

THE ROLE OF THE ITALIAN UNIVERSITY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY AND URBAN POLICY

MICHELANGELO SAVINO¹

Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia

The idea of “*Forma Urbis*” and “*Forma Universitas*” has been one the most widely accepted of the different relationships perceived to exist between the university and the city (although some have seen this relationship as conflictive in nature, rather than harmonic). A certain degree of controversy has also existed as to the relative merits of “introverted” and exclusive relationships between universities and cities (as in the case of external campuses) and more “extroverted” and inclusive solutions (that tend to foster relations between the two institutions and encourage synergies).

The experience of the Italian University system has been typically and historically urban, with very few examples of external *campuses*. As a result, the Italian experience would appear to offer little scope for conducting an investigation into “extroverted” universities, though plenty for investigating another level of relations, which assumes particular relevance in contexts in which general planning (as an instrument for orienting and adjusting urban policies and initiatives aimed at territorial transformation) seems weak and where its ability to “organise” has been called into question.

The university has grown over time (due to processes culminating in the improvement of its organisation and the extension of its academic programme, through the “germination”¹ of new faculties and academic studies) and has come to occupy new areas within the city. In recent times, Italian universities have actively participated in projects and processes aimed at re-qualifying and finding new uses for existing space.

Research carried out in a number of Italian cities² in 1997 revealed that it was not enough to simply catalogue the use of urban spaces as part of a general analysis of the city, its structure and functions. Instead, there was a need to redefine the

1. That is to say the parallel creation of new university studies or faculties in other urban centres in order to improve the territorial distribution of opportunities for higher education in Italy – which have traditionally been unevenly distributed – and to help to solve problems of “overbooking” at certain centres.

2. See, SAVINO M. (prepared by) (1997-1998). “Città e Università – Università *vs* Città? Gli effetti delle nuove strategie di sviluppo e riorganizzazione delle università italiane sui processi di trasformazione della struttura urbana” (“City and University - University *vs* City. The effects of new strategies to develop and organise Italian universities based on processes involving the transformation of the urban structure”, published in *Archivio di Studi Urbani e Regionali*, pp 60-61).

political roles involved and to work to change existing relationships between the different tools currently employed to manage the urban system.

It is therefore *the political dimension of relations between the city and the university* to which I would like to dedicate my reflections. In recent years, which have witnessed major transformations, the university has assumed a greater importance within both the city (and its immediate area). The university has come to play a much more active and visible role in the processes of constructing the city than ever before. (However, when I say this, I do not wish to call into question the traditionally observed symbiosis/osmosis between the two realities). One aspect referred to in the previous study was the existence of a *strong antagonism* and indeed competition between the two institutions. In the different case studies proposed by the previous study, certain aspects of the relations between the city and the university came in for criticism. It is precisely these aspects that have tended to be repeated, both in terms of intention and political will: this is a situation that is well-known and that requires urgent action.

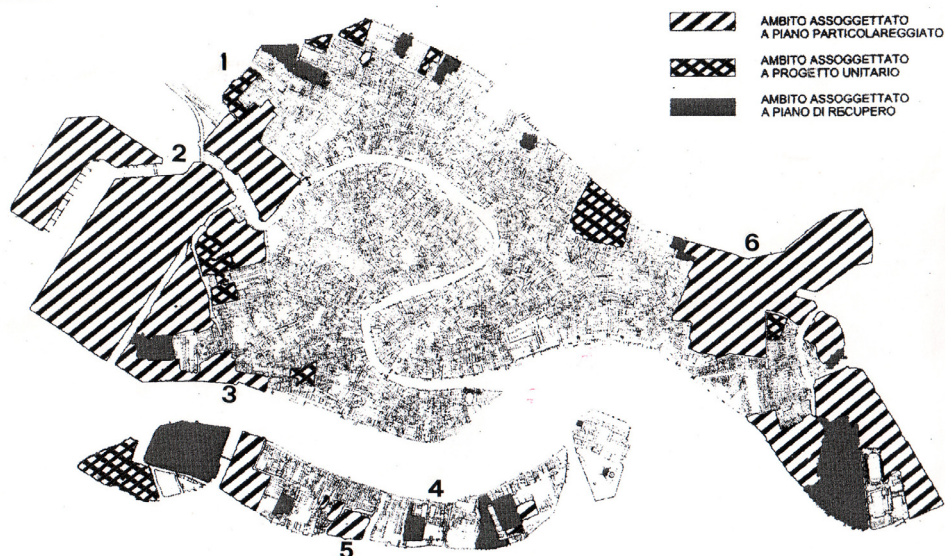
With reference to this need for clear, transparent policy, explicitly defined roles for the city and the university, and clear rules for the game which must determine the interplay of forces and the relations between them, I feel that the Italian case presents a number of particularly interesting elements that have not only been brought together by the phase of *administrative reform* that is currently influencing urban policies, but also by the numerous urban re-qualification projects that are currently underway, and which either have been, or are about to be, initiated in the many cities in which the university has already become a major protagonist.

I also believe that the Italian reality is not so “different” from that which is, or has been, found in other European countries: in some cases it anticipates these processes, while in others it appears only as an *epilogue* and fails to suggest ways of correcting the work in hand. Without doubt, a series of recurring themes and questions arise in all places where planning shows signs of “giving way” to the pressures exerted by the market and by societies undergoing far-reaching processes of change.

AT THE GATES OF THE 20TH CENTURY: CHANGES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Over recent years, the development of the Italian university system has not only been characterised by the territorial diffusion of its programmes at the national level, but – above all – by the way in which it has consolidated poles within the city. As already noted, this is one of the particular characteristics of the Italian university system, which has a strongly “urban” connotation with a corresponding lack of interest in alternative locations outside the built up urban area.³

3. The most famous cases are those of Arcavata di Rende – near the city of Consenza in Calabria (work by V. Gregotti), the campus of Fisciano, which houses the new university of Salerno, and that of the University of Rome, which is located in the Tor Vergata area. On the other hand, the urban location of the campus of the University of Bari effectively excludes it from a list of what are generally regarded as examples of campus universities. In reality, many Italian universities have some of their centres, complementary services and/or faculties located outside the city itself. Even so, almost everywhere, the

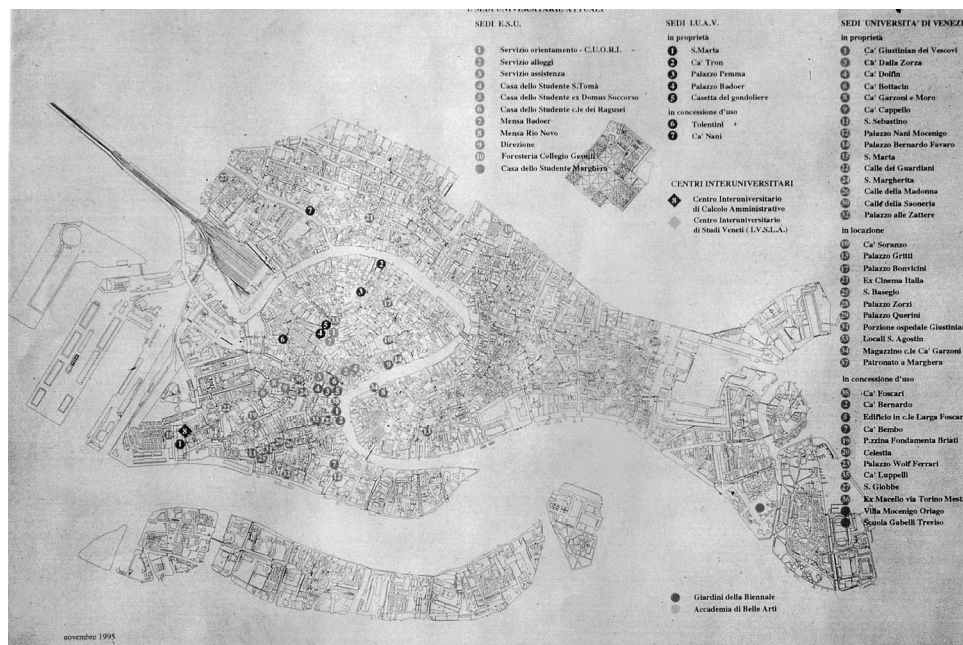


Large areas in transformation: 1. San Giobbe 2. La «Testa di ponte» 3. San Basilio and maritim station 4. La Giudecca 5. Former Junghans Factory 6. L'Arsenale

This system has gradually grown, but not only because of a rise in student numbers (which have suffered certain fluctuations over recent years, but which have generally increased – mainly due to the increased time required to complete these studies). The main reason for this growth has been the development of the complementary activities that the university has cultivated over the last few years in order to improve its administrative and bureaucratic organisation. Apart from its traditional activities and services, there has been a growth in its cultural activities and in such areas as the promotion and provision of general and consulting services. This development process has produced a need for larger spaces and (given the characteristics of the Italian urban system) above all urban spaces.

All of the above is currently taking place at a very special moment in Italy's urbanistic history, and one at which a number of special, new conditions have appeared.

predominant model favours a peripheral but – “despite this” – urban location, either within the first or second metropolitan ring, in provincial capitals or in medium-sized cities in neighbouring provinces. This choice carries with it a series of almost inevitable problems arising from the lack of associated services and infrastructures (particularly transport) that – as has already occurred – reduce both accessibility to the institution and its functionality. Such inconveniences are not only associated with “non-urban” universities, but may also apply in the case of some of the complexes recently located in denser urban fabrics. One such case is that of Bicocca, the old industrial area formerly used by Pirelli, which – after careful restructuring by Gragotti – now houses several departments of Milan's state university and offers a number of degree courses; though it still remains relatively inaccessible.



Distribution of university building in the Historic center.

1. For some time now, Italian cities have stopped growing. Along with the demographic decline, which became apparent in the country's major urban centres in the mid-1970s, there has also been a reduction in physical growth: in other words, recent urbanisation has tended to favour non-metropolitan areas, or non-urban areas with diffused settlement. All of this has created a certain degree of confusion with respect to the most appropriate programmes and criteria for "building the city". At the same time, more time and attention have been dedicated to re-qualifying and re-using not only empty urban spaces, but also large areas of the "modern" city, which have suffered progressive degradation due to the new processes of urban transformation. This has led to the emergence of new types of urban emergency intervention, including the cheaply built, popular housing areas constructed since the 1970s. These have since suffered a rapid economic and structural decline (as seen from some of the most famous and emblematic cases, such as Zen in Palermo, the famous "*Vele*" of Scampia in Naples, *Il Corviale* in Rome and *Il Pilastro* in Bologna).
2. In recent years, urban open spaces have been seen as presenting great opportunities, but also as requiring emergency attention. Their progressive "production" within the constructed city has not been unrelated with processes aimed at capturing the income that the city's development has guaranteed to areas momentarily deemed "interesting" (but which after initial use and interest, have tended to rapidly become

marginal and peripheral). The number of such spaces is on the increase, which demonstrates – as Folini has pointed out – the growing crisis of the city and its functions (which has not only been the product of technological change) as they have renewed, grown, and relocated, and then abandoned the city. This has produced: old factories and obsolete industrial installations, abandoned cinemas, theatres and petrol stations, empty prisons, abandoned slaughterhouses and markets, hospitals which can no longer be used, now-deserted port warehouses and even former churches. Some items of this patrimony are valuable, while others are of little interest. There can be no doubt, however, that the city offers a wide range of buildings that obviously constitute a “resource” (making it unnecessary to consume new land) but also an expense for the local community (which must take action in order to prevent irreversible degradation). This causes a situation of undeniable tension, which – in many Italian cities – has led to a veritable “*terror vacui*”⁴ due to the importance that it has come to assume for those engaged in designing the future city, drawing up plans and projects, and locating the main public facilities and functions demanded by the “modern” city.

3. After many years of supposed “crisis”, urban planning is now undergoing a rapid process of innovation, closely associated with the modernisation of the administrative mechanism. The reform of the local autonomies (Law 142/1990) has been followed by the transformation and strengthening of the powers of local authorities (which have given local mayors a more important role). This should have given the instruments of intervention greater authority (although perhaps not as automatically as the law seems to indicate), particularly in the field of urban planning. But, the most apparent novelties have been the innovations introduced as a result of the legal formalisation of the instruments of concentration (program agreements, service standards, area contracts, bases for negotiations, etc.). These should help to guarantee a minimum speed for decision making, to mobilise society, and to increase the number of urban agents and at the same time provide the flexibility that the traditional urban plans – or at least those applied in Italy – seemed to lack.
4. Recent restrictions on public spending, have led to a reduction in transfers from the state to local administrations. Greater autonomy has been conceded to local authorities for the collecting of local taxes, but this has been applied with extreme caution – mainly in order to maintain a political consensus – and while waiting for a “financial federalism”, which is taking a long time to appear. In the meantime, the State (or rather the Ministry for Public Works – though other ministries have also been involved, as in the case of the direct financing of projects for the social and economic development of depressed regions of the country) has been involved in numerous programs aimed at financing intervention projects within both the city

4. Fear of open spaces.

and its immediate territory. These actions partly follow on from European financing projects (such as the URBAN projects or the regional interventions included in Community Objective 5b) and also, in part, repeat (perhaps rather conventional and unrevised) models for intervention through residential developments (following a tradition that regards the building industry as “the locomotive of the economy” and housing as a recurring need for a population constantly in search of accommodation). Throughout the 1990s, numerous urban intervention proposals were financed and refinanced (often because resources were not assigned due to the lack of projects considered “worthy” of receiving funding). There was a successive “fine-tuning” of the techniques and mechanisms employed for drafting, presenting and evaluating projects, for comparing those presented by different operators (whether institutional or otherwise) and for favouring collaborations between public and private entities (and especially for providing them with financial resources).

5. In the last few years, there has also been a reactivation of the economy and, above all, renewed economic interest in the city. This was made possible (at least on the political level) by the “official closure” of the Tangentopolis⁵ case and the definition of “transparent” mechanisms for adjudicating contracts. This has led to a general mobilisation of the traditional agents involved in transforming the urban environment and has added new agents (including the university – with its renewed role and energy as a source of proposals for certain types of projects) representing some of the new tendencies in the field of urban transformation.

At this stage, it is important to stress the role played by co-operation between institutions (in both the drafting of plans and their execution) and negotiations carried out during the decision making process, as the key tools of the chosen policy. The traditional dilemma between “plan” and “project”, and the predominance of one over the other, can now be considered a thing of the past, with the generally accepted idea of the plan as a group of different projects that gain substantial coherence when combined in line with political will to transform the city. (Though it is not normally necessary to explain what the principles of this urban transformation actually are, or to express these ideas in terms of the – now somewhat conventional – figures of sustainability, integration, solidarity, inclusion, and quality of life, etc.)

In Italian society, there is a general “lack of confidence” in the ability of the plan⁶ to specifically and coherently guide interventions that affect the urban fabric and

5. Tangentopolis was the name of a legal case concerning political parties which received undeclared private financing in return for the granting of various types of “favours”.

6. It should be explained (for the arguments and reasons that follow) that I understand the plan as the moment of “legitimate” and “accredited” collective construction of a shared social and urban scene that may embrace the social and economic development objectives that a given local community seeks to achieve. It may also be defined by the different formulas – the property development project is one of possible, temporary tools of intervention – which range from the authoritarianism and state intervention of a synoptic plan to the participative flexibility of any of the other formulas that the city may wish to impose.

thereby either offset the negative effects of transformations, or even produce positive offshoots that might benefit the city and the local community as a whole. That is to say nothing of the “timings” of the plan, which are very long term and inappropriate for the rate at which modern society changes its plans, its characteristics, and its ways of interacting. There has, therefore, been no lack of criticism of traditional ways of correctly recognising and individualising (and therefore responding to) society’s effective needs, whether these are local, global, fragmented, multi-ethnic, or whatever..

It is not that the *project* offers answers to these kinds of demands, but rather that it has an undoubtedly fascinating form (being both tangible and precise). It also has a language that – in stark contrast to that of the plan – is easily understood and can be converted into the object of discussion and debate. All of this makes it a democratic organism: something that the *technicisms of the plan* (its language, its codes, and its representations) seem to make impossible. The project seems to offer the advantages of rapid production (thanks to its “more immediate” objectives, short duration, less general and more spatial content) and flexibility (due to the reduced number of people involved in the decision making process, and the – perhaps apparently – greater opportunities for debating their objectives).

It therefore comes as no surprise that – precisely because of these very different convictions – recently organised programmes for urban intervention (including those promoted by municipal administrations) have tended to challenge the plan and to reject its connections and associated ideas. In some cases this has served as an excuse for adapting and applying “outdated” rules to new social needs and to changes dictated by the city. In other cases, it has only occurred in order to access funding and take advantage of the presence of private operators (who are willing to risk their own capital in processes of urban re-qualification). Thus change, complexity, and flexibility have become the key factors conditioning the processes of change within the city and the formulation of the policies and strategies that – in precisely this sense – leave the field open for negotiations and co-operative actions⁷ whose limitations are evident, though often denied:

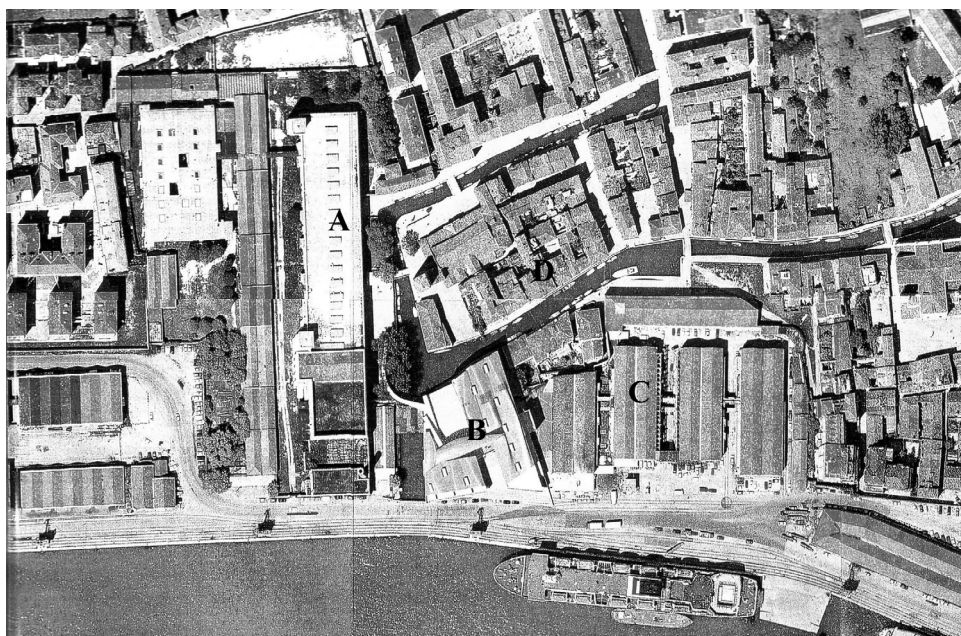
- A. The *time* factor: The time available tends to be short, as a result of the very specific nature of emergency actions (these include dealing with floods and landslides, but also with urban vacuums resulting from rapid physical degradation, or urban re-qualification associated with special funding provided by central government or a particular real estate operation). In Italy, the majority of major urban transformation projects have traditionally been associated with emergencies or urgent action (examples of which include the Umbria earthquake, the organisation of

7. The term “consensus”, which was so popular in the 1980’s, is no longer considered “politically correct”.

the World Cup football championships, the Palermo *Universiada* of 1977, and the modifications to Rome's infrastructure for the *Jubileo*).

- B. The *spatial* factor: Action only brings about the transformation of certain parts of the city. This effectively reduces the formal effects of renewal and also often gives rise to highly publicised “reductions in quality”.⁸
- C. The *political* factor: Actions and interests (of both private operators and institutions) are often quite *opportunistic* in nature. They tend to be linked to the exploitation of temporary funding, a particular set of economic circumstances, or a possible return to consensus in a process that results in fleeting alliances and weak strategies.

Negotiation is nothing new. It has always existed and forms part of urban dynamics. In fact, it is the way to autonomously “move forward” – without a minimum degree of integration or bonding imposed by general tools – in the *ex ante* definition



San Basilio and maritime station area seen from above: A. *Cotonificio Olcese* of IUAV; B. Former cold-storage by E. Miralles-B. Taliabue; C. Former *Ligabue* warehouse, building n° 7, nowadays holding the laboratory and studios of the *Facoltà di Arte e Design* of IUAV; D. Former *Convento delle Terese*, now holding some department offices of the *Facoltà di Arte e Design* of IUAV.

8. I would even dare to suggest that the mechanisms for mobilising citizens also assume exclusively local characteristics, which have no parallel in the processes observed in other districts and zones of the same city. I make this observation in reply to the general conviction that it is possible for just one of these urban processes to generate a generic collective reaction to degradation and thereby foster – an even more illusive – collective sensitisation to the problems of the city.



The seat of IUAV Cottonificio Olcese in the crowds of San Basilio.

of the basic rules of the game (guarantees for both institutions and private operators) that constitute the main novelty in today's national urbanistic scenario. This does not always, however, offer guarantees with respect to the quality of the projects, the soundness of the decisions taken, the duration of the agreements undertaken or their resistance in the face of ever-possible social, economic and political changes. In fact, each change of government brings with it the risk of reopening debate concerning projects that have either been previously approved or that are currently in an advanced phase of execution.

Italy offers numerous examples of (more or less famous and paradigmatic)⁹ "uncertain" forms of urban re-qualification, such as the great transformation of Lingotto in Turin, the Genova Expo, and the Mediterranean Games of Bari. The university has also participated in many of these projects (though in different ways, and to different degrees in various phases of the respective decision making process). It is possible to cite several examples including Milan's La Bicocca, or the vast La Fondiaria operation

9. The following are just a few of the many publications that have turned their attention to this question: See, INDOVINA, F. (a cura di) (1990), *La città di fine millennio*, Franco Angeli, Milano; INDOVINA, F. (a cura di) (1993), *La città occasionale. Firenze, Napoli, Torino, Venezia*, Franco Angeli, Milano; Dente B. *et al.* (1990), *Metropoli per progetti*, Il Mulino, Bologna; MORISI, M., PASSIGLI, S. (a cura di), 1994, *Amministrazioni e gruppi di interesse nella trasformazione urbana*, Il Mulino, Bologna; relating to the subject, PASQUI G. (1998), "Cosa sono (e perché sono importanti) le attese in un progetto urbano. Riflessioni a partire dal caso Pirelli-Bicocca", *Archivio di studi urbani e regionali*, n. 63.

in Firenze – which was undertaken in the Castello quarter of the city but took its name from the building company that carried it out. But, above all, the university has been involved as a promoter in interventions involving the reuse and re-qualification of the many open spaces that have become available within the urban fabric. The most well-known of these include the Gasometro area of Bovisa in Milan, the former tobacco factory and now disused fruit and vegetable market of Bologna, the former sugar factory of Cesena, the old slaughterhouses and some of the port warehouses of Venice, and abandoned army camps and convents in Perugia and Bari.

These are just a few of the many examples to which we could refer in Italian cities. They are not only examples of architectonic restoration and re-qualification, but also of innovative processes associated with the development of urban policies, and the establishment of new types of relationships and forms of co-operation between different types of institutional and non-institutional agents – whether public or private – if, indeed, it is still possible to make such a clear and precise distinction between the two categories.

THE UNIVERSITY AS AN AGENT OF URBAN TRANSFORMATION

In this area, I think that the “political” dimension of urban operations (encouraging *ex novo* settlements in cases of the emergence of new universities) proposed by (or in conjunction with) the university, is quite clear. I hope that the totally unique role assumed by the university as an agent of transformation in the city and the implications of this are equally clear.

From the perspective of the “plan”, it is clearly evident that the university presents itself as a potentially important partner for all the urban and (why not) regional development policies within its territory.

In this case, all possible hypotheses relating to synergies, transfers of *know-how*, the development of new professions, and incentives for creating employment seem plausible. And (to my understanding) they also find in the plan an instrument for their appropriate economic contextualisation, for the creation of positive synergies and for developing virtuous relationships. The plan, with its medium-long term horizon, allows more balanced cost-benefit analyses and more accurate evaluations of effects and possible impacts. Some recently concluded planning projects (and others that are currently underway) seemed to contradict what I am saying (examples include: Turin in the period of the Cagnardi & Gregotti PRG from 1992-1994; the present phase of the renovation of Venice’s old quarter; and Rome’s “*Il Piano delle certezze*”, which began during the first term of office of Mayor Rutelli and whose future has, for some time now, been hanging in the balance). But in all of these planning processes, it has been possible to detect all of the discrepancies and incoherencies associated with construction in a general shared space as well as the opportunities offered by the new urban tools, while many new projects have encountered difficulties in even getting underway.

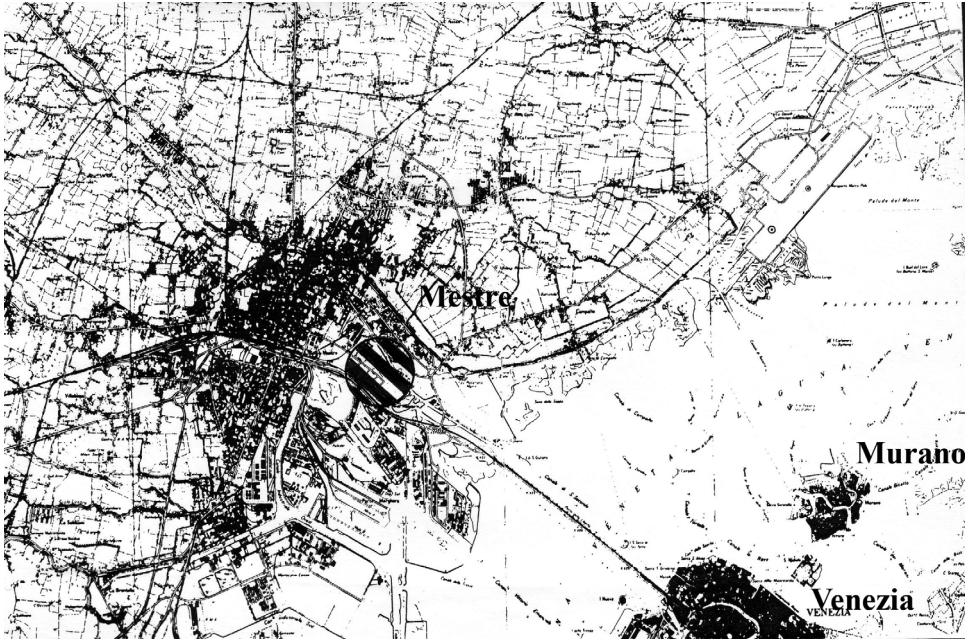
From the perspective of “project” (understood as the moment of activating a complex system involving general and sector-specific policies for urban development, the “fine-tuning” of planning objectives in order to take into account specific context-related factors – whether economic, social, or urbanistic, etc – and relations with the rest of the city), the university should assume a planning function and not seek to differentiate the qualitative aspects that the location of such an important and relevant function could acquire within the urban fabric. However, the planning that can be observed in many university projects for Italian cities seems much more related to certain speculative and housing aspects of these projects than to other more traditional and long recognised characteristics of the Italian system such as the *distortion factors* that govern procedures for building in the city.

1. First of all, we should examine the *emergency* character, as this sense of urgency is clearly felt by university institutions. This is seen in the congestion of the university, the overcrowding of its central offices, the diversification of its functions, the re-organisation of its didactic and research activities, the individualisation of new faculties and new study programs: all of which calls for the occupation of new spaces and for rapid solutions. To these objective factors, it is possible to add another, which – although important – is often forgotten: specific property transactions (which are frequent in cities that “fill empty spaces”). They lead the university to acquire spaces that can be transformed in line with subsequent needs and priorities. It is not always a case of “doing a good deal”: many “urban spaces” are difficult to transform (although they may be specifically earmarked for conservation or protection), above all when their characteristics and distribution – particularly in the case of industrial buildings from the first and second waves of industrialisation – are highly specialised and designed to perform one particular function. In Italy, re-cycling seems to be the most widespread of new building practices, as it often guarantees a less peripheral and de-centralised location with respect to the city centre and central university sites. In fact, many “empty spaces”, run down peripheral areas, and districts that need urban, architectonic, social and economic re-qualification are also regarded as emergency cases by the municipal administrations which (with ever scarcer financial resources) are called upon to administrate this patrimony and to limit the collective costs associated with these “empty spaces” and emergency actions (and their corresponding degradation, removal and substitution, maintenance, and safety).¹⁰

10. For more comments relating to the essential need to reuse areas within old quarters for the location of university functions, see CERVELLATI, P. L. (1997), “*Città e università: verso il riuso urbano*”, Casabella, n. 423, mar. On the other hand “attention to the fact that it is not a case of discovering the university as a driving force for a new “industrial archaeology”, as an analogy to the notion of the “historic centre”, which has so far been proposed and applied in every possible situation to the point of making (particular) extensions to the university (systematically) coincide with the development of historic neighbourhoods (...); it is not a case of manipulating the university in the process of giving a unique character and qualification to old and new guidelines for its growth” CANELLA, G. (1997), “*Il caso dell'area milanese*”, n. 423, mar.

2. There are other types of emergency action, such as the building of residential accommodation for students, though – in fact – this tends to be largely a secondary problem in Italy. On one hand, the demand for accommodation seems to have increased (while its supply has grown much more slowly), the general process of development and diffusion of the economic and social welfare of Italian families has made this investment sector less important within the general institutional equations of universities (with respect to the question of social redistribution and of guaranteeing access to higher level training that cannot be offered within this particular area). On the other hand, it may seem that the property market has largely been capable of offering suitable responses to students' needs, although its ability to evaluate students' demands (for example the supposed competition with residents for rented property) has often been called into question. The university's accommodation policy has therefore rarely been relevant, although Merlin has talked of university-related construction being "the keystone to relations between the city and the university".
3. The nature of the *great opportunity* for the city and its institutions: resiting and replacing become opportunities to confront some of the previously unresolved organisational problems of urban territory (the location of major waste deposits, the reorganisation of traffic and public transport, the re-qualification of some parts of the city, the development of certain services, and the reorganisation of the urban fabric). There is an opportunity for the local administration, the university and local society to talk about the city without initiating that planning process which so often seems "dangerous", counterproductive, and (as already pointed out) antidemocratic, and which is almost inevitably inefficient in terms of both its timing and procedures.
4. There is also an *opportunity* to accept what I have defined as "giving a sense of purpose to the plan". Despite its current crisis, the plan remains a very important document, and one that each administration feels "obliged" to draft, if only to pay lip-service to the law: it therefore comes as no surprise that the guidelines for its design may seem rather vague. Indications that are too precise could obstruct the possible transformation of areas and fabrics whose conditions for modification call for a degree of flexibility (with respect to final uses and urbanistic and building indexes) whose absence might otherwise deter private operators. Occupying the resources of whole areas of the city for indeterminate periods could – in the course of the long term nature of the plan (ten years or more) – constitute a resource for responding to any new needs that might emerge in the city. From this, it is possible to deduce that the plan may often contemplate *destinations for "shady uses"*.¹¹ In the plan, urban "empty spaces" often

11. There are, from this point of view, a number of rhetorical figures associated with urbanistic technique: the "polyvalent building", "multifunctional area", "directional area", "advanced tertiary centre", etc. that, not infrequently, make a poor job of hiding ambiguities and limited capacities for making



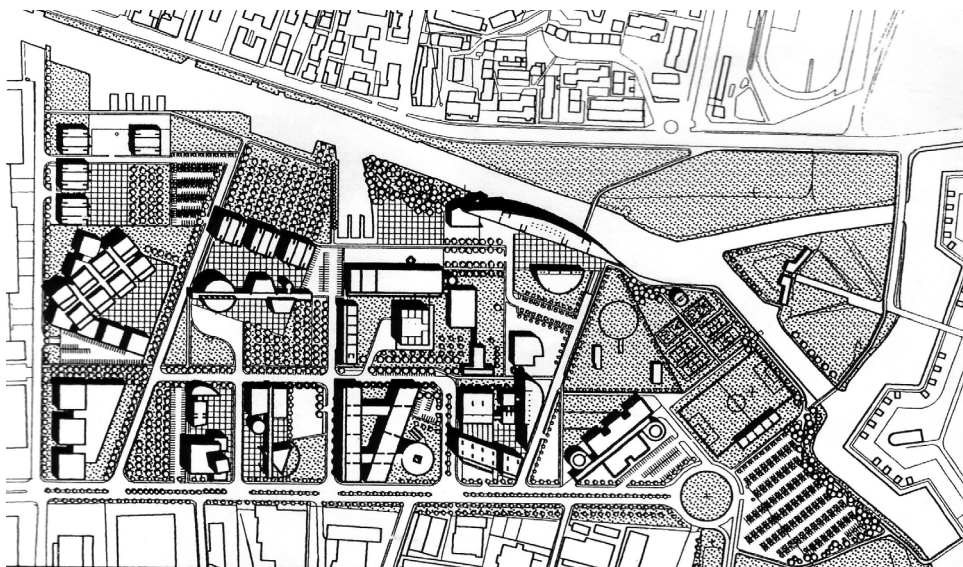
Between Terraferma and Centro storico: the *Baricentro* of the “bipolar” city in the area of via Torino.

remain “empty” and without clear and unambiguous guidelines. In certain cases, this has led municipal administrations (in cities such as Bologna, Milan and Venice) to specifically use the universities’ need for space in order to give these transformations a sense of meaning, a final use and a form of reuse. And as always in this process, some important aspects are thereby left unattended:

- The peculiarity of university space, which often needs well projected and organized space for specific functions; a need that, all too often, is simplistically expressed in terms of the useable surface area;
- The difficulties of transforming the typology of the buildings in question, which do not always adapt to other uses, but rather to the high costs and sacrifices (which are not always authorised by management) of the original characters;
- The location of these spaces within the city and also, in this case, – and leaving aside some of the specific needs of university services – a location which cannot appear to be indifferent to the complex urban system,

proposals. It is therefore no coincidence that these symbols have become increasingly frequent in recent urbanistic plans.

- because the university also needs to consider future progressive expansions, for accessibility and for the complementary services that it needs, etc.
- The effects that the location of the university may have upon the surrounding area, which are not always known, are not easily controlled, and call for “great care”.
5. Finally, the absolutely idiosyncratic character of the particular *operator* in question, presents numerous specific elements and raises many expectations with respect to the traditional context:
- a. In the construction of urban policies, the university has (according to a somewhat *Manchean* distinction between the public and private) assumed a *substantially hybrid connotation*, which still persists in the decision-making process.¹² Although some doubts (which also stem from the nature of the mission and the public origin of its resources, which come from state transfers) exist with regard to its “public” nature which could justify a substantial participation in the objectives of the municipal administration, it is possible to affirm that its “neutral” character derives from the social role of the university (or rather from the impossibility of giving it a peripheral location).¹³ Mobilising



Renewal project for the University in Mestre-Polo di via Torino. Volum project.

12. This is the case despite the fact that several different analyses of policies have shown that the formulation of strategies and objectives would reveal no notable differences between public – even given the specific mission of pursuing the general interest – and private sector initiatives.

13. The arguments relating to the characteristics and roles that the university has assumed in the social and political contexts since the beginning of the twentieth century should not strike us as purely

other (generally distrusting – when not conflictive) private operators to work hand in hand with the public administration would constitute another specific resource. In this case, it is possible to state that the university appears as a possible “*provider of consensus*”, and is therefore an important factor in the development of strategies by public institutions and “in experiencing new forms of interaction between the different types of agent involved in projecting and carrying out urban transformation policies”.¹⁴

- b. The university appears to have *great financial resources* (with the possibility of accessing additional funding from both the state and the European Union) and few committed expenses (in comparison with the obligations of the public administration). It therefore has the capacity (on account of its supposed neutrality) to find other resources in the Ministries and also the possibility of mobilising other (private) funds through policies of “financial engineering” and *project financing* (mechanisms that are foreign to many Italian public administrations)
- c. It is possible for the university to reveal a *great capacity for proposing projects* and its intervention is implicitly regarded as that of a “bearer” of high quality projects (the designing of inert spaces and external public spaces are two examples of this). This vision is a joint product of its natural resource of know-how: the university’s capacity for technological innovation, the knowledge acquired from the structural characteristics of the (university’s, city’s, territory’s and society’s)



Isola della Giudecca. Area ex Junghans

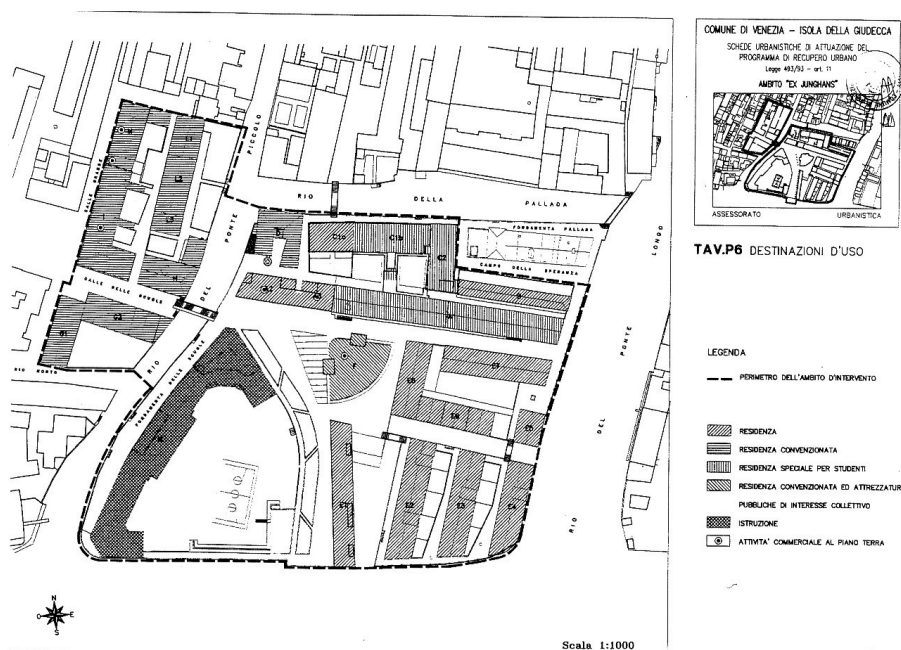
H Source: DINA A., ORTELLI P. (ed.), *Mille alloggi per Venezia. I programmi di recupero urbano e la costruzione della nuova città*, Comune di Venezia – Arsenale Editrice, Venezia, 1997.

rhetorical. In these last few years, in which there has been much talk about reforming the university, changing the means of entry and the nature of its relations with the outside world and with society and the market (with it having to assume the functions and strategies of a private company if it wishes be considered “efficient”), reflections about whether or not the university appears to be public have become important elements that have influenced such considerations as its mission, the distribution of its investments, and the most appropriate ways in which it should conduct its teaching.

14. See PASQUI G. (1997-1998), “Le università milanesi come attori urbani. Politiche, strategie e processi di interazione”, *Archivio di studi urbani e regionali*, n. 60-61, cit., p. 139.

problems, and the possibility of offering (the administrations, for example) a theoretical view and a state of the art analysis of specific problems and providing advanced urbanistic solutions, that contribute to the “renewal of the two institutions”.¹⁵ This is a type of *expertise* that could not be expected from any other urban operator (it is thus no coincidence that on many occasions municipal administrations ask the university for advice about particular aspects of urban problems).

- d. Finally, the university could guarantee the *establishment of collective goods and services for all city uses*. In many cases, the services and facilities that universities create are neither specialised nor extraordinary, but rather just the opposite. The services that they provide that exceed the characteristics of their functional specialisation (sports installations, car parking facilities, green areas, meeting points, libraries, auditoriums and exhibition halls) may therefore contribute to the offer of a complete system of urban services in the same way that they take advantage of certain urban resources (urban transport is used everyday by students).



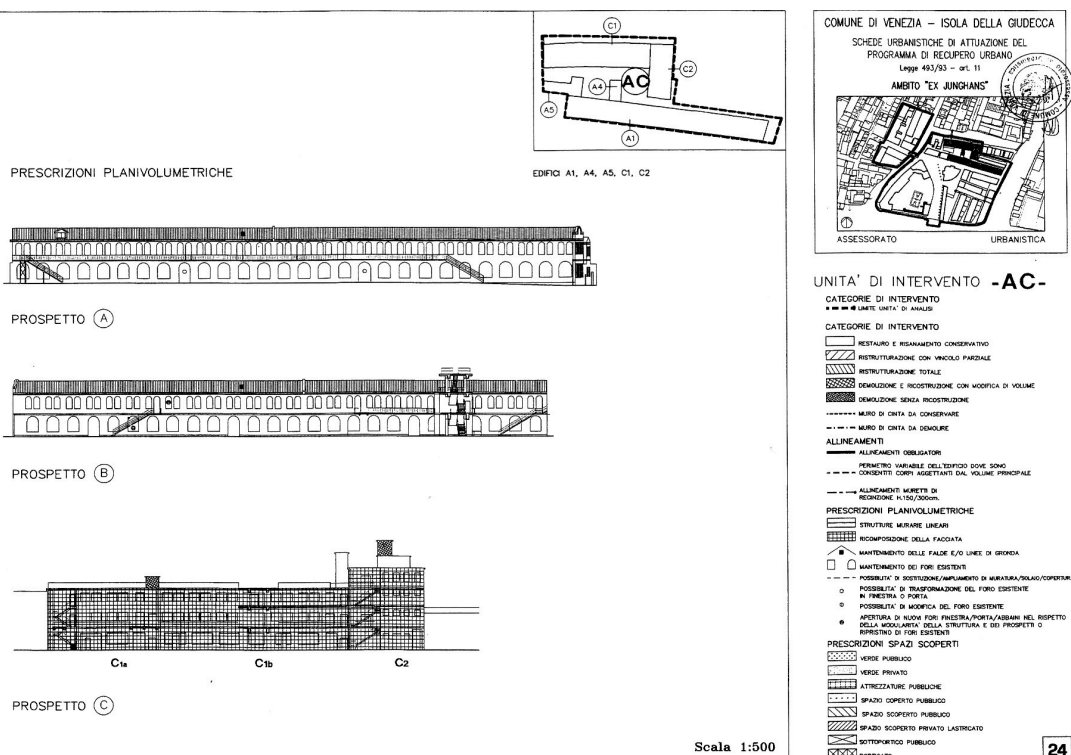
Isola della Giudecca. Project of renewal of area ex Junghans. Source: DINA A., ORTELLI P. (Rds.), *Mille alloggi per Venezia. I programmi di recupero urbano e la costruzione della nuova città*, Comune di Venezia – Arsenale Editrice, Venezia, 1997.

15. AYMUNINO, C. (1977), “Riflessioni oltre l’esperienza veneziana”, *Casabella*, n. 423.

And the university also manifests clear expectations with respect to the municipal administration. For example, it demands the clear recognition of its own prerogatives, or rather an open and unconditional acceptance of its proposals and the chance to have a say in the (urgent) priorities that directly concern it, as opposed to the many imposed by the city in its everyday transformation. This implies accepting a general flexibility of the established norms and even repealing some of the main points of the plan, on account of its (real or supposed) "social role".

It is pointless to say that this "game between sides" causes further misunderstandings and conflicts. It is necessary to remember that so far we have treated (in order to avoid entering the labyrinth of public institutions) the university as a single unified, coherent and expert protagonist. But if we look around at reality, we see that such a figure does not exist.

The university is, in fact, a heterogeneous and contradictory universe whose students, teachers and administrative and technical staff coexist without necessarily sharing objectives, strategies, knowledge and techniques. I believe, however, that due



Isola della Giudecca. Project of buildings rehabilitation for students accomodation, Source: DINA A., ORTELLI P. (eds.), *Mille alloggi per Venezia. I programmi di recupero urbano e la costruzione della nuova città*, Comune di Venezia - Arsenale Editrice, Venezia, 1997.

to this particular aspect, the theory of organisations may have made a significant contribution and largely helped to explain the associated problem of conflicts, fragmentation, power of information and informative asymmetries.

The “group of experts” is not always, therefore, *expert* in the matter. At times all of this “knowledge” that the university concentrates, but does not share at different levels, proves insufficient. On the contrary, the group as a whole can lose its legitimacy and be undermined by other members of the same university who do not recognise its role.

Choices of general interest may be blocked by demands from specific groups within the system. The plans of an enterprising principal (often supported by the decisions of the faculty council or other representative organs) can be thwarted by staff opposition to the relocation of university sites, or by student protests.¹⁶

As this is often the case, property-related policies within the university will consequently tend to be prepared by a specific sector of the university administration that is often deprived of any direct knowledge of the real needs of the institution, faculty, teaching staff, students and research centres. Such bodies also tend to be relatively insensitive to the proposals presented by the different *partners* who participate in operations involving urbanistic interventions and are equally insensitive to urban issues in general.

Many of the conditions that supposedly favour the success of processes of urban re-qualification or concerted construction simply do not exist, because:

- The university does not seem to take a single, homogenous position with respect to a particular problem or a particular solution. To the contrary, on many occasions (whether through debates in the press, directly at the moment of defining proposals, or at moments of confrontation with other institutions and operators) the contradictions and conflicts that may arise within the institution become apparent, and these often disorientate the public administration and other associated operators.
- The proposed projects may seem “poor” or may directly conflict with other objectives of the administration, thus giving rise to clashes that cannot always be resolved by a reconsideration of interests and the introduction of limited modifications to projects or other aspects relevant to the project. At times, it seems surprising that, even after finding a good solution, the university remains unable to offer and share a description “of the problem” in question..

16. For example, the Italian student protests of 1994 and 1996 (the protests of the “Pantera” – as that particular process of student mobilisations decided to call itself) clearly revealed the close links between a series of different questions that were equally urgent (ranging from the content of what was taught and the re-organisation of syllabuses, to improvements in classroom conditions and student space and demands for a more efficient administrative system) and that influenced the choice of a particular university model that had to adapt to changes in society.

- The financial resources available may not be sufficiently abundant. Many re-conversion projects (for old factories or other structurally similar buildings), and the simple act of acquiring open spaces, have proven particularly difficult to manage and complete without encountering interruptions, changes in the course of building work, and/or changes in the size of the project. This is exactly what happens with other urban projects that receive no type of “help” from the ministry or from any other public administrations.
- The requested *consulting* or “*expertising*” phase may lead to conflicts within the university institution or cause competition between the university (with respect to companies entering the market, even though they may be specialised providers of “strange” services) and either the professional world outside, or even its own components (in the form of self-employed workers operating in the same markets). Furthermore, it should be stressed that this is a particularly frequent phenomenon, above all in places where faculties of architecture and engineering have been called to solve the urbanistic problems of their respective cities and where – as has occurred in these years of financial autonomy – the university has been impelled to search for new financial resources and to “externalise its own services”.¹⁷
- The *university frequently makes use of the city*, giving little in exchange. Many of its “banal” amenities are effectively closed to other users unless specific agreements, contracts and memberships are negotiated (for example, the CUS - the University Sports Centre). Many university buildings appear “introverted” and, except on rare occasions, remain closed to the city and its general population. It is not therefore possible to defend the argument that the mechanism of building common goods – so often referred to in the case of urban/university services – is both immediate and automatic. It is also easy to find mismatches between the timings of the university (when building its installations) and of the administration (when preparing infrastructures and adapting services; under a “happy agreement”) and

17. Operations that sometimes run the risk of impinging upon established corporate interests (these are present in the Italian case, but also elsewhere). Staying with the specific case of Venice, the IUAV's external offer of a projection and territorial planning *service* (with the constitution of the ISP srl-IUAV Services and Projects) has met strong resistance and opposition (with the corresponding legal actions) from local professional interests, which have forced it to limit its activities to a specific field of action. Even so, the ISP has recently received a contract from the Ministry for Public Works to design the new Mestre by-pass (following the failure of the Venetian Region, the province of Venice, and Venice City Council to provide a project meeting with the consensus of all the corresponding municipal authorities and public bodies). In this case, it can be supposed, that – in addition to the technical preparation of the ISP – there is also a need for “political neutrality” in the projected technical solutions. Another example is provided by the CRU (Urban Research Centre) of Ferrara's Faculty of Architecture, which has succeeded in finding a way to collaborate with local institutions and the Emilia-Romagna region in the areas of training and research and in the drafting of plans and projects within a totally different political climate.

for these temporal differences to result in difficulties for accessibility, the marginalisation of some university structures, or the overcrowding and imposition of functions in other parts of the city.

- Another question which remains to be resolved concerns the supposed benefits (other than simply its prestige) that the university offers to its host city: these are not always unanimously well received, either by the collective consciousness or by political propaganda. The experience of Padova reveals strong competition between the city's "university" and "traditional urban" uses across wide areas of the urban system. This has been particularly noted in the form of an aggressive university policy, which has led to functional specialisation in an area containing a high concentration of university amenities, with processes of residential substitution, rather than "polarisation"; changes in the commercial network; a reduction in the provision of family services; and specialisation for users of the university.¹⁸



Giudecca island. Facade of the students accomodation building in the Junghans factory area.

18. This is what emerges from a recent study of urban degradation which was commissioned by the IUAV, and which centred its attention on the area lying between the belt formed by the walls of 15th Century Padova – which lies in a zone called “*degli Ospedalt*” (Via Gradenigo, via S: Massimo) and is characterised by the invasive presence of university clinics and other institutions that form part of the university of Padova. See. Padovani L. Et al (1999), *Social exclusion in European neighbourhoods. Processes, experiences and responses*, Italian report for EC Framework 4, area IV, Venice, Feb.

Bologna, the epitome of a university city, has never hidden the conflicts between its students and residents. These have been constantly reflected in the interventions that have accompanied the changes carried out in the old quarter of the city in recent years, and above all with respect to the burning question of *safety* in the university district of Via Zamboni (this safety was, in fact, the main focus of an electoral campaign that brought about a radical change in the political colour of the city's administration).¹⁹ Other similar, but not so important, situations are clearly evident in many other university cities, including Venice (where the feared and much criticised competition between university students and local residents has never been fully verified – due to both a lack of data and a lack of transparency in the sector), and show that the perceived conflict does exist (if only in the collective imagination). As a consequence the *city-university* partnership is not always a winning combination (from a political and propagandistic point of view) and cannot always be taken advantage of; it is not always possible to pursue a *joint venture* without a certain element of risk.

VENICE: EXAMPLES FROM AN “UNEXCEPTIONAL” CITY

I will take Venice, which in comparison with other more renowned university cities presents an undoubtedly *smaller* dimension of this phenomenon, as an example in order to underline some of these often forgotten political questions:

- The number of students involved is “ridiculously small” compared to other Italian university cities,²⁰ particularly if we compare data with other cities with a longer university tradition, such as nearby Padova or Bologna.²¹ This is a *small* system

19. In the 1970's Bologna witnessed some of the most violent scenes of youth protest and the memory of those events is still very much alive in the minds of the population that lives in the old quarter of the city –which contains the largest number of centres– particularly in the Via Zamboni neighbourhood –in which university specialisation was actively opposed by local residents. See. Legnani F. (1997-1998), “*La dotto Bologna: da Alma Mater a Città europea della cultura nel 2000*”, *Archivio di studi urbani e regionali*, n. 60-61. A very different idea, speaking of “perfect integration” is presented in CARDELLINO, L. (1995), “*Lo sviluppo dell'università su scala urbana e regionale*” *Appunti di politica territoriale, Politecnico di Torino*, n. 7.

20. In the period 1998-99, Venice's universities matriculated 27,721 students, of whom 17,771 matriculated at the University of Ca' Foscari (with 3,186 enrolling and about 40% with subjects pending from other courses) and 9,950 at the IUAV (with 1,054 students matriculated and 47% of the total with subjects pending); a teaching staff of 707 (with 497 level I and II lecturers and researchers at Ca' Foscari and 210 at the IUAV); a technical and administrative staff of 946 (with 508 at Ca' Foscari and 239 at the IUAV). These data have been obtained from MURST (1999), *Il sistema universitario italiano. La popolazione studentesca e il personale*, 1998-1999, Rome, Oct.

21. At the same time Padova had a university system in which 60,290 students were enrolled (with 16,689 matriculated and 23,619 with exams pending), 2,096 teachers and researchers, and a technical-administrative staff of 1,891. Bologna registered 91,374 students (with 17,065 enrolled and 27,950 with exams pending), 2,622 teachers and researchers, and 2,443 employed as technical and administrative staff.

compared with the best known and most frequent of the *city's users*:²² the tourists, whose presence can imply as many as 10 to 12 million movements a year. It is also small in comparison with respect to the city's resident population - which numbered 292,591 in 1998. Yet its relative weight significantly changes if we base our comparisons on the 68,180 inhabitants who inhabit the old quarter, which is where all of the university activities are concentrated.

- The university complex itself is not particularly big (Ca' Foscari has about 27 centres and the IUAV has 9 – without taking into account the other associated centres that have developed on “dry land” or in other provinces), but it seems “well spread” within its territory, where – little by little – it has gradually occupied more and more spaces (including former palaces, abandoned industrial sites, ex-slaughterhouses and former convents), especially in the neighbourhood of Dorsoduro-Sta. Croce-S. Polo, to the south-west of the Canal Grande, in the area between C.po Sta. Margherita and the port area of Sta. Marta, which has become generally regarded as a “university zone”.



Murono island: rehabilitation and reorganization project for the former area of Conterie.

22. See MARTINOTTI, G. (1993), *Metropoli. La nuova morfologia sociale della città*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

- As an economic mechanism, the University of Venice would not seem particularly important, if it were not for its location next to the old quarter, where – in recent years – there has been a weakening of the tertiary sector-management-administration function (mainly due to such factors as accessibility, congestion, and an increase in the price of housing, etc.) and an increasing specialisation of the economic base in the tourist and visitor sector. Within this context, the development of the university system²³ has been supported by recent municipal administrations as a potential source of diversification and means for revitalising the local productive system.

With specific reference to this context, I would now like to “tell” a few stories about “*normal* construction practices in the city”. Although the university has actively participated in these decision-making processes, I think that it is still necessary to provide a short introduction to this question.

Every time that Venice is used as an example, there is a certain implicit element of risk. There is the risk (for the narrators) of not being *believed*, above all because everyone thinks they know Venice (which is true to a certain extent, as we know what tourism and the market have sought fit to tell us about Venice, and in part, that is what Venice is slowly becoming; a parody of itself); or else we are overcome by the exceptional character of Venice, which makes all the great events associated with it “unique” and impossible to repeat, but which also turns them into everyday events that are carried out in the city. This, however, denies the “normality” which both Venice and its inhabitants seek (which undoubtedly contrasts with the wishes of the international community, which seeks to preserve it, yet also prevent it from changing with time). In the same manner that the ways of life and needs of the citizens seem completely “normal” to us, the municipal urbanistic plan – leaving aside the exceptional urban fabric – also seems “normal” and does not appear to present any exceptional characteristics.²⁴ Just from this initial hypothesis, it is possible

23. A development that has taken place without there being a specific plan or programme for the two Venetian universities. One option would have been to provide them with a 3-year development and growth plan that –although perhaps written and passed by the consultative organs of the two universities– would, in any case, have been suggestive rather than prescriptive with respect to the workings of the two institutions.

24. Venice has been trying to find itself a general plan since as long ago as 1962 and in the meantime it has undergone major transformations without any urban tools. This lack of an action plan has simply postponed the general confrontation between the city and its destiny. The future of the city appears increasingly uncertain: due to the major industrial crisis that has hit Porto Marghera (one of the largest industrial complexes in the country, whose destiny is closely related with the fortunes of the chemical industry which entered a major crisis in late 1970's and which has only survived due to state support); due to the polluting of the bay and the increased frequency of the “high water” phenomenon; due to the rules governing the tutelage of its historical-monumental patrimony and limitations regarding the possibility of transforming its historical typologies; due to the development of tourism; due to the exodus of the original inhabitants and the loss of employment; and due to the ageing of the local population. The debate is ever more complex and controversial and often reveals a very short-sighted

to appreciate the value of these examples, which help us to understand how the university is a contradictory – yet at the same time incredibly necessary – agent of urban transformation: it presents a series of contradictions, yet at the same time is necessary for the development of both the city and its community.

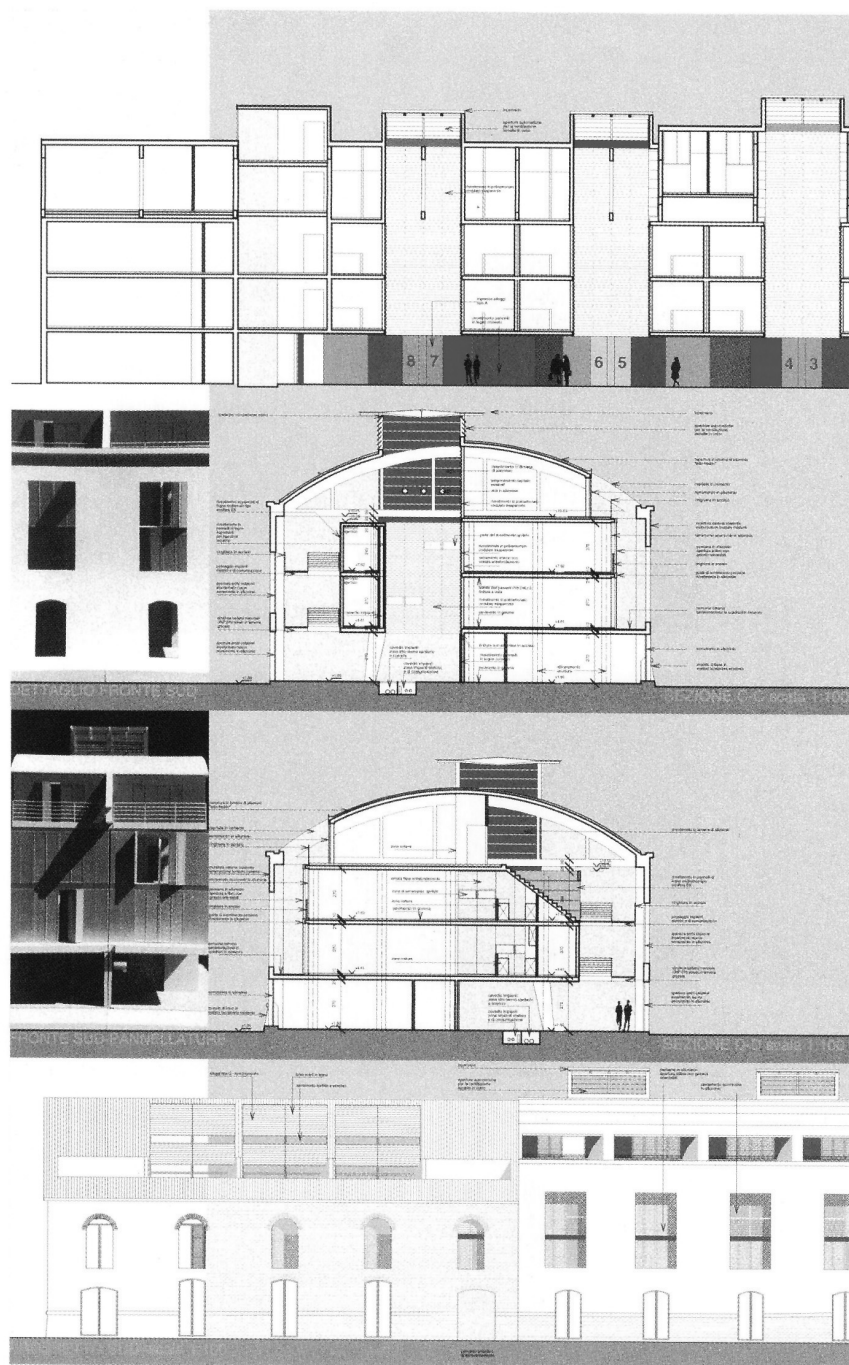
The University of Arsenale

In 1952, the Commander of the Italian navy, and historical heir to the great structures of Venice's naval arsenal, announced the progressive scaling down of the naval base (with the transfer of shipbuilding and ship maintenance facilities and associated personnel to other Italian ports) and the transfer of property rights over the site to the municipal authorities. This area, which lies between four buildings (from different periods, which range from the end of the 14th Century to the 1950's), large and small docks, and unused land, covers a total surface area of nearly 45 hectares (of which 11 are water) in the eastern part of the city. This is a fundamentally important area for Venice's industrial economy. Since the 19th Century, its gradual decline has had a series of repercussions that have not only led to the impoverishment of the eastern part of the city (called Sestiere di Castello) but also to its progressive marginalisation. This has also been exacerbated by the construction of a bridge across the bay, which has led to a concentration of activities in the north-eastern part of the city (called "*testa di ponte*"), which has now become the most readily accessible part of the city and is more attractive and dynamic than the old quarter.

Since the times of the PRG, the debate over the possible uses of the Arsenale has continued amongst doubts, ambiguities, provocations, delays, and promises made, but later unfulfilled.²⁵ The first of these unfulfilled promises was its demilitarisation – which has yet to begin – though the Italian navy does not seem to maintain much interest in the area. It has been particularly inactive in restoring and maintaining historic buildings, despite repeated calls for such action from senior officials

view of the needs of the city and of the possible solutions that could be adopted. The PRG of 1962 is currently being reviewed through two general Variants, one for the mainland area (which currently awaits approval by the Venice Region) and another for the historic centre, which the City Council began to develop in the early 1990's and which has benefited from assessment from L. Benevolo since 1994, though which has not yet been completed and officially presented. For more information, see BENEVOLO, L. (1996) (edited by), *Venezia. Il nuovo piano urbanistico*, Laterza, Bari; AA.VV. (1997), "La costruzione del nuovo piano urbanistico di Venezia", Dossier n. 6, *Urbanistica Informazioni*, n. 155.

25. Amongst those of other types, there has been no lack of speculative and property-related proposals, such as that suggested by the Fiat-Cigahotel group in the late 1980's or those that sought to transform the area into a tourist terminal for cruise ships: a possible "access point" to Venice from dry land, a tourist port, etc. As in the case of the project presented for the Expo universal exhibition, which should have been held in 1997 (ironically marking the bi-centenary of the fall of Serenissima), the project was averted by an international petition signed and presented by intellectuals, economists, actors and VIPs.



Murano: island: elevations and sections of the students accommodation building in the former Conterie area. Source: DE MICHELIS M. (ed.), *Venezia. La nuova architettura*, Skira, Milano, 1999.

and members of the public administration. In recent years, some areas have been reused for fairs and exhibitions (for example, Le Corderie – and not just for the *Biennale d'Arte*). Less attractive areas have been occupied by building activities and advanced research within the same sector. This has renewed the traditional controversy concerning productive activities and their compatibility with the future of the city. There is the old question of whether to launch Venice as a “productive city” (with a vocation for maritime activities or research) or whether to confirm its image as “the city of art” par excellence, and thereby definitively committing it to tourism and preferring fairs and museum exhibitions (which are more compatible with safeguarding its historical patrimony).

In 1995 the IUAV – that at the time was facing the internal problem of an extension and change of location within the old quarter (which was chosen as the centre of activities for all administrative, research and didactic activity) - proposed transferring all of its functions to the Arsenale. The project was very ambitious: a large complex meeting the needs of a complete re-organisation of the institution and the reunification (and co-ordination) of the faculty's different activities. From an architectonic point of view, the land available at the Arsenale offered more than enough space for conventional activities and also a highly suggestive environment (especially for the faculty of architecture). Furthermore, with its own financial capital (that in part came from a law expressly passed to help Venice and that set aside specific funding for Venice's universities) and *know-how* (for some time now the Arsenale has been a research centre specialising in restoration techniques and a practical workshop for testing the urbanistic and architectonic projects of the faculty's students) the institution can participate in the recovery and restoration of a number of different sites and thereby open the area up to the citizens who, even today, are effectively denied access to it other than on special occasions and under very specific conditions.

The reaction of the public administration seems to have been quite reserved, we could perhaps even say cautious, but it has generally been in favour of intervention. The old and difficult problem of the final functional use of the area seems to be moving towards a solution and the university seems to inspire “confidence”. However, as has always been the case in Venice, there is no strategic document or program for the future organisation of the city to allow a logical and objective evaluation of the main aim of the project: as a result, this move could be interpreted in many different ways.

On one hand it is believed that the change of location from the IUAV to Castello could revitalise the area, bringing new economic activities, and stimulating the property market through an increase in demand for accommodation (from students and teachers). On the other, there are fears that the neighbourhood could lose even more of its original inhabitants (expelled by the new student residents, who are only temporary residents, who tend to have few roots in the city, and whose stays are linked to other temporary activities) and that the few traditional crafts and commercial activities that

still remain will be replaced by relatively “unskilled” activities (such as snack bars and photography shops, etc.). The local press recognises the positive side of locating the university in one of the most important parts of the city and giving it recognition as an important function within the city’s economy. However, other economic institutions are opposed to this distancing of the Arsenale from the traditional functions (traditional crafts and shipbuilding) with which Venice’s fortunes have long been associated and which they think should be supported and strengthened in order to guarantee the use of the Arsenale. The municipal administration has chosen a neutral role and adopted a stance that seems increasingly complex, but in this way it has avoided having to make a more general reflection upon the social and economic future of the city.

Opponents have also emerged within the academic institution itself. Some of the teaching staff – who had initially voted in favour of the change of location – have since decided to oppose a project which they now see as too expensive, too difficult, and above all, not sufficiently functional. In local newspaper articles, they agree with some of the more recent proposals that have emerged from public debate, but which are not, however, supported by any official institution. There is no lack of criticism from the university’s technical and administrative staff. They oppose the concentration of activities at just one location and the move to a site which they consider too peripheral and which would imply a longer daily journey to work for most employees, who tend to live in Mestre or in other parts of the metropolitan area. The guarantees offered by the public transport company (that for the first time has found itself faced with questions related with a special type of client that is not one of its two traditional types of service users – tourists and local residents)²⁶ and its willingness to study possible solutions in order to improve its services do not seem sufficient.

The position of the IUAV seems less certain, and particularly weak in the face of public opinion.

The main subject of discussion is the same as ever; the project presented by the university itself. The administration has not put forward any proposals and no new guidelines seem to have emerged since the beginning of the general modification to the PRG – which is still underway. There has been increasingly clear opposition from the heads of the municipal government, who oppose moving the university to the Arsenale as they believe that such a move would do great damage to the typological and structural characteristics of the buildings and would alter the organisational stability of the whole area.

26. Since 1999 the ACTV (a public company that manages and provides local public transport for Venice’s metropolitan area) has introduced the *CartaAteneo* – a specific series of facilities and special tariffs for modes of public transport in the historic centre, which is aimed at university students who do not live in either Venice or Veneto (who can obtain the *CartaVenezia* that allows them to use the public water transport network at “social” rates, paying a quarter of the ticket price charged to tourists and non-residents using the same transport network).

The issue, which progresses amid favourable indications (based on the recognition of the economic and life-giving role of the university in the eastern part of the city) and the adoption of precise positions against the project (on account of the incompatibility of any “modern” function – other than a museum – with such particular monumental sites) was interrupted in 1996 when, following demands from the heads of the municipal administration, the Minister for Cultural Heritage intervened and definitively suspended the project with the justification of maintaining architectonic integrity and respecting the existing monumental complex.

Despite its emblematic nature, this development has yet to become common knowledge. It does, however, provide an example of the city’s incapacity to discuss its own future and to find a solution that satisfies both the functional uses of its spaces and its future organisation. We are talking about the future of a large urban area, about relations between different institutions and between these and local citizens (who are generally excluded from proceedings), about difficult interactions between government entities, economic institutions and cultural bodies, and about an explicit reflection upon the importance of the university for the city’s economy. We are talking about the future of the city, its productive structure and its economic base.

However, the “exogenous” nature of the interventions that characterise many of the decision-making processes that concern the city²⁷ remains a determining factor for the future of Venice and, if we agree to regard decision-making processes as *social learning* processes, of “collective learning”: this prevents the city from deciding its own future, due to its ambiguous relationship with its tourism.

Sta. Marta and S. Basilio: a pole of excellence for re-qualifying the periphery

There is a periphery in the old quarter of Venice that is so conventional that it seems almost impossible. It is conventional in its origins and location and also in terms of its degree of degradation (its main characteristics). It has grown up on the “fringes” of the old quarter since the fall of the Republic. The *waterfronts* obtained have improved the general image of the area by reflecting the waters and creating new islands at a time when Venice saw no other residential alternative and sought its future in industry and commerce. The area continued to expand, above all in the eastern sector, following the construction of the railway bridge, and gradually grew with the addition of different types of building and, above all, the development of new port facilities, the duty free zone, warehouses and docks. These were later joined by new technological and industrial facilities (the old gas works and the aqueduct complex) and also relatively cheap residential neighbourhoods.

27. For an intervention justified by the “mechanism” for safeguarding Venice, as its “World Heritage Site” status brings the city 2,000 million lira in state financing for its tutelage and upkeep, as well as considerable international funding, which it uses to recover and restore its monuments.

This gave rise to a new periphery with an unequivocally Venetian character, which technological innovations, limited accessibility and the decentralisation of production have – since the 1950's – converted into a problem area in need of re-qualification. The planning instruments of that time only partially foresaw a possible change in the use of this area; a rationalisation of its port activities and the possible location of the university (the IUAV had bought a 17th Century building called the *Cotonificio Olcese* and the University of Ca' Foscari used some industrial warehouses as centres for some of its courses).

In the late 1980's, the survival of Venice's commercial and industrial port was closely associated with its transfer to a dry land location. Porto Marghera (which offered suitable areas and facilities meeting modern logistical requirements for the movement of merchandise) and the passenger port (for cruise liners with ever greater capacities) were definitively transferred to the western-most part of the old port area. The whole S. Basilio Sta. Marta area (the old naval station and the free port area) needs a new use and, above all, needs to be "reincorporated" into the urban fabric. It has been separated from it by years of functional specialisation and by a high brick wall, which has also effectively isolated the Sta. Marta neighbourhood, and has previously had to develop behind this barrier.

From 1987 onwards, a number of different projects have been drawn up for the area,²⁸ and as the years have passed, the idea of the IUAV-Ca' Foscari university pole – with all the necessary complementary facilities, university residential accommodation, etc. – has gradually gained more and more supporters. This idea has become consolidated in the collective consciousness and in administrative practices, though none of the projects – some of which have been prepared by the municipal authorities – has been formulated as an urbanistic tool.²⁹ A formal decision would allow the concentration of the university centres and would remove the need for subsequent

28. For a more complete review of the urbanistic history of Venice and details of other recent projects, see. Savinno M. (1993), "Progetti per una Venezia tutta da inventare" in Indovina F. (edited by), *La città occasionale. Firenze, Napoli, Torino, Venezia*, Franco Angeli, Milan. For an idea of more recent projects, see. DE MICHELIS, M. (1999) (ed.), *Venezia. La nuova architettura*, Skira editrice, Milan.

29. From the few documents that provide an insight into the choices involved in the General Variant plan, we know the terms of the rigorous tutelage of the historic built tissue (through the "philosophically correct" evaluation, recovery and restoration of the historical typologies, which with their minimal propensity to change, have once more become a model for intervention in the existing patrimony). With reference to the large areas of transformation, it seems that the Variant seeks to coherently take into account the agreements and interests of recent years (in a pretence to show the unity and continuity of political and urbanistic interventions) having approved many interventions. The same has occurred in the case of the university (and has been included in a general chapter entitled "major services"). "The regulating plan will confirm the programme agreed upon by the Municipal authorities and the two universities (...) thus, seats in the old part of the city, movements and cases of new settlement continue to be regulated by the compatibility of the partial Variant and will be made ready for the subsequent development of the agreements", see. BENEVOLO, L. (edited by), "*Venezia. Il nuovo piano...*", cit., p. 59 (cap. VII)".

university sites to be scattered across the old quarter or located on the mainland³⁰ (as would be the case if the Economics Faculty were moved from Ca' Foscari to the former slaughterhouse of S. Giobbe).³¹

While waiting for the area to be released by the local administration and privatised by the port authorities, Venice's two universities have begun work on the reorganisation and restoration of the old cotton factory and other abandoned annexes. The suspension of the project to move to the Arsenale has led the IUAV to strengthen its presence in the area and to purchase new spaces (including refrigerated warehouses) in the S. Basilio area. In 1998, an international competition was organised to find a solution for these new spaces. It invited designs for a building that would house a library, auditorium, classrooms, exhibition halls, etc. After a few months, this had been transformed into a special plan for the S. Basilio area. It was prepared by the municipal authorities and by technicians from the IUAV and passed in September 1999.

There are different ways of judging and interpreting the operation.

On the one hand, despite the far-reaching financial efforts made by the two official institutions in the transformation of the area, the effects of locating the university have never been the object of evaluations and verifications either by the City Council or by the university itself (even at the draft stage of the main Variant for the old quarter) accepting the principal that the university function cannot, in itself, have a "revitalising" effect. The presence of flows of students who have come to what had been a relatively isolated and marginalised neighbourhood, with respect to the main part of the city, has contributed to the general revitalisation (including,

30. An evident resistance (or "lack of interest") by the two universities with respect to the idea of decentralisation had already been noted in programme documents belonging to the municipal administration and dating back to the second half of the 1970's. These documents clearly reveal a minimal propensity for programmed decentralisation (as seen in other areas of the historic centre, where the municipal administration made numerous buildings available in an attempt to achieve a better "use of public property" and with which a strategy was developed to "recover parts of the city by finding uses for urban areas that had been abandoned by their traditional productive activities"), and for a model involving increased growth, which had already been attempted in the past (see. Comune di Venezia – Assessorato all'Urbanistica (1979), *Introduzione allo studio della pianificazione universitaria in Venezia*, Venezia). The document also records all of the different groups (trade unions, associations of neighbours, etc.) that opposed the siting of university activities in other parts of the city than those in which the institutions and teaching facilities had gradually emerged over time.

31. The slaughterhouse (built in the middle of the 19th Century) is located in the northern part of the old quarter, near the railway station, in an empty area with no university tradition, which has always been residential (all recent industrial activity closed down after the Second World War), which explains why many political powers strongly opposed the project; they were worried that the residential nature of the neighbourhood might be undermined. These are the same reasons for the rejection, in 1974, of Le Corbusier's project for a large hospital complex in the same area. They also explain why the area was left without any designated function until 1991, when the City Council approved the Variant to the 1962 plan and allocated the area to the university. The agreement to cede the area to the university for a period of 99 years had, however, already been signed the previous year.

for example, the improvement of public transport) and an overall improvement in the “quality” of the neighbourhood, which – following the renewal – will once again have a view over the Canale della Giudecca.

On the other hand, there has been no lack of complaints from residents who claim that traditional commercial outlets have been replaced by shops that exclusively target the needs of students. People also complain about increases in rentals and property prices (public residences – most of which have been “rescued” over the years by their old occupants and later sold).³² Surprisingly, it has been quite clearly evident how both teachers and students have opposed and resisted the university’s move to what are perceived as marginal sites (such as Sta. Marta and S. Giobbe) and considered far from the city centre and distant from other university facilities (including the rector’s office, libraries, and secretaries, etc.).

The competition was well organised and successful, and produced a number of positive results. Above all, the publicity generated had a positive effect in improving the image of the IUAV and renewing its prestige (within the institute itself, in the local press and at the international level). Leaving aside the quality of the projects,³³ it proved a great opportunity to return to the debate concerning the undoubtedly complex question of “building in Venice”, but also provided an excellent “political” opportunity, which has extended from the end of the competition to the presentation of the plan of action. Without a doubt, it is necessary to add to all of the factors mentioned above, the wise idea of involving the main public powers affected by the transformation of the area (the City Council, the port authority and the authority responsible for fine arts) at all stages of the competition (from the initial outlines to the work of the jury) and thereby creating the necessary pre-conditions to assure a “general” consensus on the initiative (and it is no coincidence that “in a somewhat ambiguous manner” the authority responsible for fine arts abstained in the final vote – a decision that could – as has often been the case – have important bureaucratic consequences for the intervention,).

32. Similar complaints were recorded in the S. Giobbe neighbourhood, which (thanks to the presence of students) has seen an increase in the number of evictions and the introduction of short-term rentals by property owners. In this area there has been a registered growth in processes of recovery and in the restoration of properties which had mainly been abandoned and left to decline. Yet in neither one case nor the other is it possible to clearly affirm the nature and quality of relations between university accommodation and changes in the urban structure (a process over which municipal urbanistic planning does not seem to have much control, particularly in questions relating to functional changes and the final uses of the properties concerned).

33. With respect to the projects resulting from the competition, the local and national press has echoed the criticisms voiced by Gregotti (centring on the reconstruction of two peripheral buildings destined to provide services and facilities for Ca’ Foscari), that in certain ways (and although Gregotti generally supports “innovative” interventions in the old quarter) bring back memories of the controversies associated with F. L. Wright’s ill-fated project for a building on the Canal Grande, which was rejected in the 1960’s, the hospital projected by Le Corbusier (in the same Camaregio area that now houses the Faculty of Economics), or L. Kalm’s project for a pavilion in the Giardini della Biennale.

Despite the fact that the formal language of architecture talks of an opening and an extroversion towards the city in the case of the building foreseen by the winning project, generally speaking, none of the projects presented in the competition gave very much attention to the urban context within which they were to be located and (as always happens) the total “re-qualification” of Sta Marta was entrusted to a generic “diffusion” of benefits that would pass from the architectural to the urban context “by a process of osmosis”. It is the urban context (the Canale della Giudecca, the revisited industrial architecture, the traditional transport routes – canals and streets) that provides the starting point for the project. The evident “opening” to the city, which is also treated in fine detail in the recent Plan, seems little more than a rhetorical call, and the integration of the new area within the city is presented in terms of pedestrian streets and the re-conquest of the *waterfront*, rather than in a real combination of new functional uses that interact with the rest of the surrounding area.

The question of its functions has been mainly forgotten. As always, the main controversies have centred on the debate concerning the confrontation/clash between “the old” and “the new”: between “what is typically Venetian and the introduction of apparently foreign elements”, the form of the architecture, and whether the “innovating” forms of contemporary architecture are compatible with Venice.

The fact that there may be a problem with respect to the relations between the city and the university (involving a greater or lesser degree of conflict, relating to reciprocal valuations, and concerning economic re-qualification and re-vitalisation, which may be necessary or could perhaps be avoided, and that could perhaps be automatically induced or may require stimulation) is a question that has not been considered in recent reflections upon architecture and policy.

Via Torino: the neighbourhood centre of a “bipolar town”

One of the main objectives of the new urbanistic plan for Venice is, without a doubt, to heal the rift between the old quarter and the part of the city on the mainland, which over the years has gradually opened wider and wider. The bridge that crosses the bay seems like a weak *link* between the old quarter (with its monuments, mainly tertiary sector and tourist activities, concentration of the main local, provincial and regional administrative institutions and the daily coming and going of between 23,000 and 25,000 people) and the mainland area, which seems to be fully introduced within the metropolitan *regional centre* system, which is no longer just residential (as planned by most of the urbanistic options of the past), increasingly less tied to the great productive system of Porto Marghera, and increasingly less dependent upon the old quarter, having developed its own productive system based on advanced tertiary sector services and on small and medium-sized companies that are increasingly integrated with the rest of the region.

One symbol of this major social and economic separation can be seen in the autonomy sought by Mestre, which seeks to become an autonomous city, separate from Venice. I am simplifying what is a very complex situation, and one which Venice's public administration has been trying hard to deal with for many years now, by creating major elements capable of physically and formally "sowing together" the two territorial entities. The neighbourhoods created through social housing projects in the 1950's and 1960's (Campalto, Viale S. Marco) were built with this objective in mind. Today, within the process of progressive de-industrialisation of Porto Marghera and the environmental recovery of the areas which look towards the bridge (S. Giuliano, Forte Marghera), the area between the "head of the bridge" (Piazzale Roma and the railway station) in Venice and the centre of Mestre-Marghera has been proposed as the possible focal point of a "single" though "bipolar" city. According to the City Council's urbanistic plans, this area is to be transformed and will become the "central" organising zone for the activities and functions of Venice's metropolitan area.³⁴

The promotion of the public transport system (by wheel, rail and water) and the creation of a "functionally strong" area (in the form of a pole offering metropolitan services and facilities) as the system's unifying factor, has become the central linking mechanism for an urbanistic policy that has conditioned some of the choices made by the administration. This process involves the creation of a science and technology park (in a zone initially dedicated to industrial uses that has now been abandoned); the creation of a public park (financed by the European Union); parking zones and transport exchange areas; and also the location of the university in the Via Torino area, with faculties and research centres to give greater "urban importance" to the new neighbourhood centre, complementing (and acting as a counter-weight for) all of the functions concentrated at the head of Venice's bridge.

All of this also helps to explain the agreement between the municipal administration and the University of Ca' Foscari to cede both the S. Giobbe and Via Torino slaughterhouses to the academic institution. The agreement foresees a concerted intervention on the part of the university to recover a run down and marginal area (closed off by part of the railway and relatively inaccessible by road) that would also involve the IUAV, which has been invited to develop a series of activities in areas adjacent to the Via Torino slaughterhouse.

In this case, the university is destined to play an important role in putting the plan into action, because its presence also adds weight to the science and technology park and gives an impulse to the transformation of part of the old industrial zone,

34. See TONIOLO, M., "*Il progetto preliminare al nuovo PRG di Venezia*", and MANCUSO, F. "*Il progetto preliminare del nuovo PRG di Venezia: un primo commento*", both of which are published in *Urbanistica Informazioni*, n. 147, 1996.

through the development of service activities. The university services will also complement the S. Giuliano Park in the provision of further public amenities.

Almost confirming some criticisms of the plan (and of the university) that regard the university functions as “weak” (and perhaps relatively “unrepresentative”, with respect to the symbolic and rhetorical plan of the urbanistic project), the response to the plan from the two academic institutions has, in any case, been rather disappointing for the municipal administration.

Although a recovery Plan has recently been adopted, it seems that there is a lack of interest and commitment to investment in the area on the part of the university. Honouring the agreement it signed for the cession of the slaughterhouses, Ca’ Foscari started to locate some activities in the area in the early 1990’s. With the progressive re-structuring of some buildings in the area, a degree course in Computer Science was finally initiated, though with only 199 students registering for the course in the academic year 1998-1999.³⁵ In light of the evidence, the Ca’ Foscari’s commitment to the area seems rather relative and this tends to cast initial doubt over the development of the university’s Via Torino site, where work by the municipal administration to improve accessibility (by rail and car) continues to run behind schedule.

The IUAV, for its part, has failed to undertake any relevant investment in the area. Building work on the *Laboratorio Prove Materiali* – the only installation initially foreseen by it – has been planned, yet has not been afforded any special importance. All the attention of the architecture faculty seems to have centred on locations within the old quarter and on promoting the Sta. Marta pole. As a result, the Via Torino university pole has become an increasingly remote option amongst the locational strategies of the university. On the other hand the lack of relations and synergies between this area and the science citadel of Porto Marghera provides further evidence of the weakness of urbanistic guidelines in the absence of a common will to act.

The recovery plan (drafted by two lecturers from the IUAV and adopted by the municipal authority) presents no special features that are worthy of mention from an urbanistic or architectural point of view, other than the formal reaffirmation of the university function. While on one hand, it effectively makes a new proposal for a university pole, on the other, it is very much weakened by the “diffusely peripheral nature” of the area, the potential difficulties in reorganising it due to the presence of a “communication dead-end”; the “excessively slow” rate at which old economic activities that are not compatible with new functions have been abandoned; and, above all, by the indecisiveness of the administration with respect to undertaking interventions to provide the required levels of infrastructure and accessibility. The projected

35. Despite the prospects for development, this degree course still remains one of the university’s academic options with the lowest levels of demand. Ca’ Foscari owes its fame – above all – to the disciplines of economics and statistics (which account for more than 7,300 matriculated students) and linguistics and literature (with more than 9,000 students matriculated in the years 1998-99).

solutions appear to be extremely “weak” and are incapable of stamping character on the area; though on the other hand, given the indications of development for the university pole, that are now emerging from the two universities and relate to activities that should be undertaken, the functional uses (residences, sport activities, classrooms and research centres) seem to be *compulsorily* flexible and generic, as do the inescapable relations with the rest of the city.

In this case, the project explicitly highlights the doubts held by the two main protagonists and above all underlines the lack of coincidence between the university programme and municipal planning, which (for the moment, at least) have failed to find common ground on which to agree and thereby guarantee the execution of what is an ambitious and difficult project, but one which will have numerous positive implications for the development of the city.

“Full of meaning”: student accommodation

I have already briefly mentioned the different interpretations that have generally been made with respect to the presence of students in the city. This is perhaps the most important phenomenon governing relations – whether sociological, economic or urbanistic – between city and university. It is the students who we find in the streets; it is their flows that give life to some parts of the city and their presence that justifies commercial activities that would perhaps not otherwise be found in a city that otherwise has too few residents and too many tourists.

This interpretation is purely subjective; as subjective as the evaluations of the characteristics and habits of the population in question.

How many of the students who are matriculated in Venice’s different academic institutions form part of the daily flow that moves in and out of the old quarter, remaining there for only a few hours?

How many live there for 4 or 5 days a week and participate in different university activities? And how long do their respective studies last?

How many stay there longer, taking on the appearance of potential future fixed residents and, as such, use the services, shops, cinemas, sports installations; the city and its spaces?

In a quantification of the services that a city needs to provide in order to be functional, should students be considered part of the “critical mass” that justifies maintaining a network of services and facilities that would otherwise – due to the limited number of local inhabitants – have to be reduced and re-organised with all the associated inconveniences for the local community (understood in the widest sense of the word)?

Is there, as has so often been suggested, a specific category that isolates and identifies “the university students”? Or perhaps even better, are they mistakenly afforded significance without actually playing a relevant role in the life of the city?

None of these questions has an unambiguous answer, and even less so in Venice, where the processes of progressive “regionalisation” of university studies³⁶ should (according to a generally held conviction that is not however supported by specific statistics) have contributed to a reduction in the number of resident students. If we then add such factors as increased economic well-being and traditional income limits that still limit student grants and the allocation of student accommodation, we discover that it is hardly possible to find credible data – even relating to the demand for student accommodation – amongst the information that this source should be able to provide. At present, there is no means of evaluating the effect of the students’ presence in the city and even less of calculating the extent of unsatisfied demand within a property market that is particularly expensive. It is not possible to register momentary preferences for particular locations (such as proximity to university centres, vehicle access – which would lead people to choose the Mestre and Marghera areas, which do not now present such important price differentials in terms of student accommodation as to justify students living in areas distant from these centres – or the presence of services, etc) or to make an accurate evaluation of possible interventions.

Interventions involving the building of student residential accommodation in Venice seem, therefore, to be signs of a shared (yet unconfirmed) emergency solution,³⁷ rather than the result strategic design by the university (and in particular, by Ca’ Foscari) and underline how the university’s competitiveness should be increased through a better provision and offer of services. Yet despite this clear design, neither the two univer-

36. Without going too deeply into the whole question, we refer to the process of reduction and contention of the university’s reference neighbourhood. The process began with the multiplication of university centres, which interrupt or reduce interregional flows of students, and progressively bind the universities ever-closer to their own local systems and to certain of their social characteristics (such as a greater or lesser propensity to continue their studies. In regions like Veneto, the majority of young people abandon compulsory education at the age of about 15 in order to find a job in a system that is particularly in need of labour and which – even though it may not be specialised – is particularly generous in its payments – usually beyond the normal limits. Just to give an example, in the years 1998-1999, out of 10,665 students were matriculated at the IUAV. Around 69% of these were from the local region, living between 30 and 120 minutes from the old quarter by train. It is also – theoretically – possible to add to this group some of the students from Friuli-Venice Giulia and Emilia Romagna (regions which account for 8.8% and 4.9% – respectively – of the total number of matriculated students)

37. The supply of student accommodation in Venice is really limited. At present, 20 beds are available at the *Casa dello studente* in Calle dei Ragusei and 182 beds in hostels that operate according to special agreements. A further 84 beds will soon be available in student houses that are currently being restored (the *Casa dello studente* of S. Tomà and part of the ex-convent of Sta Maria Ausiliatrice, in Castello). Amongst other ventures, the ESU foresees a series of economic contributions (to students) and agreements (with property owners) in order to individualise other accommodation opportunities for students within the old quarter. With respect to demand, municipal documents (and also those from the “*Osservatorio casa*” – which was set up in order to analyse housing conditions in the old quarter), refer to the only research based on questionnaires, which was carried out by Ca’ Foscari in 1996 (see. Savino, 1997-1998, *op. cit.*).

sities, nor the ESU,³⁸ have played an active role in recent interventions undertaken in Venice:³⁹ these have had an exclusively municipal nature and involved the construction of housing in two areas that have been subject to recovery interventions.

- On the island of La Giudecca, there have been numerous interventions to recover the now unused, former industrial areas, of the Junghans complex. So far, fewer than 160 student flats have been completed within the urban recovery programme (PUR) which aims to provide 300 new beds and to transform the ex-factory site into a residential district. Funding for this venture was granted under law 493/1993 and through a protocol agreement between Venice City Council, the Venetian region, and the Italian Ministry for Public Works: a public-private joint venture programme was signed in March 1997.
- On the island of Murano, there is a project involving the Le Conterie industrial building (which dates from the end of the 19th Century and was where beads and artificial pearls were manufactured). 56 housing units are projected for the complex, as well as public and collective facilities (including a museum), traditional craft and commercial activities, and accommodation including 280 beds destined for university students (the total gross surface area is 9,918 m²).

The introduction of such a particular function is also important given the type of ministerial funding, which foresees (art. 3 and 11, 1457/1978) specific funding for building student accommodation.

For the island of La Giudecca, the introduction of student residential accommodation has been justified by the argument that “such a typology may serve to set in motion a process of renewal and may also help to attract new inhabitants into the area”.⁴⁰ The case of Murano is just the contrary, it is predicted that the “new student residences will free some of the privately owned flats which are currently occupied (in the old quarter), thereby establishing – to a certain extent – the public price for the flat rental market and – for many months of the year – introducing a younger population into certain areas and thereby redressing the balance with respect to a constantly growing older population”.⁴¹

In the first case, the great proximity of La Giudecca to the old quarter, and to the location of the IUAV pole on the opposite bank of the Canale della Giudecca, causes no surprise other than that stemming from the weakness of the public

38. ESU –the Organisation for the right to University Studies– a regional organisation set up to promote the use of universities and the provision of related services.

39. The same studies of student accommodation typologies that have accompanied the intervention in the Junghans area have been drafted by OIKOS; a company from Bologna.

40. See. DINA, A., ORTELLI, P. (1997) (ed.), *Mille alloggi per Venezia*, Arsenale Editrice, Venezia, p. 24.

41. BENEVOLO, L., *Venezia. Il nuovo piano...*, cit., p. 46.

transport system and from the rather eccentric location of student accommodation in the middle of a mainly private residential zone.

In the case of Murano, on the other hand, the creation of a student residential zone on an island that has always (since the 14th Century at least) specialised in the manufacture of glass (but has now become peripheral due to the industrial crisis and the emigration of its population towards the mainland and which is only partly affected by tourist flows) poses a number of questions. Despite the different proposals that have been put forward, the public transport network does not seem capable of guaranteeing the required levels of access and speed of movement between the island and the different university centres in the old quarter. But above all, the location (although apparently complete in the project and offering all essential services) seems rather like a complement that is separated by an urbanistic and social context within which providing student accommodation appears to be difficult due to the lack of any university activity there. This situation would not encourage students "to live in the neighbourhood" but rather to use their flats as simply places to sleep. Furthermore, in this case, the lack of studies relating to the behaviour, "life styles", and demands of students (including their preferences in terms of where to study, meet, and enjoy themselves, etc.) prevents a meaningful evaluation of this last hypothesis. Indeed, it is possible that students have other "places" of reference (for example the university itself) for their activities (studies, meetings, leisure, etc.) and that, as a result, "centrally" located accommodation may not, perhaps, require any other function.

What seems to be most difficult is the task of creating a general logic that justifies such a kind of intervention, yet does not appear to be too "informal". Both the revision of the plan and the urban recovery projects provide weak justifications for this type of specific urbanistic intervention. They also reveal a substantial lack of rigour in the methods used to evaluate the phenomenon of the student presence within the city, in both considering it capable of producing a structural dynamism with respect to the resident population and supposing that it induces a revitalisation of marginal and run down urban areas.

It must be recognised that the urbanistic interventions undertaken in Venice in recent years have consisted of a "possible shock treatment" for combating "the resignation to degradation" that seems to have prevailed in certain run down urban areas. In a city which is dominated by emigration and mass tourism, this has pushed people into recognising the university students as a transient "source of dynamism" and urban transformation. It seems important to understand this component well and to get to know their daily habits and demands and also the nature of relations between local residents and students, so that urban re-qualification does not become a substitute for conflict.

From this point of view, student accommodation located far from university activities and divorced from the urban reality that surrounds them, does not tend

to represent “a place to live”, but rather appears as “a new property product”⁴² that “gives meaning to” certain urbanistic projects that could otherwise seem rather conventional and out-dated. The case of Venice (which hidden behind a mask of rhetoric simply views the student population as a “strategic resource” to help with re-qualification and to keep the city alive) also reveals a rather banal attitude (or perhaps simply indifference) to this special kind of client or “resident”: this type of attitude is widespread in Italy (and I think also in other European countries). Yet this is a resource that, from both the political and urbanistic angles, should merit a different approach, including a rich variety of inter-disciplinary and inter-sector reflection and a great capacity for innovation.

This is, without a doubt, the reason for the renewed interest in relations between the city and the university: it is a case of discovering the potential opportunities that may be profitably harnessed and used in processes for re-qualifying both the city and society.



42. I have made improper use of the terms used by ZETLAOUI, J. (1996), “Le Maisons de L’Étudiant: future lieu de vie universitaire ou nouveau produit immobilier?”, *Espaces et sociétés*, n.80-81