
Provincial Neoliberalism: A Case Study

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Abstract

Social research has concentrated on large urban centres in the study of neoliberalization processes. This article describes the impact of neoliberalization on a small city in northern Italy: Savona. An industrial city until the 1980s, following the crisis in its manufacturing sector, Savona was converted into an advanced tertiary and tourism-based economy, according to the local elite. The article examines this break and demonstrates how the industrial crisis made it possible to establish a real estate speculation program of questionable socio-economic benefit although strongly supported by local officials. The consequences of this restructuring of the urban fabric are greater social polarization, less public space, and a weakened manufacturing sector. After presenting a theoretical link between the city and neoliberalism, we briefly illustrate the choice of the case examined and our findings.

Key words: Neoliberalization - province – real estate speculation – deindustrialization – rhetoric - Italy - Savona

1. Neoliberalism's impact on the city

Over the last decade, the distance between current socio-economic policies and the original neoliberal doctrine has become increasingly obvious. The utopian formulas of Hayek (1960) and Friedman (1962) called for a near total withdrawal of the State to allow the virtuous mechanisms of the free market to work. However, the governmentality of advanced liberalism (Hindess, 2008; Miller, Rose, 2008) is everything but *laissez-faire*. At every level of government – from the individual (Ong, 2006; Nadesan, 2008) to the global (Larner, Walters, 2008) – it implements a series of regulatory processes, security devices (Foucault, 2004), and interventionisms directed toward the marketing of every social sphere.

Attention was focussed on the transformations of the neoliberal city for two main reasons:

The first concerns the political importance that the main European countries have placed on the urban context by adopting an entire series of reforms (Le Galès, 2011; Di Gaetano, Storm, 2003). In a context of redefining responsibilities among national, supranational and local governments, these reforms made the link between urban governance and the population more widely visible and striking. Moreover, the institutional infrastructures of local governments were restructured for the purpose of promoting the integration of government activities and private capital. The emphasis

placed on the urban governance processes summarizes a string of power restructurings aimed at creating new government procedures, commonly called networks, having their own local nerve centres, recipients and legitimization mechanisms. The cities thus become laboratories for endogenous development models based on the mobilization and empowerment of all existing resources. Harvey (1989b) deemed these aspects to be the passage from managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism and that they stress the necessity for cities to act like competitive entrepreneurs in order to attract private capital, investments, tourists and new residents.

The second group of reasons, found in the social sciences, comes from the observation that the end of Keynesian Fordism did not correspond to a homogeneous socio-economic paradigm but rather to a long phase of unstable, varied and contradictory restructurings (Amin, 1994; Jessop, 2002; Peck, 2010; Brenner, Peck, Theodore, 2010). Parallel to the gradual destruction of Keynesian structures, in the 1990s a more distinctively creative phase of neoliberalism began. This period led to a string of attempts aiming to affirm market logics, as well as to limit its potential failings and the unsustainable social and economic consequences. The urban space plays a fundamental role as the preferred theatre of the changes in progress. The cities become the "arenas" of neoliberal political plans (Brenner, Theodore, 2002) and at the same time acquire a prominent function in the reproduction of neoliberalization processes (Peck, Tickell, 2002).

Neoliberalism's impact on the city reveals its metamorphic abilities and its power to adapt to specific socio-economic and institutional contexts (Brenner et al., 2009, 2011), as well as its easy coexistence with other main government ideal types: neo-authoritarianism, neo-communitarianism, neo-stateism, etc. (Jessop, 2002b; Krinsky, 2007). Urban transformations are not the mere effect of a single formula focussed on market spontaneity. Rather, they have a strong dependence on the context whose specificities they reflect, but also the conflicts and compromises implemented to guarantee a favourable climate for private capital. The transitions between the structures inherited from the past and present-day regulatory strategies are thus essential to studying how neoliberal precepts took root and its territorialization (Brenner and Theodore, 2002b; Peck and Tickell, 2002).

Despite the variety of neoliberal practices, common denominators can be found; first, the gradual dismantling of public agencies responsible for fulfilling social needs and providing services to the community (Colombo, 2013); the increase in devices for the monitoring and surveillance of spaces resulting in socio-spatial polarization (Davis, 1990); the managerialization of institutions along with the development of hybrid public-private agencies for managing services (Clarke, 2004) and finally, the gradual reduction of public spaces, eroded by real estate speculation (Palidda, 2011).

The role of private economic agents becomes central. Their investments are considered the driving force necessary to the city's development. Despite the state non-interventionism professed by neoliberal theories, private actors at every level of government and in world finance alike, have benefited from advanced capitalist governments' political and economic support (Harvey, 2005, 2006; Saad-Filho, Johnston, 2005; Howard, King, 2008; Gallino, 2011).

The resulting urban landscape is fragmented and chaotic. The city's development has no link with planning and instead depends on the fortuitous choices of investors (Dear, Flusty, 1998). The city's plan becomes a collection of independent places, an "archipelago" of spaces (Soja, 2000), socially homogeneous and controlled, such as gated communities, theme parks and gentrified neighbourhoods - the new symbols of social inequalities.

2. A provincial city as a case study

Most of the recent studies have emphasized neoliberalism's penetration of major urban centres. However, it is also useful to investigate smaller spaces, particularly in the European context, which has historically favoured urban planning based on small and medium-sized cities (Mumford, 1961). Italy can serve as a paradigm. According to the preliminary results of the 2011 census, only 11.78% of the population lives in cities with a population greater than 500,000 (Data ISTAT; demo.istat.it). The urban territories that dominate in the world economy, competing for the spatial division of work and consumption as well as for the redistribution of resources and command functions (Harvey, 1985) are certainly not the only ones interested in neoliberal logics. Even the smallest urban centres suffer from the influence of the "*mantras*" privatization and deregulation (Harvey, 2000: 176) and they must reinvent themselves following the reduction of monetary transfers coming from the state and greater government responsibilities and tasks.

At the local level, we note one of the main characteristics of the legitimization framework of neoliberal practices: the habit of attributing socio-economic transformations to exogenous macro phenomena such as globalization, the offshoring of manufacturing, the current economic crisis, the tertiarization or the financialization of the economy. The references to extra-local processes can contribute to examining the changes in the cities in determinist terms and subsequently, obscuring the specific management choices of the public institutions that also encouraged them. This has the immediate effect of depoliticizing the social questions. External factors would seem to change the fates of urban spaces almost like a *deus ex machina* acting regardless of the will of the local dominant classes. Focussing the analysis on realities of modest dimensions allows us instead to very clearly highlight the strategies and responsibilities forming the foundation of neoliberalization processes.

The objective of this article is to illustrate the neoliberal transformation of a small urban centre in Italy. Capital of the administrative district of the same name, Savona is a city of 60,000 inhabitants and an agglomeration of approximately 100,000. The city overlooks the Ligurian Sea, is 40 kilometres from Genoa, and approximately 150 km from both Turin and Nice. Strategically situated in the Turin-Genoa-Milan "industrial triangle", after World War II Savona developed an economy based on the steel and metallurgy industry and activity focussed around the port. In a political situation dominated by the Italian Communist Party, Savona remained a working-class industrial city until the 1980s. The city then entered a long economic and demographic crisis: industries closed down, unemployment rose, and the population decreased and was aging. The decrease in the population was concentrated at the

peak of the industrial crisis, between 1975 and 1990, when young households began to settle in the nearby major urban centres (Turin, Milan, Genoa). This phenomenon, coupled with a fertility rate well below that of demographic replacement, caused a net aging of the population. In 2010, Savona had the second highest aging rate (pop. ≥ 65 years/pop. 0-14 x 100) of all Italy's district capitals (265.89) and had the oldest workforce (pop. ≥ 65 years/pop. 15064 x 100). The fertility rate was 35.87‰ and the birth rate 7.5 compared to much higher national figures (40, 59 and 9.29) (Data ISTAT; sitis.istat.it/sitis/html/).

Savona's urban transformation is a smaller-scale reflection of some of the main centres on the Mediterranean that have considered their waterfront the keystone of their urban development: Barcelona, Valencia, Genoa, Marseille, Naples (Palidda, 2011). In the second half of the 1990s, Savona turned toward a new development model based on residential construction and, at the rhetorical level, on the advanced tertiary and tourism industries. This change of tradition was greatly desired by the local leading class, which is characterized by three main elements: stability of political power, the gradual linking of political and economic power, and the convergence of the largest groups of local entrepreneurs toward real estate.

First of all, after the Second World War, the city councils, with a single exception, were always on the left wing of Parliament. The mayors were from the PCI (Italian Communist Party) at first and with its demise, its heir, the PD (Democratic Party). For those who think conservative political forces have a monopoly on neoliberalism, Savona – called the “red city” until the late 1980s – is a counter example of neoliberal penetration. Secondly, since the 1990s, urban transformations were carried out through a merging of political and economic actors. This connection is well represented by the mayors. The mayor in office from 1998 to 2005 was president of the “League of Cooperatives [Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative e Mutue]”, operating in the construction sector; the current mayor was president of the government corporation IPS (Investimenti Produttivi Savonesi) which is responsible for the conversion of a downtown industrial area into a shopping gallery, with the objective of distributing public funds to private enterprise. The future candidate for mayor, who was left-wing prior to entering politics, was the secretary of the most important union in the jurisdiction, management of which was severely criticized for not having opposed the deindustrialization of the port area. With regard to economic actors, over the last 20 years, local business groups have started to invest in the real estate sector. This includes the multinational Demont, which operates in the steel and shipbuilding industry; the GF Group, world leader in the import and export of fruits and vegetables; the Campostano Group, operating in port services. The Port Authority itself pushed hard for residential development of the port's industrial areas.

The reflections presented here are the findings of research conducted from 2007 to 2012 with a two-fold objective. We first wanted to show the circumstances of the choices made by the leaders, showing that these choices were not the only options. Secondly, the purpose was to think through the link between the elimination of the industrial heritage and real estate speculation. The displacement of the economic centre of gravity was both a privatization process – that affected not only public goods and services – but more greatly, urban planning. The neoliberal assertion that private economic initiatives must be given preference to the detriment of

government actions, led to immediate political legitimization of any and all private strategies. After having gathered demographic, political and economic data and interviewed preferred witnesses, we created a database of approximately 6,000 local newspaper articles on the period from 1997 to 2011. The findings of the analysis are reported in detail in the text *Paradossi Urbani* (Colombo et al., 2012). This research included Luca Arrigoni, Erika Cappello and Francesco Laterza, who we wish to thank. All the articles analyzed and quoted here are from the newspaper *Il Secolo XIX*.

In this regard, the case of the steel company, Italsider, which has been part of the city's economic history since the mid-19th century, is representative of the neoliberal transformations and relationships between political coalitions and economic actors. The plant had fallen into disuse although it was still operational (Lugaro, 2007), to make way for an imposing crescent-shaped building designed by the architect Ricardo Bofill. In 1999, the plant was bought by OMSAV, a company made up 30% by Ilva (public) and 70% by private individuals (Penner, 2010). Among the latter, we find the names of the city's economic and political leaders, like the presidents of the "League of Cooperatives" and the "Industrial Union". A percentage of OMSAV's entrepreneurs is part of a real estate company formed in 1991 for the purpose of redeveloping Italsider's industrial spaces. The strategic position of the roughly 55,000 m² of land and buildings, right downtown and with a view of the sea, made them particularly attractive, giving a glimpse of the speculation that would presumably have multiplied their value. The plant closed its doors while still manufacturing and in such a suspicious manner that it drew the attention of the Public Prosecutor's office in Savona in 1994. The political institutions in complicity with private individuals made zoning of the land possible even though urban planning regulations did not allow residential use.

3. Speculation and urban growth

Between the early 1980s and 1997, residential construction in Savona remained nearly stagnant. In 1997, a new residential complex was launched. This was the start of a very busy time. In the space of four years, the economic and political foundations were laid for a major increase in residential construction. The climate was *bipartisan*: the municipal government was centre-left but the main urban planning master plan (*Piano Pluriennale di Attuazione 1998-2002* [Multi-year implementation plan 1998-2002]) was inherited from the previous, centre-right administration. The Plan forecast approximately 1,000 new housing units, 2/3 of which high-end; this forecast was greatly exceeded by urban expansion over the next 15 years.

The impact on the city's geography is considerable and affected every neighbourhood. Residential buildings replaced factories that were no longer in use. The various real estate initiatives ironically took the names of the industries that preceded them: ex-Metalmetro, ex-Balbontin, ex-Italsider, ex-Magrini, etc. The example of Savona recalls Lefebvre's considerations (1970) regarding the replacement of industry by urbanization in the production of space. If urban processes can be understood on the basis of the method of capital production and accumulation (Harvey 1978, 1985, 1989), it is clear that here the industrial crisis was

the necessary condition for a vast flow of concrete. The new, unstable trajectories of the geographic division of work, resulting from the global neoliberalization processes of the 1980s, faced local entrepreneurs with a dilemma: whether to invest in the competitiveness of companies that were still technically in the avant-garde of the industry and international trade, or port services or indeed, to become a class of rentiers, taking advantage of their position of power and accumulated land holdings.

The gradual disappearance of the primary sector directly created a surplus of capital to be reinvested in what Harvey called the secondary circuit of accumulation. This is not over accumulation per se but the abandonment of industry, which effectively freed up the necessary capital. Moreover, the razing of industrial companies' assets provided vast areas of space for speculation and the change in designation produced enormous profits. This surplus of capital, absorbed by the territory – a spatio-temporal fix (Harvey, 2003) – no longer makes social or economic sense, being moreover completely unproductive with regard to total capital. Nonetheless, this was a huge opportunity for local investors to get rich.

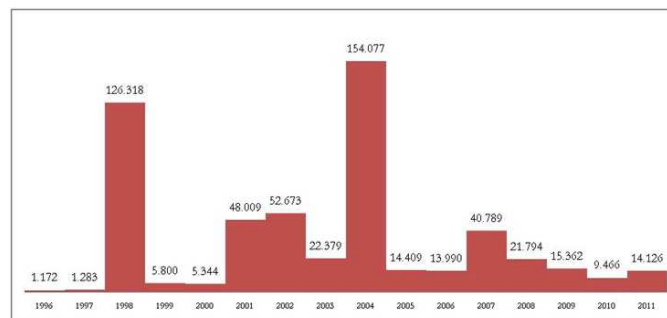
Savona's urban expansion follows neoliberal lines of town planning, which has become one of the most important trajectories of capital expansion worldwide (Miró Vives, 2011). There is a close connection between private individuals and government, a strong complementarity between economic power and political power, or, in other words, between the market and the state. In order to create an investment-friendly atmosphere, the local government directly promoted real estate projects. That is why obtaining financing was not the only goal of participation in ministerial (PRUSST, Piano di Riqualificazione Urbana e Sviluppo Sostenibile del Territorio [Urban repurposing and sustainable development of the territory] of 1999; Contratto di Quartiere [tr. Neighbourhood contract] of 2004, regional (Programma Operativo Regionale de 2008 [2008 Regional operations plan]) and community (Urban II of 2000) urban redevelopment projects¹. The main objective rather was to create a new plan for governing the relationship between the municipality and local entrepreneurs, for cutting through the endless red tape and as a result, reducing investment risks. Participation in these projects made it possible not only to channel the area's economic strength toward the real estate sector, but was also a necessary condition for major interventions on the urban fabric due to the absence of an urban development master plan. After the 1977 Local City Development Master Plan, a 34-year period of special planning instruments followed (Urbinati, 2012).

The consequences are paradoxical, as indicated in the ratio between demographics and the number of residential units built. The resident population of Savona grew throughout the last century, dropping starting in the 1970s. This negative trend

¹ PRUSST was the legal and administrative framework for redevelopment of the port. Compared to approximately €2.5 M in public funding, the plan involved 22 private companies investing over €500 M (commune.savona.it). The POR operates over the same areas with over €300 M in investments, only 20% of which from the public sector. Another example is the *Contratto di Quartiere Savona-Ponente*, which procured €8 M. in regional funding for the city. This program included redevelopment of the Metalmetron, a metal works that had gone bankrupt in 1991 and was replaced by the "Le Officine" shopping centre with nearly €100 M in private investment and a contested rezoning of the land (data from the City of Savona archives).

continued until the early 21st century when the population stabilized around an average of 62,000. Although the natural growth rate continued to be negative, the population grew due to the influx of foreigners, whose numbers rose 413% between 2002 and 2012. Over a long period, however, the population decreased significantly: between 1971 and 2012, it went from 79,809 to 62,786, i.e. a 21.3% drop (ISTAT data (demo.istat.it; sitis.istat.it/sitis/html/; dati.istat.it/Index.aspx). If the socio-economic benefit of a housing unit is related to its being inhabited, the outcomes for the new residential complexes should be close to 0. However, building permits for nearly 550,000m³ of residential construction² were issued by the municipality between 1996 and 2011 (Graph 1). An analysis by the press estimates that during the 1997-2011 period, 163 440 m² of private dwellings were built. New interventions for 115,820 additional private dwellings and 30,000 m² for public housing are (Tremila case vuote. Alleanza anti-cemento [3,000 empty houses, anti-cement alliance], May 10, 2011). We moreover stress that the over-supply of dwellings does not cover all segments of the actual demand. Over the last decade, applications for social housing have risen exponentially, while there are an estimated 3,500 to 5,000 empty apartments in the city (see Colombo 2012).

Graph 1. Residential building permits (new construction and additions), 1996-2011, in cubic metres

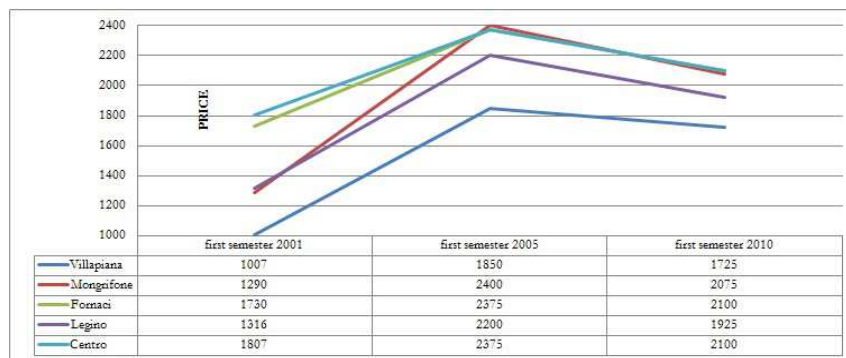


Sources: Our calculations using ISTAT and Settore Pianificazione Territoriale e Ambientale Comune di Savona [City of Savona Land Use and Environmental Planning Department] data

Supposing that the housing stock represents the supply and the number of residents, the demand, one should expect a long drop in prices to arrive at an ever-lower equilibrium price. Graph 2 and Table 1 show the evolution of the selling price of various types of dwelling according to two sources of data.

Graph 2. Average value (€/m²) of homes for sale in certain neighbourhoods of Savona, 2001-2011

² New construction in Italy is usually measured in cubic rather than square metres, which is the unit mostly used for selling homes. By cubic metre, the volume a structure occupies in space is what is intended.



Source: Our calculations using data from the Federazione Italiana Agenti Immobiliari Professionali [tr. Italian Federation of Professional Real Estate Agents]

Table 1. Values (€/m²) for three housing samples, 1996-2010

APARTMENT TYPE	1996	2010
Low cost; good condition; inner city	1.450-1.550	1.950-3.800
Recent; excellent condition; semi-peripheral neighborhoods	1.550-1.700	2.150-3.200
Low cost; good condition; peripheral neighborhoods	830-1.030	1.600-2950

Source: Our calculations using data from the Agenzia del Territorio-Osservatorio del Mercato Immobiliare [tr. Territorial Agency-Real Estate Market Observatory]

Despite a slight drop in the last five years, due to the saturation of the local market and the effects of the economic crisis, all values rose and, in some cases, more than doubled. While the market went flat (Nomisma, 2011), prices showed no sign of this and remained high. But can these values be maintained?

If Savona followed an economic strategy after the industrial crisis, it was based on the hyper-evaluation of its real estate. The residents, nearly 80% of whom are the owners of the home they live in, suddenly became richer. However, real estate analyses indicate that the value of a home is in great part dependent upon the attractiveness of the area (Thomsett, Kahr, 2007; Thrall, 2002). In Savona, following the drop in population and the increase in the housing supply, more and more buildings are staying empty. For the future, a false alternative is offered: either make the place more attractive by lowering the price of the houses or give up on attracting new residents and thus real estate prices will drop due to the impossibility of selling them. In both cases, the population will be made poorer.

This matter echoes the changes in social stratification. The socio-economic reconversion was based on the idea of making the city a more attractive place for the well-to-do. At the same time, the abandonment of the manufacturing sector and the economy's conversion to the tertiary sector, here as elsewhere, included a loss of value – economic and political alike – of the variable capital. In 2009, only 5% of the working age population and 9% of the working population was employed in manufacturing. There were only 2 manufacturing companies with more than 50 on

the payroll. The move to tertiary activities affected commerce (26.6% of workers), the food business (8.4%), real estate, professional and computer science activities (25.9%). There are many employees in the building sector (11.6%) (data from the Archivio Statistico Imprese Attive). In the administrative district of Savona, in 1991 manufacturing employed 15,052 workers whereas 20 years later, that number is 9,072 (ISTAT data). The result is an increase in social polarization where the former working class, that used to be protected by a strong social system, disintegrates in a new proletarianization. According to the data of the labour market observatory of the administrative area, in 2011, 76.62% of new employment contracts are atypical or determinate; this percentage climbs to 86.32% for those 21 to 30 years of age. Another worrying question is that of the population that is working age but not working, which is over 53% (Ufficio Economico CGIL Liguria 2012:31). The employment rate was 62.1% in 2011 (ISTAT data); of a working age population of roughly 118,000, 19,933 were registered with the department's employment agency (Provincia di Savona data). Moreover, under-the-table work continues to grow, as confirmed by the agency responsible for control. In 2010, of 784 companies visited, irregularities were pointed out in 75% (Ufficio Economico CGIL Liguria, 2011 : 23). Will the newly-built luxury apartments be purchased by the young workers without job security, those working in the tertiary industry's black market, or migrants who for the most part are employed in the construction industry or homecare for the elderly? Among the buyers of the apartments in the crescent-shaped building already mentioned, are the names of construction entrepreneurs, architects, senior managers, politicians and local lawyers (an incomplete list can be found in the article "Ecco il Crescent, 115 alloggi da nababbi ma anche spazi unici" [tr.: Here is the Crescent, 115 homes for the wealthy but single spaces, too], October 3, 2010).

It is impossible, however, to imagine an urban development plan that is unaware of the necessity of manufacturing. This entails an under-consumption spiral, that is obvious on the real estate market as well as in the empty shopping centres that were opened at a steady pace in the area surrounding the city. If the manufacturing and valorisation of goods cycles gobble up land, Savona, which is wedged between the mountains and the sea, doesn't have much more free space. The existing land was absorbed by the *uncreative* destruction process, which irrevocably changed the territory by filling it with *asocial infrastructure*, i.e. buildings without inhabitants. Today, we could think with regret about the industrial complexes abandoned by their owners, that have gone on to real estate speculation, because although abandoned, the complexes could have been promised to some socio-economic future rather than undergo the simple, slow and inexorable devaluation of the newly built buildings.

The lack of transparency in the decision-making process and the absence of an informed public opinion and public debate, are some of the conditions that fostered the nearly uncontested affirmation of a "cement" economy, that is absolutely impervious to urban planning with a redistributive dimension in the form of public works and infrastructure. This waste of territory, the environment and its economic resources echoes the relationship between space and spatial justice in the broader context of social justice (Marcuse, 2009). It is the direct consequence of a public-private partnership able to combine control of public discourse, the influence of capital and the management of government.

4. Legitimization rhetoric

In Savona, the urban changes of recent decades were supported by a set of narratives and rhetoric on superfluous topics. The first theme involved the necessity of reconversion. The dichotomy of a “grey”³ city from the past, “of shopkeepers, closed and sad”⁴, to be overcome, and the city that must be created, a “focal point” with a “first rate role, serving as a catalyst”⁵, is the what all the leaders are saying, regardless of their position on the political chessboard. The metaphors of a past defined in terms of decline and stagnation abound. Savona is described as a city in a “[tr.] situation of slow agony”⁶, “on stand by, looking for an idea about the future for getting back in the game” and “in what would seem to be an inevitable decline, unable to attract public or private investment”⁷, “at rock bottom”⁸, “in crisis”⁹. This image of the past is countered with “[tr.] a city in transformation”¹⁰, “a new cycle of balanced development...a new phase of prosperity”¹¹, “a response process in the face of decline”¹².

This normative periodization (the declining past to be overcome – prosperous future to be pursued) refers to two distinct times in Savona’s history: The industrial crisis of the 1980s and 90s is compared to the urban renewal stage, initiated by the major interventions on the city. It is not by chance that the dichotomy between the two periods is so clear: the more the past is degraded, the more legitimate it is to declare the end of manufacturing to clear the way for more profitable real estate activities. New uses must be sought to counter the manufacturing crisis, particularly – at least from a rhetorical perspective - tourism. Arrival of the Costa Cruises ships, which led to the construction of a new terminal at the old pier in 2003, increased passenger traffic to 1,307,003 (Savona Port Authority data). But these tourists are often just passing through: the number of stays hit 165,390. This data puts Savona in 11th place in the district (Regione Liguria data). New “symbols of rebirth”, residential buildings

³ *Savona deve cambiare mentalità* [Savona has to change its attitude], May 9, 2004, comment by the mayor in office at the time.

⁴ *Questa città deve osare di più* [tr. This city has to dare more], April 6 1997; *Non capisco chi ha votato contro* [tr.: I don’t understand who voted no.], March 6, 2002, comments of a port services professional and construction entrepreneur..

⁵ *Tentato dal palazzo?*, June 15, 1997, comment by the President of the League of Cooperatives in office at the time.

⁶ *In consiglio ci sono forze che rallentano lo sviluppo* [tr.: There are forces slowing down development on the council], June 10, 1999, comment of the mayor then in office.

⁷ *Berruti, come cambio la città* [Berruti, how I’m changing the city], January 19, 2006; *Berruti: 10 pillole ad uso degli elettori* [Berruti: 10 pills for the voters], January 21, 2006, comments by the mayor in office.

⁸ *Fuksas : Ecco il mio porto turistico* [tr.: Here is my tourist port], May 26, 2006.

⁹ *Le Torri Bofill come Punta Perotti* [The Bofill Towers like Punta Perotti], May 25, 2006, comment of the secretary of the PD department.

¹⁰ *Berruti: 10 pillole ad uso degli elettori*, January 21, 2006

¹¹ *Il nostro è un progetto di sviluppo equilibrato* [tr.: ours is a balanced development plan], May 19, 2001, comment of the mayor then in office.

¹² *Il sindaco chiede ai giovani idee per rinnovare la città* [tr. The mayor asks youth for ideas for renewing the city], May 12, 2009, comment of the mayor then in office

for the well-to-do and anonymous places for consumption, were built in the de-industrialized urban areas, described as the “symbol of the city’s degradation”¹³. As the President of the League of Cooperatives states, regarding the new residential buildings, “Savona is hungry for housing but not just moderate rent housing. There is a higher level demand, able to divert capital”, *Una torre sulla città* [tr.: A tower over the city], January 11, 1997. The reconversion rhetoric thus became the very basis of real estate speculation, which quickly made possible the accumulation of much more capital than would the installation of new manufacturing activities.

In the absence of an urban development master plan, the city’s fate is in effect entrusted to the personal visions of world famous architects, represented in the urban elite’s speeches as prophets of development to be blindly trusted. “There are thousands of port projects, but Savona’s is going to be known around the world because it has Fuksas’ tower”¹⁴, “[tr.]; this light tower is a stroke of genius... Fuksas is a professional.... He thought up a unique solution for Savona which should be a point of pride to us and an opportunity,” declared the president of the Port Authority in office at the time. “This is not a plan, it’s like Columbus breaking the egg....It’s something absolutely special and original. All you have to do is imagine the sea coming up to the shore again. Isn’t that brilliant?... Before, there was a danger of being overrun by a string of small buildings; now we have this futuristic light house that makes us stand out”¹⁵. Similarly, the private initiative’s contribution is considered miraculous. The investments in the city are described as a “shot of resources and confidence”¹⁶ that were necessary for urban renewal and the city’s future. “Either we decide to stop or if we decide in favour of public works, private capital is necessary,” declared the mayor¹⁷.

Collaboration with the private sector involves waiving public direction of the development, abandoned in favour of entrepreneurs’ interests. Their main goal is profit, with the common good such as historic heritage or the natural environment of secondary importance. Stoppage of the dock repurposing work for protecting archaeological objects on site thus drew the following comment from a local entrepreneur: “[tr.] There is the Directorate [Fine Arts and Archaeological Property] and there are constraints. But we have a constraint, too, the bottom line, which is time-sensitive.”¹⁸ In this regard, the city counsellor responsible for city planning at the time stated, “[tr.] We can’t eternally freeze entire areas simply because they preserve vestiges from the past, that are undoubtedly fairly insignificant”¹⁹. Environmental constraints were also disdained. In the comments of another local

¹³ *Savona deve cambiare mentalità* [tr.: Savona has to change its attitude], May 9, 2004.

¹⁴ *Martedì Fuksas in Comune per presentare il tornado* [tr.: Tuesday Fuksas at City Hall to introduce the ‘tornado’], January 30, 2007.

¹⁵ *Canavese : è un’intuizione geniale, Parodi ; Non perdiamo quest’occasione* [tr.: Canavese: a brilliant idea, Parodi; Let’s not miss this opportunity] June 17, 2006, comment of a mayor of a small nearby city

¹⁶ *Ecco ‘sua altezza’, la Torre di San Michele* [Translator’s note: Play on the word “altezza (height) and ‘your “highness”: “Here, ‘your highness’, the Tower of San Michele] , March 20, 1997, comment of the mayor in office from 1994 to 1998

¹⁷ *È arrivata la fase delle decisioni* [tr.: The decision-making phase has arrived], August 22, 2008.

¹⁸ *Questa città deve osare di più* [tr. This city must be more daring], April 6, 1997.

¹⁹ *Vietato scavare sotto la città* [tr.: Digging under the city prohibited], February 9, 1997.

entrepreneur, a protected marine species was pejoratively described as “mussels”: “[tr.] We’re talking about a 120 million euro operation. It can’t be evaluated talking about mussels....The economic operation is what has to continue; I’m not a philanthropist investing for the fun of it.”²⁰

There is also a price to be paid from the perspective of uses of public space. The city is not welcoming in the same way for all residents: the changes made lead to limited access to public spaces for those who do not fit in with the updated urban aesthetic. Though cruise passengers and hip young people are welcome in Savona, it is a different story for beggars, the homeless and non-consuming youth that prefer to play ball in the city’s piazzas. Although all the uses are permissible, some are deemed more legitimate than others and attract attention thanks to the combination of transformations of the physical space and control practices. (Davis, 1990; Mitchell, 2003).

The buildings built for the well-off have become the metaphor of the changes in recent decades. Ricardo Bofill’s residential tower became “the opportunity to symbolize Savona’s entrance into the year 2000, just as the Eiffel Tower represented Paris in the 20th century.”²¹ The concrete and glass apartment buildings rise above the others as if to show the area’s elitarian transformation.

The city’s redevelopment was so unsustainable that in certain cases, the rhetoric had to amount to proof. The only alternative to a “shrinking” city²², according to the mayor of Savona, is the construction of new buildings; in response to the drop in population and the rise in the number of empty houses, new residents must be attracted to occupy the dwellings built. A sort of real estate speculation tautology is fallen into.

The rhetoric also weakens in relation to the symbolic vacuum of a cement-based economy, as shown by the exhausting search for a project intended to brand the renewed city, a difficult task to carry out if it is based solely on residential town planning. It did not matter what, something had to be done, as a number of individuals maintained, attributing nearly magical power to the conversion: “[tr.] Savona... must create itself a tourism-related flagship project that will create new jobs”²³. The speeches and lobbying were unsuccessful in building a new symbol of the city, while the oldest buildings (the Priamar fortress and the port tower) nearly disappear among the new buildings towering over them. Savona’s redevelopment plan failed, both factually and rhetorically. When the rhetoric weakens, the practices for the appropriation and domination of space appear clearly in this small urban context piling rubble upon rubble.

²⁰ *Il nuovo progetto? Sarà pronto in un mese* [tr.: The new plan? It’ll be ready in a month], December 12, 2009

²¹ *In quell’area dobbiamo costruire un’opera-simbolo di Savona 2000* [tr.: We must build a ‘Savona 2000’ symbol in that area], December 8, 2000, comment of the departmental President in office at the time.

²² *Una torre sulla città* [A tower over the city], January 11, 1997.

²³ *Un parco acquatico sulle aree Orsa 2000* [tr. A water park on the Orsa 2000 areas], November 17, 1999, comment by the unions.

Conclusion

In Savona, in the absence of a town planning master plan, complex programs (Urban, PRUSST, *Contratto di quartiere*, POR) were used to establish solid partnerships between institutions and private actors and to speed up the normally lengthy administrative procedures. But there was no planning, whether urban or economic. The demographic dynamics did not require more housing programs in a city having thousands of empty dwellings and little space for manufacturing activities. Private investments, presented by local politicians as being the only possibly solution to the city's crisis, were speculative in nature and were concentrated in areas which due to their location in the city, made it possible to build high-end primary residences as well as secondary homes for non-residents.

The redevelopment of the manufacturing areas was justified by the idea of changing the city from its primary-sector tradition to tourism and the advanced tertiary sector. To date, this has been achieved from a purely rhetorical perspective. The number of tourists has not grown and the knowledge and innovation-based economy only exists in the speeches of institutional representatives.

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