The aim and general framework of the "Actvill" researches and the concept of the Actvill 2 research

1. Introduction: the aim of the Actvill Programme

The Actvill Programme, of the European Union Commission, was founded on three objectives and five actions, which it is opportune to remember as a reference base of this research itself.[1]

The first objective was that "*of developing new, global town-planning concepts aimed at the promotion of urban plans centred on the people (or "agora") which through the applications of technological options produce social cohesion, co-operation for a co-development of the human being, and multicultural as well as multiracial co-existence*"; from this would have to be derived a first, conform action, that of developing those concepts "*integrating constructive technological blocks*" and "*verifying the applicability to concrete urban cases*".

The second objective was that of "*creating the conditions, through the use of technological options, to manage the pressures - originating from the globalisation of the economy - on the choices of the city's development and its future perspectives with the goal of maintaining local diversity and valorising local resources*". And from this would have to be derived two actions: a first one aimed at "*identifying the instruments needed for the integration of cities in their regional environment as interactive, local networks*"; and a second one aimed at "*promoting the development of new functions and services with intern and trans-urban networks*".

The third objective was that of "*contributing to the development of technological options for the accomplishment of a sustainable city*". And from this would have to be derived two actions: a first one aimed at the development of "*models of simulation of determined cities for an effective evaluation of alternative actions*"; the second one aimed at "*evaluating technological options capable of facing the challenges of a concentrated urban system*".

The multinational study group of the *Planning Studies Centre*, the author of the present research, thought to offer its work for a deepening of the *Action 2* of which the acronym is **Actvill 2**, which is related to the "*identification of the instruments needed for the integration of cities in their regional environment*". In this direction, the PSC had already been involved in the development of an analogous research in Italy[2] and the *City action programme* constituted a good

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[1] The European Commission has mobilised the execution of five separate studies in the five actions of the programme. See: *Toward a Better Liveable City*, basic document for the "City Action RDT Programme" (European Commission, 1994).

[2] Executed on behalf of the Italian Government and with the contribution of the national (Italian) Council of research, in the framework of the preparation of a "ten-year" Plan for the Environment (see **DECAMB**, 1991).

occasion to verify if the formulation given to the research in Italy could be extended to other national, European-wide situations and configurations.[3]

Nevertheless, ever since the formulation (which was assessed during the first steps of the research – up to now no more than a couple of months old), we have noticed that the *Action 2* of the programme, besides naturally corresponding to the second objective above indicated, had a strong, immediate and direct correspondence also to the first objective (and therefore was strongly correlated to Action 1). And that, moreover, it should have supplied bonding elements for an appropriate research also for Actions 3, 4 and 5, for each of them in a specific way.

The principal goal of this report is exactly that to discuss how the research of an *optimal relation between "cities" and their regional environment* constitutes the "preface" and hence also the preliminary guideline and "strategy", of a town planning nature, to provide future plans of urban development with the capacity of achieving:

- on the one hand, *a greater urban identity and a city-effect*, without which any identity risks to be lost (for the citizens that have reached it and for those that, on the contrary, have not yet done so);

- or, on the other hand, a greater "sustainability", i.e. a way out of the state of urban "overburden" (by traffic, pollution, overcrowding, etc.), all of which make today's great cities uninhabitable.

2. A critical point of view concerning the formulation of the *City action RDT programme* studies: their inter-dependence

In order to attain the intention, in this report, we will be discussing some ideas that are subordinate to the articulation in three objectives and five actions, underlining their *inter-dependence*. Acting in this way we do not at all intend to discuss their validity (in fact, on this we would like to reaffirm here its great effectiveness as formulation of the future thought); we would only like to point out, as said, the inter-dependence, in such a way as not to risk making the error to believe that one wants to operate in separated fields of action, but in diverse aspects or facets of the same, one problem.

For the first objective, that synthesized by the term "agora" (which just means a way of "living" socially in the city, by means of technological and "constructive" or architectural solutions, which cause the citizens to intensify their own social relations and to achieve greater cohesion or social integration) – because possible 'instruments' aimed at achieving it should not become illusive and disastrous – it is necessary that can be present, simultaneously or at the same time, those instruments considered and projected for the accomplishment of the second objective, that concerning the identification of an *appropriate urban,*

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[3] For the execution of the study were co-involved also three other national territories (France, Germany and Great Britain) and related study groups (see **Study Group**).

regional environment with an adequate network of services and functions (synthesized by the term 'glocality').

An example for everyone: the first objective could be carried out (and, in effect, for example, has been pursued for decades of projections and urban fulfilment in this wrong way) with the idea of a "new city", just to answer to the needs of the greater society and integration related to human anonymity and solitude in great and overcrowded cities. We would not have any scruples to affirm that the whole history of town-planning thought has tried to achieve those constructive means in the city that are capable of supplying cohesion and social integration. No news in this profile. But the failure of this kind of town-planning experience really lies in the fact that one hasn't taken into account that the "dimensions" within which those new urban units could be accomplished were not those necessary for obtaining a true city-effect; in fact, for this it was necessary to also provide for a *critical mass* of services demanded by the same *critical mass* of users, which those dimensions simply didn't supply. And it means something that from one generation of new cities to the next (for example in Great Britain) there has been a dimensional doubling. Also the most recent English 'new cities' of the 80s, of four or five times heavier build than the first ones of the 50s, have not yet solved the problem of the *critical mass* suitable for developing an essential city-effect. They were not wrong in their achievement of objective 1, but were only unable to reach it in harmony with the bonds that were imposed also for objective 2.[4]

Therefore it would be wrong to criticise them in themselves, but it was wrong not to plan them allowing for the "preliminary" prerequisites of objective 2.

Thus the objectives that were set for Actions 3, 4 and 5, like those:
-   to give international worthiness to the cities, or
-   to introduce engineering techniques to assure the best technology for containment and pollution management, or to improve the fluency of urban transport, or
-   to adopt methods of modelling and appreciation of interactions between urban phenomena with the aim of assuring the monitoring and control of urban events such as to improve the so-called 'governance',

they all would be initiatives destined for failure, if not being "applied" to appropriate units of the urban environment, preliminarily defined and selected, which could solve (currently or, at least potentially, in future) the problem of the city-effect.[5]

An example for all: the cities which in Italy are recorded for the best urban quality, in an ecological and sociological sense, based on indicators of pollution, of criminality, of daily time employment etc., are also those *small*, culturally and socially more "stupid" cities and greatly abandoned by the young and "brainy",

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[4] On the experience of the 'new towns', see for example Rodwin (1956), Aldridge (1979), Rubenstein (1978), Lewis, ed. (1977), Merlin (1976), Cullingworth (1975), Golany (1974).

[5] We will return to this basic condition also for the research approach to the studies and the urban modelling in Chapter 5. A more profound deepening on the concept of the *urban effect* can be found in the work by Franco Archibugi: *The Ecological City and the City Effect; Essays on the Urban Planning Requirements for the Sustainable City"* (1997).

and by all the activities that make a city modern, stimulating and heartening. In Italy, in these small and medium-sized cities, we find perhaps carriers of history and prestige, and of tourist attractions, discrete and comfortable sanitary equipment, with very low occupation indication, while in the great centres – uninhabitable, polluted, congested and overcrowded – the users' demands are crowded, and the ill place themselves in the corridors or spaces under the staircase just because the best doctors prefer to live in the great cities. Even Florence, an internationally renowned city and destination of cultural pilgrimages, which up until this post-war period was a conspicuous centre with musical activities, publishing houses and high fashion shows, has today lost its role to Rome or Milan. The cultural polycentrism is not progressing, but if anything regressing, causing severe harm to the culture itself, without any particular, compensating benefits, and, in fact, causing the harmful overburden of the great metropolitan centres.

These quick annotations and examples represent that a policy of the city today – as ever – has to aim at having as reference terms the minimal conditions for obtaining results, based on which the necessary trade-offs can be operated.

And these conditions can be studied bearing in mind all the three objectives of the Actvill Programme, to which we have referred in more detail above, owing to their inter-dependence. They can only be studied by means of an appropriate trade-off between themselves.

This is also why the study undertaken by the Planning Studies Centre, which produced the report here, has started[6] with an analysis of today's problems of urban policy, which have to be considered valuable for all the three objectives of the Actvill Programme on the whole.

To consult further information, here is a **synthesis of the research results.**

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[6] From the formulation of the tender, initially approved by the European Commission.