknown for a small city like La Spezia that has faced and continues to face a profound productive, economic, social and environmental long-term crisis. The character of this process, centred in an obvious way on works of art and museums is emphasised and reinforced by another element of novelty: the setting up of a university pole tied to Pisa and Genoa Universities by restoring a military settlement on the hills above the city. Above all, another element of strategic importance must be highlighted, a favourable circumstance for propagating the effects of this innovative event.

3 – Innovation in the planning system

3.1 The Municipal Urban Plan and the Area Plans

In the same year in which Amedeo Lia donated his collection to the city hall and in which works on the museum began, work on the new Municipal Urban Planning Instrument was launched. The innovations introduced by the urban plan regulate land useof wide importance and they certainly compete to organise the new development in the context of a reformist vision, aware of the failures of the previous planning season. The themes of sustainability and urban re-generation acquired a dominant role and enabled developing a perspective of the objective of an overall transformation of the city, beginning with the identity born from the awareness of the crisis and the emerging "city of museums". This is particularly centred on

some grand themes tied to the re-conversion of areas and the re-definition of the relationship with the sea and sustained by a new economy in which integration between production and tourism is fundamental. The particular nature of the historical moment of the city and especially the need to rapidly give shape to a new vision was made evident by the fact that in the planning process some elements of innovation were introduced both in the contents and the instruments of the plan. While work on the urban plan was underway, the city hall forwarded some strategic choices that ensured the stability and strategic reliability of the "background vision" (Piroddi, 1999) that the plan was gradually interweaving. This occurred through not totally conventional instruments and procedures approving three "area plans" relative to themes of transformation, that were subsequently totally acknowledged in the general plan. The first of these relates to the re-conversion of a large area of about 70 hectares, an urban lacuna in a baricentric location with respect to the entire urban organism left by the abandoned pre-existing refinery. Here the realisation of a new urban and district centrality is heralded with the forecast of new commercial, tertiary and quaternary functions.

The new Municipal Urban Planning Instrument (Comune della Spezia)

The abandoned refinery area (Comune della Spezia Photographic archive)

The second area plan, also of crucial relevance is that which redefines the central part of the sea front part of the town, through the planned abandonment of the first port basin situated near the urban centre with the aim of re-configuring the entire relationship of the city with the sea. The difficult theme of the cohabitation between city and port, of the compatibility of industrial and commercial development with the need to look beyond new forms of tourism development, induce fixing the strongholds of the new line of coast.

The new waterfront represents a strategic opportunity to reimpose the image of the city in a tourism direction moving the new development of the mercantile port towards more peripheral areas and bringing back to a public urban dimension and with commercial, tertiary, recreation and accommodation functions the water front placed in axis with the urban centre. The further favourable circumstance that accompanied this point in the process of planning is the concomitant formulation of the new port regulatory plan by the port authority, that enables defining a series of agreements for the reorganisation of the entire coastal line. The port expands to the east thus eliminating some of the seafronts of peripheral neighbourhoods and it will leave the first basin free in the centre. In this, through a competition, some of the relevant contents for the new tourism perspective will be defined for planning, among which a new cruise ship stop.

The first Port Basin, site of the new *waterfront*   **The urban east with retro-port areas behind the neighbourhood**
(Comune della Spezia Photographic archive)

The third area plan in the east seems to constitute the compensatory counterpart vis-à-vis the periphery of this strategic choice which is unbalanced in favour of the centre. It provides for a delocalisation of port movement activities which are currently directly in contact with inhabitants of peripheral eastern neighbourhoods of the city to an external intermodal centre and the conversion of areas occupied by them to a productive district for pleasure boats, thereby injecting new sustainable productive activities in a degraded environment of the city. Here the realisation of a new "Eastern marine front" is provided for to compensate the water front of the neighbourhood for realising new port basins and the realisation of a wet dock earmarked for hosting pleasure boats within the district earmarked for their repairing and laying up.

The urban plan integrate these three grand themes in a vision with a unitary background, providing for further areas of transformation internal to the urban structure in particular those left by the first phase of industrialisation and those earmarked for equipment and services. For those the new plan introduced an equalising mode of implementation accompanied by rules for ecological regeneration and morphological and functional integration. The plan identifies a system of historical fabric placing the city that developed until the second world war under conservation rules, highlighting for the first time the presence of a system of small historical centralities of neighbourhoods of strategic importance in the re-qualification of the peripheries in marginal areas.

The particular nature of the historical juncture of the city makes evident the insufficiency of mere traditional urban instruments as exclusive methods of planning in supporting and accompanying the grand process of social, economic and environmental transformation that seems increasingly necessary and that can no longer be deferred.

3.2 The city's strategic plan
The instrument to accompany this process certainly cannot only be the urban plan. The adoption of an instrument able to place interactions between various subjects at the centre, able to place the different levels of civil society in communication to pursue a system of shared objectives was made necessary. An instrument able to integrate urban planning instruments, overcoming the possible narrowness, extending the focus to environmental and social questions that constitute cogent themes for the future of the city and that reclaim a level of involvement and sharing that cannot be reduced to procedural and technical constraints of codified institutional practices. An instrument, in other words, able to overcome the crisis of efficacy of ordinary instruments of planning and also to give answers to new emerging questions of society (Fedeli, Gastaldi, 2004) without de-legitimating the regulatory function of urban plans. The strategic plan, which can be interpreted as a "political-planning document that expresses general, simple, stable, selective non comprehensive choices/strategies" (Mazza, 2003a), became the instrument with which to guide this grand, ambitious process of urban re-generation. While not dealing directly with regulating the use of land and physical transformation of space, it nonetheless interacts with the efficacy of

urban forecasts, and it is based on the interaction and participation of subjects to be potentially involved in implementation (Dematteis, 2003). The strategic plan of La Spezia developed in two phases. The first one began in 1999, a year before the adoption of the Urban Planning Instrument with the aim of elaborating a shared image of the city and formulating some projects for change, but especially to express the need for identity and to develop the idea of a city-community. The plan was structured as a pact among public and private actors and leadership was accorded to the co-protagonism of the municipal and provincial administration: (Perulli, 2004). The re-foundation of a new urban identity, whether real or illusory, is the fruit, in this perspective of a pact between networks of actors able to attribute a statute of reality to an idea of city. A strong inter-relation is developed among different institutions called to face each other and undersign a "pact of the new city": Chamber of Commerce, Local Health Board, Port Authority, as well as all public bodies. Other public bodies, like the Region and some other municipalities in the territorial district, while not signatories of the "pact", undersign specific agreement protocols on the strategic objectives concerning them. The objectives are: *identity*, understood as a revisiting of the historical vocations as a reference for the future of the local economy; *competitiveness*, as brought by economic globalisation with the aim of enhancing natural and cultural resources; *solidarity* connected to problems of welfare and the search for development of participative processes; *sustainability* deals with resources as the basis of competitiveness of La Spezia in an international arena. The strategic axes on which objectives are to be reached and on which over the second phase of the plan eight work commissions were articulated are: a) the sea as a significant identity resource; b) construction of an integrated provincial tourism-cultural system; c) confirmation of the centrality of defence and marine technologies; d) the promotion of variety and synergies; e) activation of strong collaboration among productive sectors and the system of training and University; f) strengthening of the infrastructural system, on a grand scale and on an urban grid scale; g) production of a more qualified environment through a better balance between productive-port functions and territory, the reduction of polluted areas and the spread of green areas and services; h) a more modern welfare based on a plural system of supply and on a renewed governance meaning participation and crediting of actors; i) structuring of paths of extended participation of citizens in the system of decisions that relate to them (Camagni, 2004). The main part of the work, more strictly tied to the theme of identity as a fruit of construction and the decision-making process, is centred on the theme of shared "vision" based on research of a new economic, social, environmental and cultural perspective. In La Spezia, therefore, like in other European experiences, the building of a shared image (Mazza, 2003b), the visionary production of a social imagination (Gibeli, 1996) of a vision of the future (Pasqui, 2001), seem to be both the motive and the objective of the plan process, opening up an arena of discussion to develop the conflictuality that each of the themes inevitably brings with it. The strategic plan serves to enable conflicts to emerge and be channelled in forms of confrontation and composition and it serves above all to build an extended sharing. On the theme of new urban identity the need for innovation seems to be emerging: the preoccupation with revisiting "historical vocations" seems to denounce the need to anchor uncertainty in the future in the *reform* of some recognised themes like *identity* for the city, among which the re-confirmation of the role of army.

4- Reflections on the case-study

4.1 Urban identity
Ongoing transformations in the city only marginally regard the urban shape and size if we compare them with the transformations that have occurred in significant moments of its history. The transformations of the foundation or of development of industrial cities have

been much more relevant both for the extension of interested areas and the characters and forms of the urban architectures implemented.

Today transformations regard the image of the city, rather than its physical form. It involves a renewed experience of the city and of its perception that solicits unprecedented behaviour by inhabitants (Lynch, 1984). The imagined city makes them protagonists of evolution of the traditional city, port and military industry to the "creative city", of culture and tourism.

Museums undertaken with appropriate and circumscribed actions of building recovery in the 19th century centre have set off a process that has affected the dimension of the overall urban imagery. Like in all complex processes, they are akin to the "beating of the wings of the butterfly that in Japan set off the hurricane on the coast of California" (Thom, 1972).

The new museum of ancient art attributes a new role and immediate visibility to the old 17th century convent long abandoned and forgotten. The new museum of modern art and the most important European collection of seals have found residence in the 20th century building that was home to the courthouse which has been restyled. A private cultural heritage, unknown to most has become a public good and has enlarged the awareness of the value of the city among its inhabitants through the renewed image of urban quality.

The careful architectural restorations and rediscovered public role of two buildings have led to the recovery of surrounding public spaces by the municipal administration and the enhancement of the down-town building fabric by private owners. A process of collective identification in the overall improvement of the urban image that exhibits the unsuspected cultural values of the city has been put in place.

In the light of this experience it is useful to ask ourselves what urban identity is. If we consider only that which appears, identity would seem to correspond to a pure image without history and context, like a photograph that identifies people in identity cards. If we consider why all this has happened, the answer is not so easy. The cultural dimension has not come from nothing; it existed already in private spaces of the bourgeoisie of the traditional city and in closed places of its collective rites. When that type of city and society finished their vital cycle, it emerged to collective and public horizons, renewing not only its image and urban spaces but also collective values and behaviour.

The new urban identity has deep roots in the humus of the military elites at the origins of the city; which subsequently became the leading bourgeoisie that directed development of port and industrial activities. The intuitions and happenings that stimulated the new urban identity were possible because fuelled by cultural and financial roots that originated in previous historical phases of the city. History sedimented and capitalised competencies, technical culture, capacity and economy that today are cultural and economic resources on which the development of a renewed and unprecedented urban identity is based.

Urban identity is therefore something more than a simple image; it is the deep structure of the way of being of an urban community and city spaces in which it lives. It is made of relations that put in relation the behaviour of inhabitants that take on the value of collective practices with the spaces in which they are manifested. These spaces have become public places in which the image of the city is expressed and therefore symbolic. The relationship changes over time and identity is renewed in the continuity of change that is physiological and vital.

The apparent discontinuities represent moments of transition in which the contradictions among different vital cycles are obvious and that manifest the structural evolution of a more general history in local history (Quine, 1969; De Candia, 2000). Identity works on the difficult border between continuity and innovation, an ambiguous and slippery border like the construction of a simulacrum aimed at giving intelligent forms to the relationship between past and future. If identity is the fruit of a decision, the weight of the past is certainly difficult to delete.

4.2 "Cultural city" and "urban culture"

If the prospects of a renewed urban identity are founded on cultural values and resources, it is natural to ask what is urban culture today and what are the behaviours and meanings that it expresses. In the feud of words between "cultural city" (Carta, 2004), as metaphor and

image for promoting change, and "urban culture" (Mumford, 1938; Zukin, 1995), as knowledge, models and techniques that enable interpreting and orienting change, you can create a short circuit that renders urban complexity banal, proposing it according to slogans of publicity images. In a consumer civilisation the city too can be sold like cars. However, in both cases culture is no longer the term that designates an exclusive dominion of subjects that have technical, professional or intellectual competencies.

The city that considers its cultural resources as motors of development places works and goods that were once objects of interest for a few scholars to the fore. Museums were once almost exclusively frequented by experts in artistic, historical, cultural material learned enough to understand the symbolic meaning of exhibited objects. Today museums are places for masses of people that activate notable economic flows in tourism activities. Average levels of education are much higher than in the past and the higher availability of free time tied to the increase in average age and early pensioners, have generated a population of potential users of cultural goods which have been likened now to consumer goods. The value of cultural goods is no longer intrinsic to the symbolic meaning of the object but to the level of "valuing" that it obtains in circuits of mass communication. Historical cities, open air museums refresh the image of facades and public spaces to attract new occasional tourist visitors, before improving the quality of life of inhabitants. The process of improvement is pervasive and is spread out in spaces and individual actions. The strategy of public interventions leads to improvement activities of many private interventions. The city is no longer transformed as a result of choices made in offices of public administrations and because of the design of subjects that have technical and professional competence. The culture of the urban project is extended to a multiplicity of actors that were extraneous hitherto but that are now essential for its realisation. The "cultural city" relates to "urban culture" in an aleatory fashion. It presupposes the renewal of the appeal of urban images, carriers of an ephemeral identity that values "cultural goods" but also requires the diffusion of new values tied to needs of urban quality and the meaning of cultural goods like public goods and new social and anthropological behaviour of identification and participation in the improvement process (Rykwert, 2000).

However, "culture" introduces contradictions and ambiguities since it cannot be pervasive of all the city reality. The excluded parts, as in the case of La Spezia in the port and retro-port areas demonstrate new aspects of marginality and degradation. They tend to be cancelled and omitted by edifying and pervasive images that publicise the city regenerated by culture.

4.3 The creative city
The "industrial city" that produces and manipulates material goods is substituted by the "cultural city" that produces and manipulates immaterial goods to support the tourism economy. But in the definition of the city that affirms itself after "industrial city", other economies also intervene that produce immateriality of images or knowledge or information. The cultural city is only one of the many aspects of a city supported by the production of immaterial goods that in more general terms is defined "creative city" (Landry, 2000). Once more the term evokes highly imaginative meanings but does not define concrete things, it provokes doubt and uncertainty. What are the relations between spaces of the "creative city" and the spaces of the "creative economy"? Are we to understand by the term "creative city" that which realises spaces of the "creative economy" or is the correspondence between the two a reductive simplification of more articulated and complex relations that hide problems that are more conveniently removed?

Reflecting on the case of La Spezia, it would seem that the definition of "creative city" does not only refer to modes and styles of economic production founded on the production of intangible goods, but refers to the capacity to manage and accompany change. The "creative city" has taken the opportunity of unpredictable and entirely casual events to activate a strategic process of urban planning in which conflicts are also active elements of change.

The contemporaneity of museums and the drafting of the new municipal urban planning instrument has created a favourable concomitance that has facilitated the setting off of a

season of sometimes conflictual debate and new cultural events debating the future of the city. The "creative city" has sought to regularise relations among different subjects and reabsorb conflicts set off by choices on the use of land made in the urban planning instrument, inserting them as active moments in the "strategic plan of the city". The change, in which the factor of initial catalyst can be found in the donations of collections by modern benefactors, was not concluded by the drafting of the urban planning instrument. The debate and confrontations were brought together in the new instrument that institutionalised procedures and places in which all private and public subjects as stakeholders can express themselves. The planning process has been opened to a sequence of decisions and actions that have found headquarters in the procedures of the strategic plan. The structure of the "strategic plan" proposes continuous updates to accommodate unforeseen events and to make compatible different hypotheses for transformation of the city proposed by a multiplicity of actors.

The "creative city" in this sense does not require acts of predetermined, sectoral or temporal planning, but new instruments with which planning practice seeks to insert itself in the process of continuous transformation. The new instruments with which the planner operates are placed between the intentionality of planning and the causality and unpredictable nature of events.

4.4 Professional issues and challenges

Today, by contrast with the past when material problems of urban growth and the size of services and infrastructure were relevant, the most relevant problems seem to be related to the creation of attractive urban images and their communication. The field of action of the planner is no longer limited to the design of the materiality of urban forms but it is extended alto to the immaterial construction of collective imagination (Maffessoli, 1993).

Urban and regional planners have to confront immaterial and intangible questions that are difficult to approach and define. Their nature changes the paradigms and references of professional practice that have to decline the abstract terms of quality, creativity, culture and imagery with concrete actions and interventions. In the case of La Spezia, these problems took on very evident real and contingent professional connotations. By non-definitively evaluating the outcome which is still uncertain, partial and not resolute, we can reflect on the more general only apparently abstract questions. They lead us to understand what is "urban identity", increasingly recalled as a factor with which to measure urban quality; what is the nature of "urban culture" and what are the behaviour and values that express it; what is the meaning of "creative city" and if this has to necessarily coincide with the "creative economy".

The case of La Spezia is not a successful one, or at least it is not yet. Many problems are still open and large-scale conflicts still need to be resolved. Economic and demographic decline have not been overcome and environmental emergencies have still not been resolved. The hypotheses to enlarge the port have created a conflict between economic and environmental quality rationales that paralyse choices. However, it is an exemplary case that enables a non-dogmatic or non-simplified reflection on the search for a new identity by a medium-sized European city that has had an industrial and port city identity.

An initial reflection expresses the need for a theoretical and conceptual foundation. If the new emerging categories of the "creative city" send us back to abstract terms like identity, creativity, and culture, the paradigms and parameters with which these interpret and represent the urban phenomenon are still little explored. It would seem that speaking of "identity" we cannot fail to have to do with models of complexity, with continuity of history and the controlled arbitrariness of evolution.

The dimension of urban culture that does neglect the real city puts at stake a multiplicity of images, contradiction of visions, diversity of interests and interpretations, and considers conflict positive, if it enables solutions that are not taken for granted and not only imagined by a single point of view.

A second reflection also expresses a certain preoccupation. If we accept the logical simplification that associates the "creative city" with the "creative economy"; if the creative

economy is based on immaterial goods, one wonders whether the creative city also belongs to the immaterial world and therefore is not real.

There are reasons for fearing that it is fruit of manipulation of images typical of publicity slogans, once again tied to a strongly and exclusively economic vision. One wonders whether the city is not more articulated and complex, whether planning has not still got instruments to decipher and operate in the transition from industrial city to still-to-be-named city that has replaced it.

The creative city, that produces itself its own image to compete with the economies of other global cities is evidently the city of dominant elites and classes. Since the city of citizens is still far away, one has the impression that the "urban culture" that creates the imagery of the "cultural city" or the "creative city" tends to hide the phenomena of marginality and disadvantage. It proposes a unifying and media image that does not correspond with the real city.

In the meanwhile the phenomena of marginality and disadvantage have also changed but differently from the city of elites; the city of marginality does not have an equally evident image nor clear parameters to describe it. The emerging image of the "cultural city" and the "creative city" risks hiding fragmentation, discontinuity, ambiguity, and contradictions of the real city.

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