

Aesthetics in urban space: architecture and art for sustainable cities

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Abstract

Addressing the problem of aesthetics in urban space nowadays implies dealing with new models of cities, in which sustainable development, regeneration, re-qualification and urban reuse become indispensable. The reuse of the city, in regions affected by a dramatic declining of population, might prove an opportunity for inventing new ways aimed at creating new urban public spaces and new shared meanings. In the prospect of a social construction of space, the urban models become achievable by resorting to an economic and social, as well as urban, landscape. The image of the urban space is at the same time the image of power, but also that of a public space in which new practices of art and architecture can generate renewed places. Due to the spread of new artistic practices, cities may achieve enhancements by the recovering of community spaces by promoting dialog, social cohesion and resilience. The understanding between artists and citizens can breed good practices and new models of connection with the environment and the aesthetics of the city. A responsible and involved

citizenship is able to generate re-qualified relations with the social and physical surrounding environment. The theory of 'Defendable Space' by Oscar Newman (1972) suggests a correlation between the adoption and application of security measures in the subdivision and use of urban space, the improvement in the conditions of urban life and a drastic reduction of the crime rate in certain urban areas. Also Alice Coleman's research (1985) examines the relationship between design and deviant behaviours. Even the theory of the 'broken windows' by George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson (1982), associates urban decay and insecurity, affirming that the disorder (broken glass) propagates itself in a virtuous circle, expanding to an oil stain. Instead, artistic practices can foster huge cultural changes into the public spaces, contributing to revitalise the sense of place. Shared and active interventions between citizens and artists are able to generate new forms of resistance to globalistic logic and patterns.

Key words: urban sustainable development, regeneration, re-qualification, reuse; responsible citizenship

1. Introduction

The great issue of aesthetics declined in social space necessarily refers to some basic distinctions on the role of aesthetics and of the aesthetic attitude in society. To begin with the subject, we cannot ignore what Pierre Bourdieu argued. For him, the aesthetic attitude assumes first and foremost a 'distance from the world' (Bourdieu 1983: 53), i.e. a distance from *need* that is to say an essential condition for manifestations of *ease* – as P. Bourdieu also calls it – or of the *nonchalance* or *scorn* (the ease with which the man of court meets the difficulties) as it was named in the classical tradition of Baldassar Castiglione. The discussion is strictly about a construction of reality that tends ever more to disregard the needs, to achieve what Max Weber considered a 'stylisation of life', capable to orient our tastes: from the table to the house and to the city. Still, if aesthetics – as the sociological tradition always described it – could move far from that peculiar way of construction of the aesthetic sense as the sense of distinction (Bourdieu 1983) and come nearer to the territories of sociability (conceived as the whole complex of real, lived social relations that bind the individual to the others, by means of interpersonal or group bonds – according to Georg Simmel), it might find, in social space, an utterly different meaning from that of the absolutisation of the difference. I particularly refer to the great *corpus* of prac-

tices and discourses concerning co-participated models of urban planning, and – for the same reason – aesthetics, and experiences of inclusive citizenship, successfully produced in many European cities and countries in recent decades. All of those practices and discourses emphatically raising the problem of the impact of the arts and culture on topics very close to sustainability, i.e. ‘the suitability of settlement systems to withstand time, particularly from the material and functional point of view’ (Vicari Haddock 2013: 70). The complexity of an exercise aimed at the understanding of the ample set of relations binding the city and its economic, political, cultural and social resources in their variegated unfolding, on the one side, and sustainability on the other, should not discourage the sociologist whose task – as Michael Bell (2004) reminds – is in the study of the community in the broadest possible sense.

2. Aesthetics, culture and sustainability in urban space

2.1. The cultural construction of social spaces

2.1.1. New forms of cities

The community has wholly understood nature both as physical and biological presence and as cultural building: in fact, it is undoubtedly from the cultural dimension that contradictions begin, whenever you try and check the cultural meanings derived from the uses of urban spaces (the reference is obviously to Clifford Geertz, 1973). It is from the networks of meaning, woven in the cities and around them (according to M. Weber), that the meanings unfold of a culture that you can finally interpret as an independent variable of society, along with the programme strengthened by sociology of science and of knowledge (Bloor 1976). It is thus becoming very important to understand the processes that support this weaving, as also Jeffrey Alexander (2006) emphasises. Among these processes, is that which relates to the construction of spaces under the banner of democracy in the city is crucial: postulate and fundamental condition of its being the possibility of having public and social spaces easing the relationships between human beings, not neglecting the basic connection between the beings themselves with both their senses and nature. Connection bound to conflict, in globalised societies, with particular territorial ambitions and

with symbolical and political uses of nature, coming from the most variegated groups of interest. These are the forces acting on the hyper-complex scenario of contemporary cities and megalopolis, where control over tens millions inhabitants is chiefly achieved through the control of the territory and its forced urbanisation.

In Italy, every five months an area equal to that of the city of Naples gets cemented, where the urbanised surface per capita equal to 170 m² in 1956, increased to 343 m² per inhabitant in 2010. Even the case of the Chinese metropolis and of the whole south-eastern Asia during the last twenty years is lamentably emblematic and very much eloquent in this context. Thus urbanisation passes through the culture of consumption, which is the first cause of abandonment of paradigms of sustainability, not to say of the general fall in interest in aesthetics, whilst the sustainable city becomes 'how people treat the city', according to the architect Thomas Sieverts (1999) who resorts to the concept of 'intermediate city' (*Zwischenstadt* as a 'strange urban-rural landscape and a new form of city').

Following the analysis by T. Sieverts, studies on the city in recent years have pointed out that – with regard to the agglomerates of large urban regions of Europe – the concept of 'sub-urbanisation' is no longer appropriate, since it implies a relationship of unique dependence between the 'city-pin' and the periphery. By now many interactions materialised between the 'cities-pin' and the surrounding urbanised landscape; and within this urbanised structure, with its own centrality that indicates a mutual dependence: the sub-urbanisation has become an urbanisation, without yet having a defined name. For this form of urbanised landscape/city 'villaged', the epithet 'intermediate city', coined by T. Sieverts, makes no reference to the old *urbs*, even less to the *civitas*, and not even to a regional city sanctioned in any entitled form. The intermediate city lies not only between place and world, space and time, city and countryside, but also, historically, between the old town and a form of regional urban union, the contours of which is still very confused (Sieverts 2003).

According to the reading of Richard York, Eugene A. Rosa and Thomas Dietz (2003), widely shared by Paul H. Reitan (2005), urbanisation guided by the vision of the world characteristic of the culture of consumption is unsustainable. P. H. Reitan (2005) argues that the modern vision of the world defines success in terms of ability

to consume, still adding that, if modernism does not help us to consume in a sustainable way, the consequence is not a truthful vision of the world. Today, when more than half of the world's population lives in urbanised places (Solecki, Leichenko, 2006: 12), cities continue to expand, whilst people keep moving toward the centres of cities and space is made available both from decentralisation and urban expansion. In fact, every day the world population increases by a quarter of million inhabitants (Pimentel et al., 1994: 347-369). While population in urban areas continue to rise and the style of cultural consumption spreads at a global level, the limits of sustainability remain, in the limelight, defying the trend to global modernisation. Added to this, inherent in modern culture, is an ecological contradiction for which, right from the abandonment of this vision of the world depends every possibility to achieve economic social and ecologically sustainable conditions. To speak about sustainability, however, one should remember that at least three different sociological points of view on how man affects the environment might be adopted. The first being that of human ecology; the second – that of modernisation; and the third – that of political economy (York et al., 2003: 283). Since the nineteenth century we therefore passed from *brown* problems of the cities to *gray* and then *green* ones, i.e. from issues related to the need for water even for reasons of hygiene and public health, to issues of air pollution and, finally, on global problems, connected to changes in atmospheric composition and climatic change.

2.1.2. Sustainable cities and good practices

In spite of a distressing world-wide panorama, marked by non-sustainable exploitation of the territory, it is luckily still possible to cite a number of good practices and case studies in the context of sustainable urban development projects under the banner of an aesthetics more apt to repair than to heighten and exasperate differences. The socio-economic and ecological influence that sustainable cities may exert on the environment was – for example – the object of the exhibition 'Green life: building sustainable cities', held in Milan at the Triennale, from 5 February to 28 March 2010. Organised by Legambiente, Triennale di Milano and Istituto di Ricerche Ambiente Italia, edited by Maria Berrini, Aldo Colonetti, Fulvio Irace, Franco Origoni and

Andrea Poggio, this exhibition made good use of images, photos, videos and things to illustrate a selection of projects of sustainable buildings and urban interventions made with 'eco' criteria. Italy was represented by the sustainable projects of the Centre for Sustainable Energy in Ningbo in China (of Mario Cucinella) and by the Centre for the welfare of women in Ougadougou, in Burkina Faso of FARE Studio.

Italy were also the location and the certification for the Museion of KSV, the Casanova District (both in Bolzano) and the Primary School in Ponzano Veneto. Also important, in the same exhibition, are the projects of nine other European cities, with plans of architecture and urban planning completed or under construction. Among these, most remarkable those regarding Stockholm: Green Capital 2010 and 'fossil free' by 2050. Other cities in Sweden documented the enormous effort for environmental restoration of whole areas of social housing (Göteborg, Norrköping and Kristianstad); in Malmö, the harbour area was upgraded. Hamburg (the European metropolis of the green economy, pledged to reduce its own CO₂ emissions by 40% by 2020) showed the re-qualification of Hafen City with some of the most interesting buildings (Unilever and Baufeld10). Amsterdam, where by 2015 all new buildings will be 'zero-emission', displayed its best practices through the various projects in the exhibition, including the historic eco-district GWL Terrain. Copenhagen, a city symbol for the protection of the climate, was proposed with its projected carbon neutral and car free district (Nordhavn) and with its public spaces: from the recovery of the harbour area to the small vertical gardens. In Fribourg's favour, eminently green and solar city, spoke the eco-districts of Vauban, Rieselfeld and Sonnenschiff, besides the symbolic Solar Fabrik. The buildings of Zurich present in Green Life clearly proved the consistency of a city that is striving to bring the individual consumption to 2000 watts (against the current 6200): in the show, among others, the Research Centre EAWAG Forum. Last but not least the Austrian experience, recounted from Vienna and Salzburg with the 'solar and car-free Districts' (Floridsdorf 2010).

Instead, to give account of a very ambitious and commendable project of Copenhagen, in 2014 appointed European green capital (Copenhagen as European Green Capital 2014), might be made mentioned of the initiative of research in the field of culture²¹ Nordic, in collaboration with numerous partners, actions and re-

flections of artists within the project *Eco Island Amager*, Copenhagen is a widely renowned city for its engagement with a strategy *bicycle friendly*, for implicating its citizens in the democratic processes for sustainability, for the active attempt to reduce CO₂ emissions and to foster the production of sustainable forms of energy, and for a ten year plan for the purification of the aquatic area of the harbour, thus being able to authorise numerous bathing sites inside the harbour. All this is by now amply known as policy of 'Copenhagenising', widespread by Time Magazine, CNN, design companies etc. Sharing Copenhagen is the name of the programme for Copenhagen Green Capital. The sharing is strategic as a form of promotion of Copenhagen, involving agents inside and outside the same city. The Amager island did play a special role in the city's history: as tumulus of compost and landfill, the lung and storage for food, the runway through Øresund bridge and from Kastrup airport; and recently, most important of all, as a new epicentre of creativity, energy and nature.

Amager is in transformation. With its 180,000 inhabitants on 96 km² and at least as many commuters who come to work every day, it represents many of the problems of Copenhagen's development. The Eco Island Amager project seeks to explore what it might mean to be a part of the capital city with ambitions of sustainability, in a local and trans-local perspective. The project, like all those conceived in a perspective of sustainability is also likely to have its limits, that will emerge throughout its execution. The limits might usefully be compared with those proposed by P. Bourdieu who refers to the concept of the field: 'The limits of the field lie where the effects of the field cease. Accordingly we should try and measure, each time and in various ways, the point at which these effects, statistically detectable, begin to decline or vanish' (Bourdieu 1992: 71). Again, in the realisation of similar projects, the habitus, structured and structuring, 'generating principle of regulated improvisations' – according to P. Bourdieu – plays an important role. Working as an automatism, the habitus directs the practice toward a sensible future, at one time guaranteeing predictability in social order. By incorporating habitus, societies secure themselves the chance to remain the same through time as well as to regenerate by means of integrating new and external practices. P. Bourdieu's discourse on the limits

proves very effective when from good practices and projects so far cited one drifts towards bad practices, with which they are in strident contrast.

2.1.3. Sustainable cities against bad practices

To remain in Italy, bad practices meant above all public politics aimed at meeting the home needs through a distorted mode of abusive construction of territory, disregarding any attention to the construction of models of conscious, responsible citizenship. It is Federico Zanfi's belief (who analysed in particular the problem in Southern Italy) that it is within and because of these out-of-control practices that the various emerging social tensions concur to consolidate a crooked relationship between inhabitants and local political classes. The same author mentions practices and drifts of transformation that establish themselves far beyond the interpretative frameworks referable to the couple speculation/need, citing good practices of opposition and resistance, e.g. replies to the acceptance of the state of collapse of the territory; it is right that abusive edification which, since the seventies, turned Puglia from an extraordinarily fertile plain into a periphery of naked family houses, devoid of infrastructures and services. A space of failed aggregation, without squares or other usual places of meeting and which has acted as a stimulus for the inhabitants to find individual alternatives: from the gardens for self consuming, irrigated with wells (no water mains), to the tanks of phyto-purification for domestic waste (no sewerage), and to the solar photovoltaic installations that as well feed the kitchens (no gas network). The above solutions were indicated by the researcher as a 'signal of a different sensibility, but above all, a final mutation of the crooked relationship with the local politics, who at every election go on promising sewers and lampposts in the streets' (Zanfi 2010: 39-41). Owing to the spread of new artistic practices, cities can earn in the recovery of community spaces, at the same time promoting dialog and social cohesion and, last but not least, resilience. The meeting between artists and citizens can generate good practices and new models of relationship with both environment and the aesthetics of the city. A responsible and sympathetic citizenship is apt to generate re-qualified relations with the social and physical surrounding environment. Oscar Newman's theory (1972) of 'Defendable Space' suggests the correlation between the

adoption and application of security measures in the subdivision and use of urban space, the improvement in the conditions of urban life and a possibly drastic reduction in the crime rate in certain urban areas. Alice Coleman's investigations (1985) are equally focused on the relationship between design and deviant behaviours. Also the theory of broken windows (1982) by George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, associates urban decay and insecurity, affirming that the disorder (broken glass) propagates in a 'virtuous circle', reproducing itself like a wild fire. Artistic practices may, on the contrary, promote important cultural changes in the public space, helping to revitalise aesthetically the sense of place. The sharing between citizens and artists of active interventions is apt to generate new forms of resistance to logics and global models.

2.2. Retraining, regeneration and reuse of the city

2.2.1. The general idea

Building sustainable cities is therefore of the utmost importance for the future, no less than to deal with the theme of regeneration, retraining and sustainable urban reuse. The theme in fact implies the issue, crucial in town planning practice, of acting in conformity with a policy mode of a sustainable city development. Projecting sustainable cities also involves the consideration of various related aspects, among which that of spaces excluded from production processes, shantytowns, urban expansion, environmental impacts and, last but not least, consumption of non-urbanised soil.

Another issue of consequence for urban regeneration is the construction of appropriate decision-making inclusive processes. The citizens' participation, as it appears in Francesco Musco's book (2009), certainly appears as an important element on two grounds: on the one hand, to identify, support and develop policies of sustainability, and, on the other, as a means to achieve shared solutions. It must be stressed, however, that in order to be effective and efficient, participation should be a continuous, recurrent practice. Retrieving spaces abandoned from production processes or restoring new environmental, economic and social quality to degraded districts, perfectly answers the concept of sustainable city, by limiting urban dispersion and reducing environmental impacts inherent in the built-up areas (Musco

2009). An excellent example in this line is provided by the city of Barcelona. Central in current projects of re-qualification of the city is the intention of connecting it with the retrieval of Eixample/Ensanche's from Ildefons Cerda's idea, already stretched to include all the social and urban needs of a city one and a half century old. Public space and its regeneration are then conceived as a strategy for modification of the metropolitan area, once again overcoming the fences of utopia with the ability to carry out projects (Mazzoleni 2009). The awareness of living in a world whose resources and possibilities of expansion are limited helped to draw attention to the ecological limitations and the possibilities of change in relation with both environment and culture. Hence the diffusion of methods of ecology of culture and of ideas to find sustainable solutions.

The very peripheries, those of which Renzo Piano, the architect, writes that they need to be 'mended' by a new generation of able and responsible young people, are perhaps to embody the city of the future, and not only in Italy: 'The suburbs are the great Urban bet of the coming decades. Are they to become parts of the city, or not? Moreover, are they to become urban, in the sense of civil, or not? In 1979, in Otranto we arranged a workshop area, a project sponsored by UNESCO to "mend" the centre. A counselling centre formed by *architetti condotti* might be an idea for a start up. In the suburbs we must not destroy, we must transform. This requires a scalpel and not a bulldozer or a pick... Our suburbs need a lot of work to be mended and repaired. I stress the point, since it is truly "mending" from all points of view, hydrogeological, seismic and aesthetic. New crafts and techniques are to be found, intended to the consolidation of buildings, and micro businesses that only need a small capital to trigger a virtuous cycle' (Piano 2014).

2.2.2. The urban contraction

The irreparable decline and inexorable depopulation in some of the US, Japan and western and eastern European cities and suburbs, at the same time stimulated the research for a better understanding of new synergies between decline and growth.

The phenomenon of urban contraction (shrinking) has acquired a new meaning, which connotes a variety of urban ailments, comprising both North and South of the world. The planning lessons that come from both the American Rust Belt and eastern German cities (which admit that the traditional growth strategies were socially counterproductive and economically ineffective) are conquering the centre of the scene and helping to solicit new planning paradigms. Starting from these, one can finally evaluate the social and environmental consequences of the global industrialisation, with the aging of the population and the planning interventions in favour or against subsequent spatial solutions (Audirac et al., 2010).

In particular, Germany made successful use of these new paradigms: since 2002, the Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA) Stadtumbau Sachsen-Anhalt 2010 developed strategies against abandonment and degradation of cities, trying to stem the phenomenon of urban contraction in federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, where 200,000 houses are constantly empty. Since the reunification in 1990, the population dwindled from 2,900,000 to just 2,400,000 and, according to the forecasts of the federal statistical office, the inhabitants are to become only 1,300,000 in 50 years.

The international exhibition of the building industry for the retraining of the municipalities in the Saxony-Anhalt 2010 (IBA) develops strategies for the future of cities with a dwindling population. Faced with the challenge of organising this contraction, 19 municipalities participated in the IBA and put forward during 2010, the last year of the project, their proposals for a solution to the motto 'Less is the future'.

A truly important experience for city planners came from an unprejudiced approach, simply from observing and being surprised by the stimuli coming from residents, as stated by Sonya Beeck, the project manager IBA for the city of Köthen. For centuries, politicians and urban planners were committed to building new roads, opening larger residential neighbourhoods and widening commercial areas. That paradigm of growth is nowadays cracked. The cities of IBA show exemplary solutions to try and become smaller but more pleasing. These new modes of design and creation must now be further tested, also because the IBA is ending, while the re-qualification of the regions in contraction has just begun. By focusing on their specific potential, on a prudent balance between demolition, compression, and connections,

as well as on an effective management of planning and of the territory, combining competence of the inhabitants and artistic inventions, the cities in contraction of Saxony-Anhalt seek to remain viable and to preserve their future. The city of Dessau-Roßlau, for example, aims at a radical urban regeneration. The project relies on 'urban islands', condensed urban nuclei inserted in an extensive landscape in the course of time originated from the demolition of places remained empty. The derelict land (*braune Felder, brown fields*) that in perspective, dilating, should join this great green expanse, are bounded by 400 m² of large claims, that the city granted free use to inhabitants, initiatives and associations. Currently 19 claims are under management: a pharmacist implanted a garden with medical plants, the 'Energietisch Dessau' experiments with renewable raw materials, while some associations moved their grills and other social gatherings on their claims.

Thus not only a new type of free space is born. Also the city's image begins to oscillate between built and not built-up areas, as maintained by the landscape architect, Heike Brückner, who follows the project on behalf of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation. A problem that the cities of IBA have addressed programmatically, outlining their profile and linking to other towns, has to do with nurseries, schools, hospitals, public transport, administrative offices and theatres. In regions with a dramatic reduction in population, expensive infrastructures cannot be subsidised in every place, so good practices multiply in direction *problem solving*. For example, the city of Stendal, situated in the less populated region of Saxony-Anhalt, controls a variety of educational offerings in well renewed school buildings, this way integrating the nearby economic centre of Arneburg. The conditions of urban dismissing can therefore become an opportunity for the outcrop of new practices, such as those observed by F. Zanfi in Southern Italy. That the cities of IBA, through the growth of their potential, are able to develop new strategies of city marketing, also results from the cities' reuse, as intervention on their physical body, in order to create new shared urban spaces and new collective meanings.

To attain such results, particular attention should be paid to the transformations of territory and environment; and investigations made on the possibility of reuse through creations conceived and structured according to energetic and behavioural

criteria compatible with sustainability. Emblematic is the example of Köthen, where in the nineteenth century the founder of homeopathy, Samuel Hahnemann, lived and did his researches. Inspired by him, urban regeneration follows on the motto 'Homeopathy as force for development' by focusing on the theme of health as economic factor. The restored hospital building in Köthen in the meantime houses the European library of homeopathy (transferred from Hamburg) and developed into a congress and training centre of moderate success. The University of Magdeburg is here to house a master in homeopathy next year. City planners also, in their fight against abandonment and decay, experimented with instruments taken from the boxes of the homeopaths. In practice, there was a problem with Ludwigstraße, where 17 houses must be demolished. According to the homeopath method, urban planners first listened to the complaints of the inhabitants and then applied the 'worsening of symptoms' therapy: one night they turned off the light in Ludwigstraße and then invited the nervous and angry residents to an assembly. At the end of the debate, there was commitment, a sense of responsibility and willingness to act: some of the once empty houses were since restored and re-leased (Schwiontek 2007).

2.3. Urban spaces: 'hieroglyphics of power' or spaces of interactive planning

Not only an ideal object of socio-urban planning attention in terms above described, urban spaces are also interesting in the prospect pointed out by Sharon Zukin (2002). With reference to the transformations that took place on Chicago's city ground in the 19th century, i.e. a century before the birth of the homonymous sociological school, S. Zukin argues that 'the famous theory of urban development of the concentric area is not only a diagram of land uses and of property values, but can also be read as a sort of hieroglyphic of environmental, economic and social power' (Zukin 2002: 345-348). The opinion is shared by Herbert J. Gans (2002) with its approach oriented to the use (as in C. Geertz) when he refers to spaces to be described by resorting to control strategies developed for that purpose. His reference applies precisely to the right of citizens to take decisions aimed at controlling the use of the territory and to the right of poor people to remain in their own homes, with direct connection to the drifts in the *gentrification* processes in act in all major world's cities.

Still in agreement with H. J. Gans (2002), S. Zukin (2002) argues that urban space must be understood first and foremost as the key element of social relations; but its analysis of urban space goes further on, with the consideration of the built environment as something exceeding its own end: city and suburbs, buildings and roads transmit an image of power.

No less illuminating, in this sense, is the example of the garden's space in relation to power: following in this track are also the studies of Chandra Mukerji (1997) and Laura Verdi (2004). C. Mukerji surveys the gardens of the British and French nobility of the 16th and 17th centuries, seen as deliberate, large-scale efforts to experiment power strategies both social and technological, according to a path already marked by Michel Foucault (1977). Investigating those spatially specialised techniques, by means of which central powers, exercising terror, try to shape the social, sexual and bodily self, clearly meant – according to M. Foucault – to follow an ideological project aimed at encompassing the individual, as well as the social and physical space of its worrying and growing etero-direction. Despite the image of a power in all ways capable of controlling the project, use and government of territory, it is not yet wholly impossible to think of an architecture presently more responsible and directed to a government project concerning the landscape without resorting to surveillance, control and punishment such as those cited by M. Foucault: a model of architecture finally able to redefine the relationship between environmental, social and economic aspects of the project of sustainability, just from a perspective of sustainable urban development, taking into account the necessary connections between city and nature, not omitting its symbolic and political practices.

In a pragmatic and optimistic problem solving direction, the more developed cities are nowadays faced with 'green' issues, as Stella M. Čapek suggests (2010), when she refers to a socio-ecological approach to the problems of nature in relation with the city. Exemplary in this sense are doubtless the sustainable architectures of Sheppard Robson, in which the aspiration to a more responsible architecture is particularly evident. The work of this British architect returns in fact a vision of architecture as a continual process of redefinition of possible relationships between environmental, social and economic aspects of the project of sustainability. In the course

of many decades Sheppard Robson succeeded in occupying a central position in British architectural panorama, by dedicating, since its creation, specific attention to the issues of environment, innovation, technological transfer and integrated design.

3. Conclusions

To conclude, it seems useful to also mention the example of mega-events, realised or planned respecting the principles of sustainable development. Of particular interest is the case of Milan Expo 2015, which goes towards the promotion of a truly sustainable urban development, privileging a planning 'sensitive to differences', modulated on the needs and wishes of the plural bodies of inhabitants, in their richness of gender, age, life-style and consumption, sexual orientations, religions and spirituality, geographical and cultural background, conditions of physical and mental health, income levels and social location (Paba 2010). Limits and possibilities of the interactive planning are to emerge in this case from the complex practices of trading relations between inhabitants and places, all focused on the construction of a model of responsible citizenship. Only the models of planning based on the integral interaction, social conversation and support to the experiences of collective self-organisation will be, in the end, considered capable of interpreting the interweaving of trajectories and aspirations of that multitude of urban bodies that inhabit contemporary cities, finally realising the wish formulated by G. Simmel and M. Weber a hundred years ago.

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