

## **Urban planning as an instrument for institutional cooperation: the case of Pompeii municipal urban plan**

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### *ABSTRACT*

*Pompeii municipal council has a highly complex organizational framework; the development of a new municipal urban plan for the city therefore requires the use of innovative instruments capable of facilitating the convergence of different institutions towards strategic urban renewal actions and the overall improvement of the municipal territory. To work towards this, there has been a proposal for an institutional interpretation of the urban plan as a useful instrument for the immediate evaluation of the spin-off effects on the physical city. The urban project is configured as an anticipation of the plan solution, which enables verification of the effects on the physical level and especially the evaluation of the institutional compatibility of the proposals, with a measured increase of the executive capacity of the plan.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The implementation of a municipal urban design for the city of Pompeii is complicated by the overlapping competencies of the municipal council, the Culture and Heritage Ministry of central government and the Catholic Curia. Procedures tend to follow separate paths, resulting in overlapping uncertainties and a city that remains stalled. The preliminary draft of the plan attempted to tackle the problem through continuous comparison, evaluating the various programmes and identifying priority areas of the strategic urban plan with regard to shared aims.

The particular situation of separate institutions with overlapping competencies is immediately evident from a superficial glance at the features of city's urban structure. Little of the built environment in the Pompeii municipality can be attributed to the ancient city, whose remains are mainly concentrated in the archeological site. Nor is much of it referable to the Marian sanctuary, although this does have a more direct influence on the everyday life of the central area of the urbanised zone. Much belongs however to the discontinuous and heterogeneous aspects of a city lacking reference points and urban values, characteristics that are common to entire portions of the Naples metropolitan area. This situation is the consequence of a very particular condition in which the prominent elements that characterize Pompeii - the archeological site and the Marian sanctuary - are managed by institutions that have never established any rapport with the municipal administration. On the one hand there is the Culture and Heritage Ministry, which supervises the archeological site through the Superintendency, and on the other, the Curia, running the religious structures - with some important monuments under direct Vatican control. In this situation the Pompeii municipality seeks to programme the development of the local economy, the regulation of traffic flow and more generally, the organization of a territory strongly polarized in the face of structures that are completely foreign to the dynamics of city. The city also strives to implement tourism policies, even if it has no voice in the management of the tourist attractions.

Because of these difficult and unresolved relationships, Pompeii lacks specific

urban utilities and is lacking also in civic services, city green spaces, schools, a sports stadium, and a proper theatre and cinema; in fact, all specificities not related to the archeological site or the Sanctuary. It seems that the events that led to the birth of Pompeii continue to mark its urban development. In fact the city was actually established thanks to the sanctuary and the ancient ruins. In 1748, when the Bourbons first organised the newly discovered archeological remains, Pompeii was a rural farming area attached to the nearby town of Torre Annunziata. Gradually, the first inhabited clusters appeared at the edges of the ancient city, offering hospitality to the many researchers who came from all over the world to visit the ancient city ruins. Later in 1891, Bartolo Longo commenced the building of the religious monuments dedicated to the cult of the “Madonna of the Rosario” and this led to the growth of real urban settlements and eventually the foundation of the independent municipality of Pompeii in 1923.

Only a small part of the present urban settlement presents a complete system: Pompeii seems to be the sum of multiple, heterogeneous spatial and managerial situations that now hamper the development of new strategic plans for the city and create the need for a new form of urban planning, understood as an instrument based on careful measurement of all the transformation possibilities. From this viewpoint, urban planning plays a catalyzing role that may trigger more active institutional participation. A discussion on specific planning solutions, exemplifying the themes and strategies to be adopted, may be the only solution that provides a necessary interface between the three actors involved - the municipality, the museum superintendency and the curia - in order that Pompeii may have a valid and up to date urban planning instrument.

## **1. METHODOLOGY**

*“Anyone with experience in the field of design and construction of entire parts of the city, especially in situations where public and private actors interact, knows how difficult communication is between the various parties, how it is crossed by asymmetrical flexibilities and rigidities that are often not easily comprehensible and reconcilable. It is usually all interpreted in reductive mode, as the result of an inability to formulate clear objectives...”*

[...]. It is absolutely true that this communication often ends in outright conflict” (B. Secchi, "Come ripensare il progetto urbano", in *Casabella* 797/2011). In fact, Bernardo Secchi affirms that the decisions regarding large city areas are often accompanied by quite bitter conflicts. Sometimes it is difficult to institute a genuine discussion and comparison panel. In view of these difficulties, an instrument such as urban planning is mandatory for polarizing the debate around the aspects that truly determine the urban landscape, discussing “the position, orientation and dimension of volumes, building typologies, the paths of infrastructure networks and their attachments to buildings, the dimension and characteristics of collective facilities, including green spaces and parking areas, the flexibility and energetic performance of buildings and neighbourhoods” (B. Secchi, op. cit.).

Through urban planning, judgments are expressed on space-places; possible transformations of the original structures are examined, introducing a technique for addressing and interpreting the reality that “informs” the various issues of transformation, providing specific solutions.



Figure 1 – Overview of the projects for Pompeii

Alongside survey operations, a thorough study has been carried out on Pompeii, focusing on diverse aspects: the reinterpretation of urban landscapes, the geographic description of sites with recognition of characterising elements, the infrastructural axes that create fractures in the city territory, the geometrical matrices that characterise the agricultural landscape, the Roman centuriation axes still evident in the northern area, the religious architecture and obviously the site of ancient Pompeii.

The study of these elements has enabled the development of an interpretative scheme for Pompeii, in order to identify the various landscapes that make up the city's complex urban framework and, above all, how these intersect. Urban planning plays a fundamental role in these key areas: the architectural translation of the general objectives allows the identification of both the critical aspects and the potential factors of the areas, and represents an instrument that enables the immediate evaluation of the effects that the design's proposals will have on the physical city. From this perspective, the design is an instrument that facilitates public participation and administrative contacts, the translation of constraints, laws, objectives and strategies into concrete terms. Urban planning thus represents a key element for the formation of a discussion panel between institutions that differ in nature, aims and bureaucratic arrangements (the superintendency, the curia, and the municipal administration). The discussion panel is certainly difficult but necessary, representing a platform where planning can identify common aims and can pinpoint and reveal the current expectations, interests and strategies of the single institutional bodies, which usually tend to independently programme their resources in the Pompeii territory without informing the other actors involved - especially the municipal administration. In his now historic essay, *Planning in the Face of Power*, Forester (1998) explains how planning could be useful in "exposing" various institutional actors, when, as in the case of Pompeii, they are reluctant to share with others those administrative decisions they are capable of making independently.

Urban planning, which is fundamental to the Pompeii plan, is precisely defined in the guiding principles, in the urban connections and reference themes but is very flexible in other aspects, being disposed towards the convergence of specific institutional interests on characterizing aspects, and adapting to new and unexpected viewpoints and new demands. In these

situations, where even the most comprehensive planning tends to remain mere graphic exercise, the creation of a plan to combine these specific urban features must necessarily undergo deep transformation. The plan therefore starts by becoming a map of appreciable differences, a description and evaluation of the possible transformations and connections, by delimiting themes, introducing emerging issues and problems and at the same time pointing towards solutions. This is not a mechanism that goes from analysis to design, but one that instead establishes a cyclic relationship in which urban planning poses and faces problems at the same time. Such a process thus turns out to be the only instrument capable of stimulating an institutional interface, which otherwise remains a very difficult goal.

## **2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAN FORMULATION PROCESS**

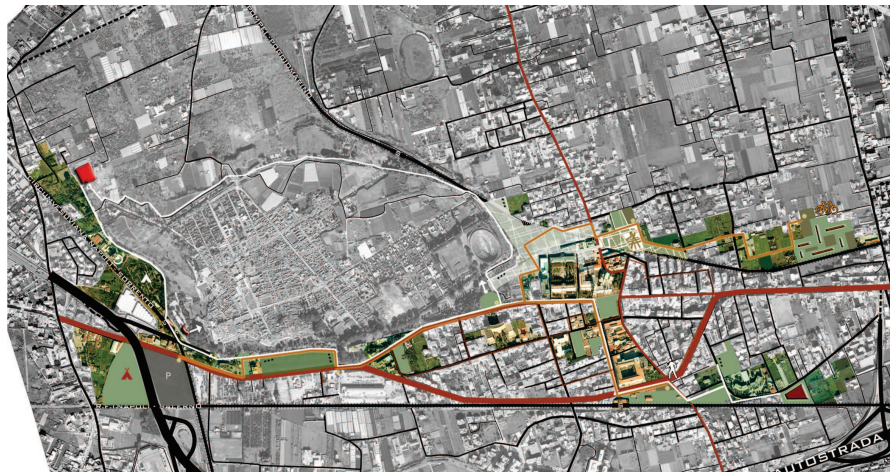
Reasoning with the municipal administration, the curia and the superintendency in an urban planning discussion panel means, on the one hand, acquiring data on the strategic and economic programming of the single parties and interests and the objectives of programme actions regarding Pompeii territory, and on the other it means guiding the various managerial bodies towards real reflection on specific common aims, not merely as a list of politicized objectives to reach, but as practical convergences on specific planning solutions to specific urban problems.

Plans for some area, such as that for the organisation of the area immediately surrounding the archeological site, or the area next to the “Santuario” Circumvesuviana railway station, represent fundamental elements of urban renewal, since they have the capacity to focus the field of reflection on to the city itself. The initial phase of the project was based on the recognition of landscape and morphological units recognizable in the territory. This served as the point of departure for a “planning” campaign intended to completely reorganise the strategic urban areas, leading to the renewal of each individual unit of urban morphology, which would then become the minimum planning unit. A cyclic procedure is therefore established between the discussion proceedings and the development of the planning framework relative to the strategic planning areas, so that on the one hand, negotiation



sets the objectives and constraints to be tackled in the individual planning areas; on the other, continuous planning updates make possible more advanced perspectives and interpretations, capable of stimulating further analysis and interpretation.

The urban system surrounding the sanctuary is marked by specific elements and places which may be traced back to the city that grew in the wake of Bartolo Longo's initiatives. There are many open spaces: piazza Bartolo Longo in front of the sanctuary, piazza Schettini with the town hall and other spaces behind; piazza Vittorio Veneto with the new railway station and Via Sacra with the Bartolo Longo complex. One proposal, based on improving the present condition of the area, aims to change the existing series of independent open spaces, delimited by the road network, into a continuous compact system of open spaces. Another proposal is a pedestrian and cycle path running from Via Plinio and connecting the southern border of the archeological site to the piazza del Santuario and the Ferrovie dello Stato train station.



*Figure 2 – New links between the archeological area and religious complexes*

The archeological city is an excellent resource around which appropriate spaces can be developed, taking into account the worldwide importance of this heritage site. Therefore an attempt has been made to break through the traditional separation between the archeological world, closed within its own boundaries, and the urban centre, which until now has been substandard in terms of its architectural profile and functional structures. It is therefore

necessary to design a wide-ranging programme that tackles issues and unresolved problems. Research has been conducted on the organization of the area bordering the ancient city and on the development of public services and facilities to aid public use of the site. The promenade bordering the archaeological site is integral to the new system of entrances to the site, so that ancient Pompeii, doubly cut off from the modern city by its perimeter walls, can have closer links with the areas to the north and south. The new Eisenman railway station project will also aid this relationship. This plan favours the connection of modern Pompeii with the great geographical entity of the ancient city.



Figure 3 – New townscapes

According to this plan, the Peter Eisenman-designed Santuario station will serve as an important starting point. This is a confirmed project, so discussions arising represent a concrete experience for discussion at the institutional table. The development possibilities triggered by this ambitious and well-argued project became the starting point for further discussion on other city areas. The area is central with respect to landscape, architectural and infrastructural possibilities, being directly connected to the city centre, to which it is the entrance, and lying east of the archeological area. Furthermore, the area is crossed by the “strada provinciale Nolana”, a road that links the urban centre of Pompeii to other nearby cities. The “Circumvesuviana” railway line also marks a boundary between the urban centre and the agricultural area to the north, hence the plan is for an underground tract of railway passing through the municipal territory and a city park that connects the parts related to the station area.

This overlapping of issues reveals the diversity of points of view and also the strategic convergences promoted by the individual stakeholders. For example, it is possible to get stakeholders involved in resolving the difficult problems of accessibility: separating tourism traffic flows from the ordinary city traffic flow would enable the construction of differentiated systems of

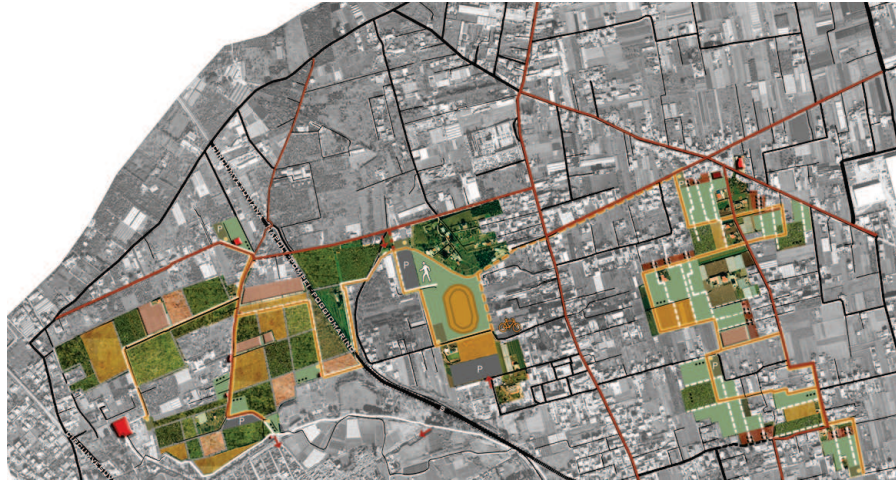


penetration into the city. So on the one hand, a road network could be set up which would be detrimental to the entire urban area or, on the other hand, areas of access and interchange could be positioned at the entrances to Pompeii, so as to favour the pedestrian movement of tourists towards the archeological site or the sanctuary. Another fundamental topic of discussion is the positioning of purpose built parking areas that facilitate access to the urban centres. The new road network should fluidly and efficiently connect the various parts of the city as well as the new open public spaces. The latter ought to be a driver for the upgrading of the entire territory of Pompeii. These areas are strategic for reaching overall objectives, taking on the shape of new urban centres; large open areas in which to create the public spaces necessary for the improvement of amenities and also in which to introduce the necessary rules for the complementary realisation of quality initiatives and services, funded also by private investment of various types.

The rebalancing of an entire portion of the Pompeii territory must be based on the potentials that the new Santuario station plan ignites, in three principal areas: the underground railway can create new and unexpected urban connections; the new linear urban green system will connect the Sanctuary area to the archeological site, in a summation of centrality that becomes significant for the redesign of the surrounding urban area; and finally, the new parking and interchange system will reorganise urban access routes and free some strategic areas of heavy traffic congestion. From these new arrangements the prospering of shops and commerce, hotels, restaurants and above all new functional complexes, capable of improving the overall quality of public services, can create a multipurpose and multicentre system in Pompeii. An orchestrated effort is required for the achievement of these objectives: grasping the transformations triggered by such projects requires having an effective plan and soliciting new and complementary initiatives. The superintendency and curia must be active in proposing alternative solutions in the relaunched plan, the outcome of the new and unexpected planning scenario. In a virtuous chain reaction, individual initiatives, elucidated in the debate on the station project, can be used by the plan as strategic actions to trigger further urban transformations. These, reappearing in a new panel discussion, can iterate the process towards the definition of a new, balanced design of the plan.

This process thus lends itself to being used for other areas also. In fact the presence of curia property and areas under the control of the supertendency are not limited to the fenced-off archeological sites and the Marian citadel. There are many *extra moenia* excavation areas outside the perimeter of the ancient city, just as there are many other curia-controlled religious institutes and complexes within the municipal territory. Planning proposals could be advanced also for other more peripheral parts of the city so as to attract the necessary process of institutional involvement. Objectives in these cases may be diverse, oriented mainly towards the search for further specific things that seem to be lacking in other parts of the Pompeii territory. For example, the area bordering the Sarno River or the area north of the archeological site, the “Civita Giuliana”, could be enriched by elements related to the main attractors, in order to spread a positive reverberation throughout the municipal territory. These are areas where there are well defined, binding rules, such as the constraints imposed by the risks relating to the Sarno, or the specifications of the Vesuvius territorial landscape plan. In these cases the institutional discussion widens to include bodies that are associated mainly with local planning processes and that can play a fundamental role in the process of urban planning.

It was thus possible, in a protected area north of the archeological site, to develop a “park” aimed towards the preservation of the landscape, recognized as a resource but also as a substrate on which to construct new public spaces. The zone itself features significant natural components: a fertile terrain enriched by a water course that crosses the project area and also by man-made field boundaries and the Circumvesuviana line, which cuts through the territory on a particularly panoramic axis. The proximity of the archeological ruins gives this area considerable potential: a new access portal to the ruins is possible via the “Porta del Vesuvio” by upgrading the panoramic path that leads to the “Villa dei Misteri”, connected at the other end to “Porta di Nola”, whose distinct character is determined by the conjoining of the agricultural and archeological landscapes.



*Figure 4 – Area north of the archeological site*

Likewise for the Sarno River fluvial strip, lying between “via Plinio” to the north and the A3 motorway to the south and divided by the railway line. A proposal has been forwarded for the recovery of some existing buildings for use as a compact accommodation structure, connected directly to the archeological sites and equipped with arts/cultural and conference facilities with an auditorium: a place where archeology, history and faith become the object of study and reflection, putting in motion a process which enhances the heritage of Pompeii that has the potential to go beyond the mere exploitation of an ephemeral and inconsistent tourism industry.

It must be emphasised that, at the basis of this process, there has been a thorough and accurate interpretation of the Pompeii territory, both in terms of landscape interpretation, morphological structure of the urban parts and specification of settlement typologies and the urban and periurban open spaces. This produced a clear picture of the urban components and the role they play in the overall structure of the territory - and also of the dynamics taking place. This became a reference grid in which to evaluate the single urban projects, which in such an open and dynamic process can lead to unexpected results. Without such a knowledge framework, the design activities may morph into a continuous flow of projects without any real strategic integration.

### **3. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSION**

A conclusive evaluation of the results of the strategy executed in the preliminary draft of the Pompeii Urban Plan is still difficult. The plan is still in a developmental phase but the experience so far gained allows us to outline a picture of the expected benefits.

First of all, a plan can be based on the effective strategies that both the superintendency and curia intend to carry out. These intentions can then be integrated in a system of urban transformations capable of grasping all the positive effects. In some ways this is *ex post* strategic planning, capable of exploiting previously made decisions in order to grasp the positive effects on the urban system. Secondly, a well-constituted institutional panel could coordinate the choices of the various agencies involved, avoiding any negative effects that some of these may have on the overall urban organisation by causing imbalances or situations of segregation.

In this way, the preconditions can be set out for the creation of an effective urban plan, based on real development strategies outlined by the authorities that run the two principal and vital attractions of Pompeii municipal territory. This mode of action could be consolidated in time, bringing improvements to relations between superintendency, curia and municipality, and encouraging the foundation of a permanent panel for discussion of the principal choices regarding the Pompeii territory, in an approach that goes beyond the optimal management of the specific resources of the archaeological site and the Sanctuary and which also grasps the greatest benefits for the Pompeii community. Fostering such a situation could lead to a concrete improvement in the actual archaeological site and sanctuary management, which would be supported by an urban framework structured to coordinate its activities in correspondence with the two great attractors and not in perennial breathless pursuit of them.

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