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Urban Planning in Europe and in the United States: a Comparative Analysis

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A city is an fickle organism. It continuously evolves as society sets the pace. The shift of the economic base of industrial cities, and the recession which hit the occidental world in recent years has caused their decline.

This new phase of transition that implies their opening to service economy, the market globalization, and the fall of many social and cultural barriers, has brought American and European city planners to reassess their role in the process of revitalization of the cities, which transcends their cultural and historical origins. Cities like Manchester in England, Lille in France, Turin in Italy, and Detroit and Chicago in the United States, are facing the same problems. Their solutions, and the final objectives are inevitably of the same nature, and this independently from the form of city planning employed.

These reasons set the basis for our analysis, which intends to be a synopsis of the cultural background accumulated in Italy and in the United States in order to develop a comparison between their past experiences and more recent planning methods, and to outline and to evaluate the aptness of the elements which configure them.

The first part of this study was conducted in Chicago, at the Illinois Institute of Technology for a period of two months, during which time the guidance of agencies such as the Chicago City Hall, the HUD, and architectural firms such as S.O.M. and V.O.A., proved to be crucial. This was dedicated to the examination of roles and dynamics in American city planning now and in history. Following this first phase, the analysis proceeded in Italy, where a just as accurate study ensued, focused majority on its recent history and evolution, achieved also through interviews with the major agencies involved in city planning in Italy.

This analysis has clearly shown how the conversion of the economic base of cities, whose administration is now closer to that of business firms, has originated processes that are shared by many of them. City marketing, city renewal and revitalization, reinvigorated after the two hundred-year-industrial-parenthesis, are some of the fundamental elements that tie these two contexts and the rest of the western countries in this age. The value of this thesis, and perhaps its expedience, originate from the new perspective under which the experiences encountered are analyzed. It should be seen as a stimulus to planners, which need new inputs in order to tackle successfully today's city planning. For too long America has ignored Europe's efforts to renovate itself, and Europe, on her part, has too often disregarded American accomplishments in city planning. We have been enraptured now into a totally different era, and we talk of world communications, global economy and global cities. It seems therefore natural to rethink city planning under these terms, and not to just follow tradition in this discipline, that, as it applies to an entity in continuous change such as a city, cannot by any means lack dynamics and new inputs everyday



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