

CITY OF FERRARA
- URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT PROVIDING FOR THE
REDEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE CITY,
BETWEEN THE RAILWAY AND THE BOICELLI CANAL AND
BETWEEN VIA MODENA AND THE PO RIVER

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In Italy, over years of discussions on the concepts of town planning, the irreversible conviction seems to have achieved whereby the authoritative model, in which the decisions were made solely by the persons vested with town planning and development authority, should be abandoned in favour of a more consensual model, in which the decisions are submitted to those directly concerned, within the framework of a process of concertation.

This principle, which has already been acknowledged by the regions that have issued new town planning and development laws, and which is also contained in the “land management reform bill” presented in Parliament, and which should replace the current legislation based on the first urban planning law, Law No. 1150 of 1942.

Equally strong is the conviction that, to redevelop an already existing city is rather different from building a city anew, so it will be necessary to provide the suitable instruments for redeveloping declining urban areas, brownfields or areas suffering from a shortage of infrastructures.

The project must necessarily focus on the clear definition of the role of each party. In the case of urban renewal, the discussion involves a multiplicity of (public and private) parties, each of which represents specific social and economic, as well as cultural and image, needs and resources.

Experience is necessarily inspired by the principles of consensuality within the town planning and development process.

In many cases, the local authorities intervene in the formation of a consensus through a process of negotiation, which comes before the planning process which leads to the development of the city according to the proposed projects.

In order for development processes to be successful there must be a synergic partnership between the public party (the local authorities), whose main task is to supervise, and the private party, which proposes and provides the resources.

The project I am about to present is an example of partnership between the public and the private sectors in the field of town planning for the urban renewal of a vast area near the historic centre of Ferrara.

Ferrara, the power seat of the Este family, one of the most important Renaissance families in Italy, is located on the right hand bank of the Po river, close to the border between Emilia and Veneto. It is a city of about 130,000 inhabitants and is built on flat land. This has favoured the development of agriculture, which has always been one of the strong points of the local economy, the predominant crops being hemp, sugar-beet, wheat and fruit, which are then processed at the many processing and manufacturing industries (sugar factories, distilleries, etc.).

The core of the city, originally enclosed within pentagonal walls some sections of which are still visible, expanded through the centuries by means of a series of “additions” which, according to the definition of the Ferrara-born architect Carlo Bassi, in his volume “Why Ferrara is Beautiful” are “... *new portions of the city organized autonomously, with an important main street and the particularity of connecting themselves effectively to the existing fabric of the town, in such a manner as to determine a sort of hierarchy within the parts that are directly or indirectly concerned by the new extension*”.

In the Renaissance, Ferrara was one of the wealthiest and most advanced cities in Europe.

In this period it became necessary to add two new areas to the Medieval city, planned according to the rules of the new architecture:

- the addition built by Duke Borso in 1451;
- the addition planned by Duke Ercole I in 1492 and gradually built by his successors.

The latter (the so-called “Herculean Addition”) expanded the city to twice its former size and, under the supervision of Biagio Rossetti, the court architect, gave Ferrara an absolutely modern appearance.

The last significant “addition” was a redevelopment planned at the beginning of the last century by an engineer, Contini, on the land obtained from the demolition of a Papal fortress in the south-western section of the city.

The area concerned by the project in question is adjacent to this last addition, outside the Medieval walls.

This project, in certain parts, presents many similarities with the more authoritative “additions” of the past.

Due to the presence of two navigable canals (Burana and Boicelli), this part of the city was chosen, in 1901, for the building of the Bonora sugar factory, from the name of the leading shareholder of a company established by landowners.

During World War II the factory was almost completely destroyed, but immediately rebuilt at the end of the war with state of the art machinery.

The plant (currently owned by Eridania S.p.A.) and its grounds occupies approx. 200,000 sq. m. and skirts the railway line, representing a large and important piece of the city, as well as a noteworthy example of industrial archaeology.

In this area the effects of the urban sprawl of the last few decades are more evident than in others.

The city, in fact, in its modern expansion, has surrounded the industrial plant making it necessary to redevelop the area and to build new infrastructures, also in consideration of the obsolescent nature of the existing ones.

The redevelopment of areas of this kind cannot be achieved solely through town planning decisions, but requires a partnership between the public and private sectors. The issue of redeveloping this part of the city was first addressed at the beginning of the 1990s, in the wake of the relocation elsewhere of industrial production.

In that period, on account of Eridania S.p.A., the Ferrara surveyor, Beppino Bonazzi, contacted the local authorities to see whether they were interested in discussing an urban renewal project for the redevelopment of the area.

The *piano regolatore generale* (master development and town planning scheme) of the time classified the area as D/1, for manufacturing purposes. To proceed with any redevelopment project it would have been necessary to approve a new scheme providing for different use of land in the area, namely for residential purposes and the service industry, consistently with the neighbouring areas.

Long negotiations followed between the company, through the above mentioned colleague, and the local authorities, the outcome of which was an agreement on the new land use and the drafting of a special planning scheme (*piano particolareggiato*), in enforcement of the amendments to the master development and town planning scheme approved in the meantime, according to which the area was now classified as a former industrial area subject to urban renewal, and providing for the construction of new:

- offices 24,000 cubic metres
- shops 49,000 cubic metres
- housing 167,000 cubic metres

Due to the variety of environments in the area (buildings, industrial plants, canals, infrastructures), it was necessary to proceed with the accurate vertical and horizontal surveying of the area, to assess the lay of the land and to then draft plans consistently with the actual situation and according to the special planning scheme.

From the point of view of the infrastructures, the goals provided for in the project, and financed under the *Piano di Riqualificazione Urbana* (PRU), or Urban Renewal Plan, made available by the Regional authorities of Emilia Romagna, concerned the rearrangement of the road network within the area and its connection with the neighbouring areas, both the south-western outskirts of the city and the core of the city beyond the railway line and the walls.

The new multi-purpose redevelopment enjoys an excellent location and is easily accessible from both the city centre and the outskirts of the city, so the project provides for the construction, in the immediate proximity, of an intermodal terminal including the regional bus station, a parking area and the construction of a pedestrian subway and a cycle-path connecting it with the main railway station and the public transport system.

Environmentally, a new relationship with the surrounding context will be developed as the project progresses.

With regard to landscape planning, trees with a high scenic impact will be planted in a number of equipped green areas, for recreational purposes, with a series of pedestrian pathways along which the city may be observed from a different perspective.

The neighbouring areas, characterized by a large number of industrial plants, will also be concerned by environmental impact mitigation projects and actions aimed at partially concealing the worst sights.

The buildings too have all been surveyed, to assess the feasibility of their preservation, based on their characteristics.

To date, the refurbishment of the main production building has been achieved, a wonderful example of industrial archaeology, a veritable “cathedral of industry”, which will be used as the general headquarters of the company that owns it, with 340 clerical staff.

Apart from the offices, it will also contain auxiliary facilities, such as meeting rooms, library, archive, cafeteria, kitchen and test laboratories.

The considerable size of the project, and the complexity of the problems concerned, require the involvement in the project of architects, engineers, geologists and administrative law experts.

As a whole, the implementation of the professional part of the project may be phased as follows:

- a preliminary phase, consisting of negotiations with the public administration and the surveying of the area and of the relevant buildings;
- a design phase, followed by the approval of the resulting plan;
- a construction phase, for the implementation of the project.

The first phase was carried out essentially by the above mentioned colleague; phase two has involved a team of professional consultants coordinated by the architects Stefano Marini and Enrico Puggioli; phase three has involved another team of professionals coordinated by Prof. Loris Macci of Florence, with regard to the refurbishment of the Eridania plant, and a team coordinated by Stefano Marino, Enrico Puggioli and Bettino Bonazzi, for the town planning works and the construction of the other proposed buildings.

The outcome of this operation is a rational and positive urban renewal project for the city and an example of partnership which will undoubtedly boost other requalification projects in the other declining parts of the city's outskirts affected, like the one in question, by de-industrialization.

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