

A city for all... in productive terms too

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The irruption of globalisation and all the falsely modernist ideology that goes with it have turned many questions (about which there were well-founded certainties until very recently) on their heads.

The most untimely case of this is perhaps that of regional planning.

Long decades of thought, policy definition and even great efforts on the part of public administration have gone into achieving regional equality within our countries, or, at least into moderating the more profound inequalities in the fields of economic development and social well-being at a national level.

Opposed to this, the new ideological currents emphatically propose that competition should be the motor for development; not in terms of regions anymore, because now no one talks in those terms, but in terms of diverse points spread across territories which, of course, do not stand out for their integration.

Within our cities, the arrival of new ideas connected to globalisation policies have also produced changes in objectives and priorities which we should look at carefully in order to undo the myth of infallibility with which new propositions are presented.

One of said changes is the overestimation of areas deemed central to activities linked to globalisation (headquarters of large companies, international tourism, etc.), to the detriment of traditional centres and, especially, of centres considered to be in the second and third order of the hierarchy, which tend to be more linked with the internal dynamics of the city and its inhabitants themselves.

In this sense, the city is valued more on its international standing than for its own merits and identity.

Just as these centres refer generally to the activity of third parties, so there have also been changes in the evaluation of and the attention paid to manufacturing sectors in our cities.

Globalisation projects concerned with such development, which are rarely put into practice, speak of technological parks where production and research should go hand in hand.

Even if it is true that the research-production relationship is highly desirable, what needs to be re-examined is whether said alliance should be thought of solely in terms of prototypes, ideas and international production destinations.

In general, this brings with it the need for heavy capital investment and intense development of sophisticated technology. The result is, of course, a high degree of mechanisation and even robotization.

The other side of the coin is that medium and small-scale production is left to one side, as are traditional processes with a large proportion of autochthonous components and elevated labour requirements.

This new way of valuing also implies that both financial and infrastructural facilities are made more available to the first group mentioned. This is how our State governments, less and less able to finance credits and provide infrastructure, direct their scarce resources towards activities which, on account of their size and of the financial capacity of those involved in them, would usually be more independent of external funding than traditional activities.

Hence it is impossible to deny the level of internationalism and undermining of all things national that is taking place.

This does not, however, mean that we should discard all our useful, functional and desirable principles and our ideas for city projects and national development.

Independent of the development of the tiny islands that are globalised activities, there are many reasons why we should protect and promote the development of productive activities which are characterised by their small or medium size or which aim to meet specifically local needs.

This is true firstly, as we have already said, because they generate much more significant numbers of jobs in terms of quantity and breadth of coverage than the big industrial companies.

It is true secondly because seeing as such activities are undertaken by small businessmen, they are the expression of a popular economy more linked to local projects, as against a business economy removed from traditions and commitments to the local area, so characteristic of global business.

Thirdly, because they are activities that tend to be located throughout a broad range of urban areas, often woven into the fabric of residential life. In this sense, they promote the idea of areas of multiple use, which, if they respect the conditions necessary for the compatibility of said uses, tend to be much more

vibrant than mono-functional areas so erroneously promoted by the rationalist urban development policies of the middle of the last century.

Lastly, because the sum total of characteristics mentioned mean that this type of business activities, linked more to local personality, possibilities and tendencies, contribute, by their very nature, to the identity, both of the specific areas they are located, and of the city as a whole.

At a time when the powers that be tend to ignore the problems and over-estimate the value of globalisation and internationality, and when the policies they apply in its name are less and less capable of providing the living conditions they vainly promised to their citizens, it is absolutely vital to identify new methods and to undertake specific processes, in search of the answer to so many un-kept promises, to so many unfulfilled needs.