

EVIDENCE AND METHODS FROM AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE ABOUT AREA- BASED  
URBAN REGENERATION

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# EVIDENCE AND METHODS FROM AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE ABOUT AREA-BASED URBAN REGENERATION

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## *Abstract*

*This paper refers to an education experience developed within the BA in Territorial, Urban, Landscape and Environmental Planning of Politecnico di Torino (Italy).*

*Actually, all the study organisation of both the BA and the Master with the same title, which the BA graduates can attend, are strongly inspired by the goal to make students aware of the inter and trans-disciplinary nature of Planning, and of the necessity for a planner to cooperate with different experts and different stakeholders. Interdisciplinary Studios are one of the means used to reach this educational goal. In these Studios students have to develop proposals/plans/designs/policies for future interventions.*

*The specific experience this paper deals with is a Studio – in the last year of BA- about themes such as urban regeneration, local and sustainable development with a area-based approach. It proposes to groups of students a sort of simulation: they are asked to behave as a team to which the public administration gave the task to produce a proposal in order to participate in a real regional tender for the allocation of European funds to a regeneration programme dealing with a neighbourhood in the city periphery.*

## **1. Introduction**

Spatial Planning activities at whatever scale are intrinsically inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary, they lie at the crossroads of several disciplines: economics, sociology, urbanism, geography, political science, architecture, etc. Following Simin Davoudi (Davoudi and Pendlebury, 2010), we can use the following definitions: "*Multi-disciplinary: multiple disciplines coming together but, each working primarily with their own framings and methods [...]* *Inter-disciplinary: occupying the spaces between disciplines to build new knowledge. [...]* *Trans-disciplinary: creating a cross-road in which different disciplines intersect and problematise each other through a social learning process [...].*" (p. 9). In fact, multi-disciplinarity is a feature of many nowadays different areas of activities, it implies interaction among different disciplines which co-exist, but retains their boundaries. The positive side is that a multi-disciplinary approach allows to look at the problems from different points of view. On the contrary inter-disciplinary approach implies a more demanding interaction among different disciplines – their techniques, knowledge and peculiar viewpoints - , meaning also a mutual influence

in order to build a common vision and evaluation of the problems. Trans-disciplinarity means an even more demanding approach which asks for a process that goes over the boundaries that are traditionally given to teaching, implying a social learning process too.

According to Déjeant-Pons (Déjeant-Pons, 2010) spatial planning is “at the same time a scientific discipline, an administrative technique and a policy developed as an interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach directed towards a balanced regional development and the physical organization of space according to an overall strategy”. Dealing with multi-disciplinarity and inter-disciplinarity in relation with spatial planning, in the background there is the issue of what is planning as a discipline, as the need to address complex problems from a variety of different points of view has produced through times risks of a fragmented knowledge and a weak image of the planner as a technical expert (Mazza, 2002; Zanon, 2014); this is a broader issue this paper is not going to address, even if it is strongly connected with education goals and what is the specific technical expertise a planner must acquire (Zanon 2014).

From the educational point of view the double faceted approach – multi and inter-disciplinary - is a serious challenge, because it requires giving to the students information and knowledge - let us say “technical expertise” - on a multiplicity of disciplinary strands, and in mean time the ability to integrate such different aspects in “doing”, being able to master the planning process. “What distinguishes planners from geographers, for example, is that planners are engaged in ‘doing’. It is about not only understanding space and place, but also aspiring to change them, not only about ‘critical thinking about space and place’ but also using this knowledge as the basis of ‘action and interaction’” (Davoudi, 2009).

The challenge must be complemented with another issue. Generally speaking, planning actions are oriented to devising strategies, actions and operational tools aimed at improving the current conditions of a place, taking into account the “public interest”, equity, etc.; this raises ethical concerns linked with values, and highlights the need of governance and participatory processes. Moreover the planner’s approach is that theories and facts must be applied in context. Planners focus on context. They use modern analysis - quantitative and qualitative - combined with participatory methods and theoretical acumen, to solve policy problems. From the educational point of view this adds another challenge: make students aware that the wide range of technical expertise they are given “incorporate a set of values” (Zanon, 2014, p. 4).

The paper addresses just these issues, trying to drive some suggestions from an educational experience which took place within the BA in Territorial, Urban, Landscape and Environmental Planning of Politecnico di Torino (Italy) in the last years. It is organised as follows: a brief description of the experience, from the point of view the problems it addresses (§ 2.1) and from the methodological point of view (§ 2.2), some results and achievements of the students' work (§ 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3), a few conclusions about difficulties and achievements (§ 3.).

## **2. The Interdisciplinary Studio "Integrated programmes for local development and urban regeneration"**

This Studio is offered in the third year of the BA. This position gives it a special emphasis on some education goals. Actually, in Italy BA graduates can find jobs either in the Public Administration or as independent professionals too<sup>1</sup>. Therefore the BA Course tries to give to the future graduates a sound disciplinary training alongside with a strong aptitude to apply the acquired knowledge; using the EHEA terminology (Geppert, 2010), there is a focus on “*Applying knowledge and understanding*”. As far as this approach is concerned, the Studio plays an important role and it is also a central experience

in the third year of the BA, whose general goal is making students aware of the problems linked with the implementation of projects, plans and strategies.

In this context the Studio's learning outcomes are: i) ability to define goals, contents and components of an integrated programme or to critically analyse goals, contents and components of an existing one, ii) ability to analyse its impacts on the urban contest and its relations with the existing plans, iii) ability to produce analyses of the involved territory and its resources, iv) ability to develop autonomously parts of this programme, physical transformations included, and to verify their economic feasibility; v) ability to communicate and discuss the defined proposals with different communication techniques, to communicate also with non-expert actors, and to use participation techniques, vi) ability to work in teams through collaborative problem solving..

The Studio methodology aims at making students aware of the necessary inter-disciplinarity in planning practice, with a special focus on urban regeneration (§ 2.1). The work is developed by small teams of students; they are asked to develop a simulation: they must imagine themselves as teams of consultants hired by a City administration which committed them the task to produce a proposal in order to participate in a public call established by the Regional government for funding a programme; the proposal has to meet the requirements and selection criteria of the call. At the beginning of this experience the public call the students were asked to refer to was a fake public call, a simulation set up by the teachers putting together features taken from different regional calls, then a real call was proposed. It is *Programma integrato di sviluppo urbano (PISU, Integrated Programme for Urban Development)*, funded by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) 2007-13, within the Measure “Regeneration of degraded areas” of the Regional Operational Programme (Table 1).

Table 1 – PISU objectives, area and interventions

Objectives	<p>PISU proposal pursues the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- redevelopment of public space included in degraded areas in order to develop economic , social, environmental and cultural heritage;</li> <li>- promotion of sustainable urban mobility;</li> <li>- development of effective urban services easily accessible online ;</li> <li>- development of available facilities to preserve and promote cultural heritage and green spaces ;</li> <li>- improvement of economic infrastructures;</li> <li>- development of cooperation between local partners (business, trade unions, universities, NGOs, educational institutions, local communities, etc.);</li> <li>- support the local economy also through financial aids to productive investment;</li> <li>- improvement of social cohesion.</li> </ul>
Involved area	<p>PISU has to be drawn up with reference to a defined area [...] in which to localize the proposed interventions. This area must be characterized by a concentration of economic, social, and physical problems (deterioration of buildings and environment, social malaise, economic marginality, etc.) higher than the average of the entire urban context.</p>
Types of interventions to be proposed	<p>The measures to be included in PISU should be directed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- urban renewal of deprived urban areas;</li> <li>- redevelopment of public spaces included in degraded areas, in order to the establish new functions (economic, social, environmental, cultural);</li> <li>- provision of urban facilities for the community easily accessible especially for the socially vulnerable people (elderly, handicapped, etc.).</li> <li>- sustainable forms of urban mobility and innovative management of traffic;</li> <li>- creation and improvement of public spaces and green areas, in order to support</li> </ul>

	aggregation and social integration ; - new spaces and infrastructures for localisation of SMEs and micro-enterprises; - granting direct financial aids to SMEs and micro-enterprises [...], for supporting to investments aimed at economic development and the creation of jobs [...]; - meeting the emerging needs of the integration and social inclusion processes aimed to support vulnerable communities and marginal subjects. - increase affordable housing offer <sup>2</sup>
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## 2.1 Why Urban regeneration

As mentioned above, the activity of the Atelier is focused on the theme of urban regeneration in the way urban regeneration has been intended in European experiences starting with the Urban method. Shortly it's helpful to recall the key features of the URBAN method (EuropeanCommunityDgRegionalPolicy, 2003), pp.6-7) that "includes:

- An integrated approach to issues which elsewhere are often tackled in isolation: reinforcing competitiveness; tackling social exclusion; and physical and environmental regeneration.
- A high profile for EU priorities such as the integration of immigrant communities, sustainable development, equal opportunities and the information society.
- Programmes are run at the local level, close to people and their problems. Local authorities are involved in the running of two thirds of the programmes.
- Close involvement of local communities, who participated in the drafting of over 80% of the programmes.
- A built-in learning cycle, with extensive tools for analysing and exchanging experience (the URBACT programme)".

Over the past 20 years, the issue of urban regeneration has been a major theme in the policies of the European Union and also in Italy. Summarising, starting in the '90s regeneration policy moved from a property-led kind of regeneration with a strong emphasis on economic growth and with a weak attention to the needs of deprived communities - with the assumption that the prosperity created by new development would trickle down to the most deprived areas which were excluded from the interventions (Cameron and Doling, 1994) -, towards a more comprehensive and integrated vision with actions which seeks to bring about an improvement either in the economic and physical and social and environmental conditions of the area subject to change (Robert, 2008; Porter and Shaw, 2009; Tyler, Warnock et al., 2012). The means used to carry out this kind of actions have been the so-called integrated programmes that integrate physical actions and economic, social and cultural measures as well and solicit the involvement and participation of a wide range of actors (public and private), with a strong emphasis on the local community involvement, that is an area based or community led policy (Moulaert, Martinelli et al., 2010). PISU belongs to this kind of programmes.

In this policy approach there is an interpretation of the problem, based on the assumptions that in Europe most people are resident in urban areas, but while cities are indeed engines of regional, national and European growth, at the same time they have been facing concentrations of social, environmental and economic problems, because an epochal fracture took place in the social cohesion through times, moving from the old economic development model to the present one, bringing to new forms of poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation, within a cumulative process, worsened by the increasing weakness of the public action, which the neoliberal approach brought about. These situations generally concentrates in particular urban enclaves, notably the so called peripheries where there is this interlacement of social and economic problems. The consequence is a local action model: an integrated model whose aim is breaking the cumulative process by valorising local resources and individuals through their context and not skipping it: bettering the contest is a condition for bettering the individual conditions

Consequently urban regeneration experiences frequently moved to the peripheries of the large cities, especially the old industrial ones where urban degradation, social malaise and territorial fragmentation situations are often present. Today, however, the peripheries, now absorbed by the successive processes of expansion of the city, are no longer seen only in negative terms: while not denying the poor quality of buildings and infrastructures that often characterizes them, and the existence of phenomena of degradation and social exclusion, they are more and more often described as complex places, where there are resources to be exploited, local actors that operate for the change, new urban practices. This unconventional approach to the theme of the periphery is consistent with the concept of local development, ie. a development which is not imposed from above, not only due to economic logic and quantitative data, an approach that proposes a regeneration based on local resources (Governa and Saccomani, 2004; Governa and Salone, 2004; Governa, Rossignolo et al., 2009). Alongside with urban regeneration local development is a second key concept for the Studio work.

This is the background of the interdisciplinary experience the Studio proposes to the students. Both urban regeneration and local development as defined above are intrinsically multidisciplinary concepts, because they cannot be approached by a single discipline, but moreover they imply an integrated policy which needs an interdisciplinary approach: an integrated description of the involved territory and its problems, integrated analytical points of view (physical, economic, social, political, etc.), integrated proposals. From the educational point of view an urban regeneration and local development programme is a suitable opportunity to make students aware of the importance of interdisciplinary.

To this picture the Studio adds another concept: sustainable development. One of the features of the new urban policies starting in the '90s has been the acceptance of the need to work in accord with the environmental objectives of sustainable development: environmental themes have become a real concern. Sustainable development is a multidimensional concept that takes into account three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental sustainability. These three dimensions must be integrated: there is no sustainable development if you cannot find an integration between these three dimensions and achieve a balance among them. So, a single red wire connects the concepts of urban regeneration, sustainable development and local development as well. On a whole, this is the conceptual background the Studio offers to the students and within which it asks them to work.

## **2.2 The Studio methodology and results**

The Studio includes different forms of training. There are structured lectures dealing both with a clarification of the concepts of urban regeneration, local development and sustainable development, intended as starting points, and with the disciplinary approaches involved. The multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach of the Studio ask for the contributions of different teachers: actually three different teachers (a planner, a geographer, an urban designer) are directly involved in the Studio, while two others (an economist and a sociologist) are indirectly involved as, teaching in parallel courses, they give the needed structured information there and ask the students to do specific exercises on the very specific problems raised within the Studio. The different teachers interact during the practical work – the second form of training – and participate in the periodical discussions of the students work which follows the presentations the groups are asked to do after each step of the work – the third form of training. The ability to clearly and effectively present and discuss the products developed is considered an important element of the training that the Studio seeks to give to the students, being indispensable component in the actual processes of consultation and negotiation that accompany the definition and implementation of integrated programs. Planners learn to communicate visually, verbally, and in writing. For that reason, ample opportunities are provided for students to

present their own work and to engage in dialogues with tutors and fellow students with diverse training and background. This is where critical thinking, presentational skills and intellectual confidence are intensively developed.

The work methodology follows the steps implied by the simulation process, that is students' teams must comply with the requirements of the public call. These steps are the following: 1) Descriptive Report, an analytical survey of the territory involved, 2) Programme Description, objectives and actions, 3) a deeper exploration of an action, chosen among the specific ones, in order to assess its feasibility from the urban design, planning regulations and economic points of view, and a proposal for community involvement in the process, 4) finally, an application dossier for the tender in which the results of the previous steps are reworked and combined. The following examples try to give an idea of the results of the students' teams work in the different steps.

### 2.2.1 Step 1 Examples of students' work

The first step (Table 2) results has to be an analytical survey and description of the territory involved. The above described conceptual background, that is a place-focused development of urban regeneration, implies a sound examination of the features of the territory from different points of view in order to understand the "why" of the problems to deal with, and the local resources to lean on. In particular the analysis of those factors as the determinants of territorial capital, going from traditional material assets to more recent immaterial ones (Atkinson, Russo et al., 2012). This means an inter-disciplinary analytical survey and description, the results of which can be summarised in some schemes and in a SWOT analysis (figures 1, 2, 3).

Table 2 - Descriptive Report (first step)

Territorial Framework	<p>1.1 Description of the urban context</p> <p>A brief description of the area affected by the project interventions (geographical location, population density, infrastructure and transport, public facilities, demographic, cultural and architectural resources, state of the environment, jobs, economy, human resources and social capital, the presence of institutions, etc.), highlighting the potentials and the critical elements. The description should be supported by cards synthesis or thematic maps. The latter are expected to detail the descriptions, identifying characteristics of the different parts of the territory, also seen in comparison to the surrounding area.</p>
	<p>1.2 . Main indicators</p> <p>.....</p>
	<p>1.3 SWOT Analysis</p> <p>It is a process of acquiring knowledge to support decisions as a guarantee of relevance of the strategic choices of the program in relation to the context. The objectives of PISU must be consistent with the needs of the territory and its likely development prospects. In this way, even a very simple SWOT analysis can be a basis for brainstorming and concrete planning, within the context of the vision, mission, and purpose an organization has already established.</p>

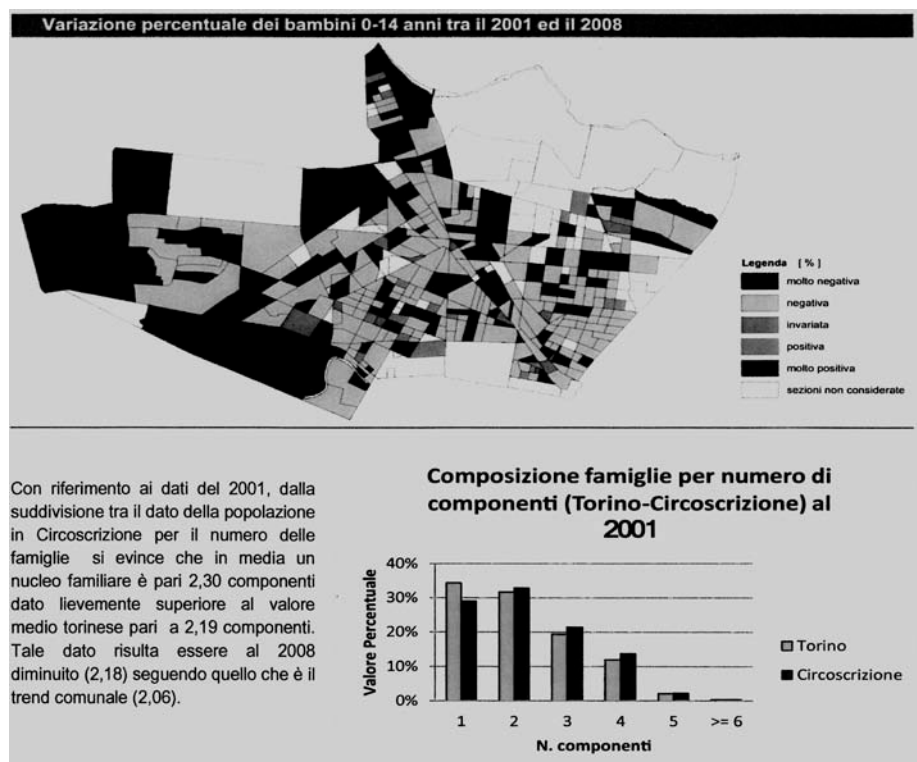


Figure 1 - Demographic analyses

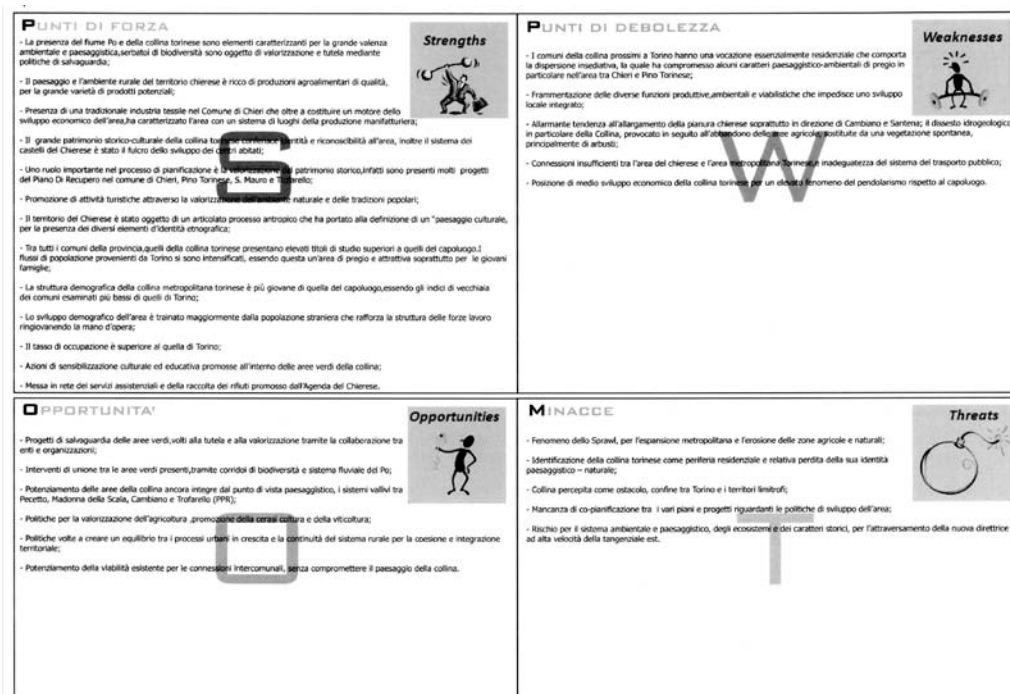


Figure 2 - SWOT Analysis



### 2.2.2 Step 2: actions and strategy

In the second step students' teams have to deal with strategies and actions. After the SWOT analysis, of course, the groups moved on to the next step developing action plans to implement its strategies. Information from the SWOT are useful in that context as well, helping to clarify strengths and weaknesses in resources and experience. They have to decide what are the general goals of their programme for the development and the regeneration of the area and to propose the actions to be taken. Goals, strategies and actions must deal with the three dimensions of both urban regeneration and sustainable development and specify what are the local resources (economic, social, physical) on which to leverage (eg. possible available brownfields or building areas to be redeveloped, available economic actors, citizens associations to be involved, etc.) (figure 3).

Table 3 - PISU Description (step 2)

2.1 General and specific objectives	The general and specific objectives of the PISU, briefly highlighting how the implementation of the Project is likely to remedy the existing situation of degradation (social, economic and physical) and what resources (materials and immaterial) are considered as leverage for the development
2.2 Specific Actions	Briefly describe the proposed specific actions with reference to the types foreseen in the public call. Where possible, the description of the actions should provide early assumptions about the feasibility and ways of involving private parties and the third sector.
2.3 Development strategy map	The description of the actions must be accompanied by an outline of the general structure of the area resulting from the proposed actions, represented with proper choice of the scale and mode of representation, in order to make choices as clear and communicable as possible.

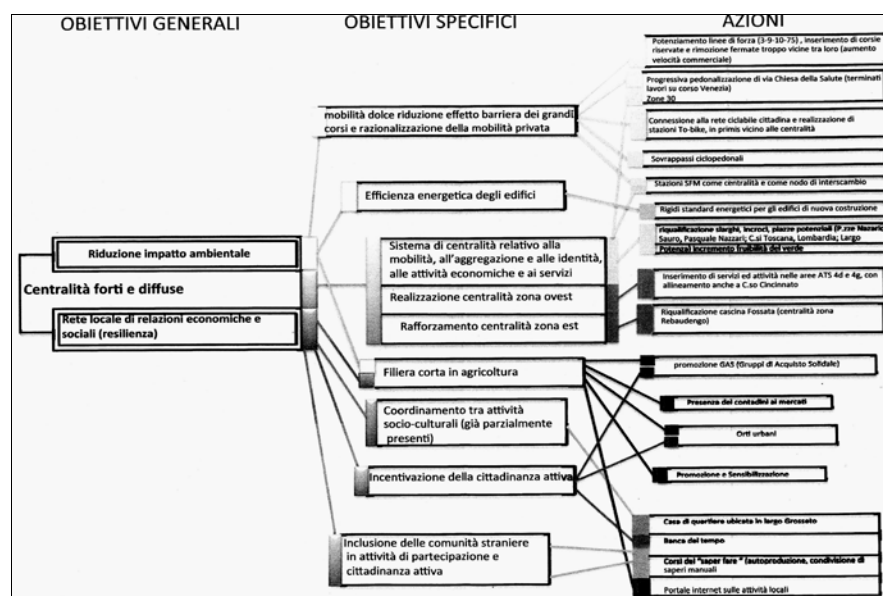


Figure 3 - List of general and specific objectives and proposed actions

### 2.2.3 Step 3 Examples of students' work

In the third step the students' teams explore the feasibility of some of the proposed actions. This means different explorations, for instance:

- an urban design project exploring the possible increase of public facilities and the improvement of public spaces or of traffic organisation, or the possibility of a new affordable housing offer (figure 4, 5);
- a careful check of the opportunities and constraints deriving from the existing planning regulations in order to evaluate the feasibility of the design project;
- an assessment of the economic and financial feasibility of the physical project and the possible alternatives (figure 6);
- possible steps for the community involvement (figure 7).



Figure 4 - Strategies and actions

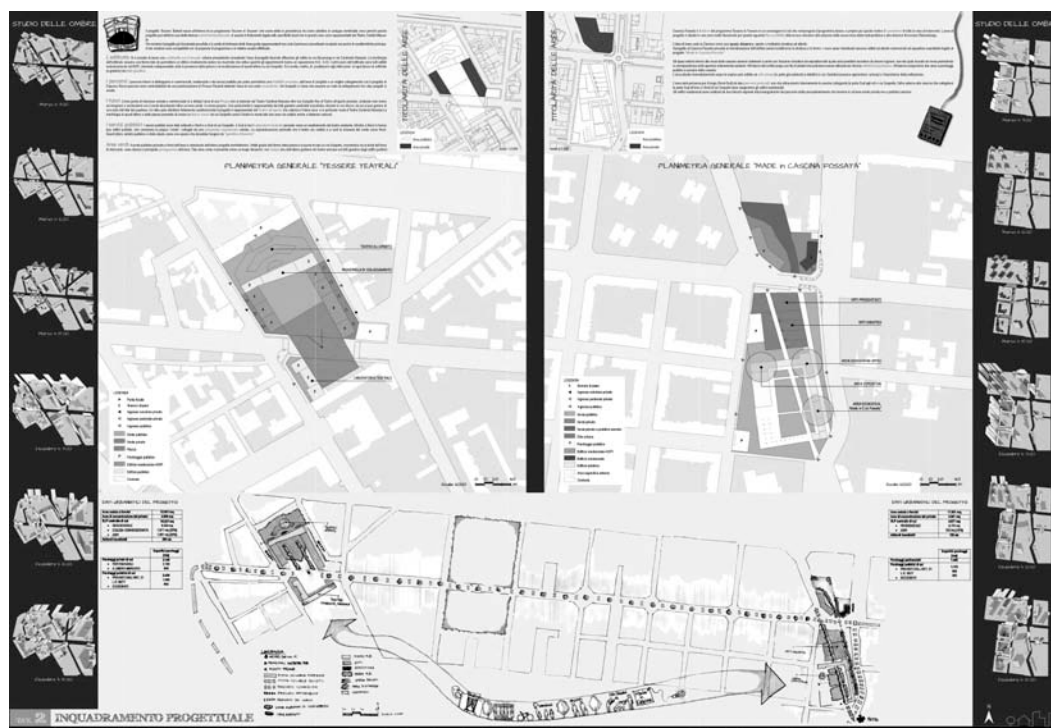


Figure 5 - Urban design project

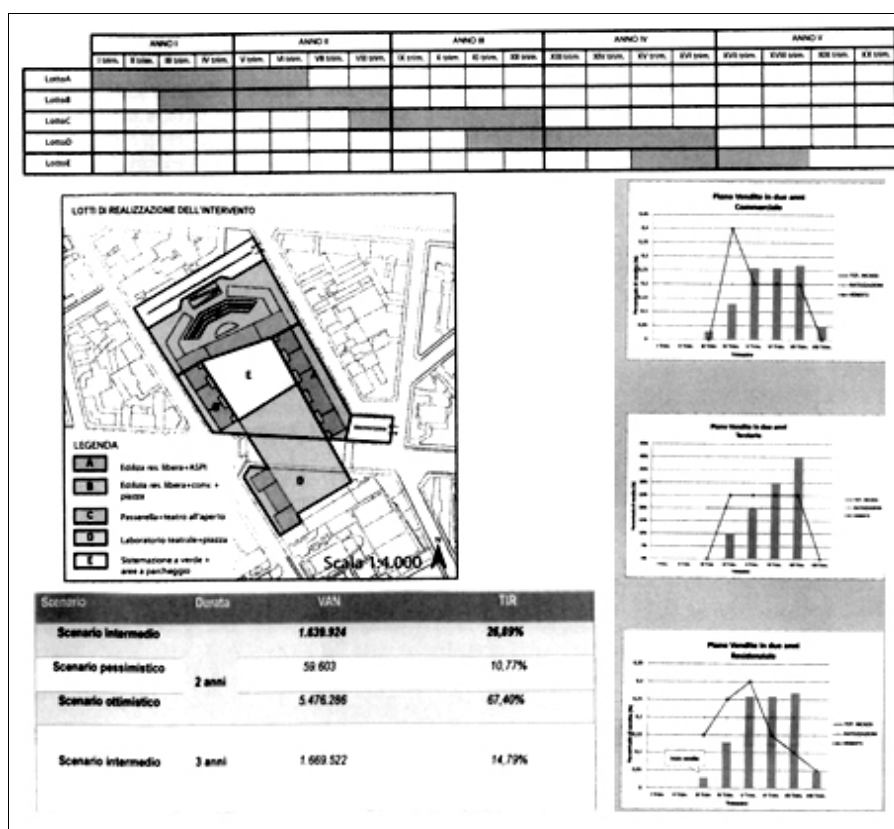


Figure 6 - Economic feasibility assessment

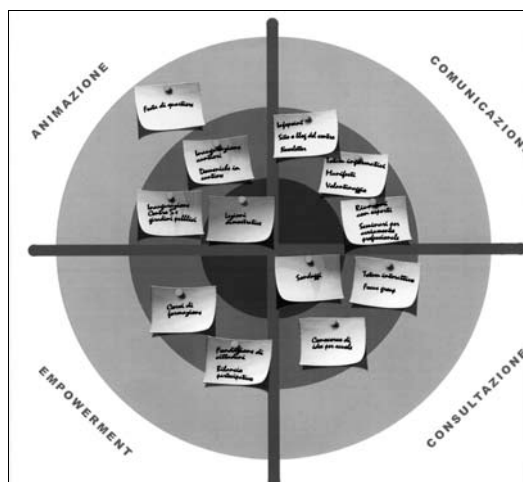


Figure 7 - Steps for the community involvement

### 3. Conclusion: achievements and difficulties

The methodology of this Studio has proved to be efficient and meaningful for either the student's awareness of the importance of interdisciplinary in real spatial planning tasks or their ability to face these tasks in an almost professional ways. They in fact combine vertical integration at the macro and micro planning levels, as well as horizontal integration of the different sectors. The second issue is an important part in the innovative character of this experience as it is offered to undergraduate students; usually BA course are targeted to give the students a multidisciplinary vision of tools and technical expertise, but not often practical experiences of an inter-disciplinary approach to planning.

Education at the BA level is generally not targeted to form a "complete planner", at least in Italy, but rather to form a technician that is able to master parts of the planning processes both in the Public Administration or in private profession, having specific technical expertise; while the role of a planner as an "expert able to master different knowledge types and ready to cooperate within a coherent process" (Zanon, 2014, p. 17) is reserved to Master graduates, with greater technical knowledge and greater awareness of all the political and disciplinary implications of planning decisions, being "prepared to reflect on actions" (Schön, 1983, as quoted in Zanon, 2014, p. 17). The innovative character of the Studio methodology lies just in this attempt to give awareness of the importance of inter-disciplinary approach to planning also to the future technician that will stop his/her educational career after BA or, being already a civil servant, decides to increase his/her education according to the life long learning principle (which is the case with several of our students).

Achievements must not hide the difficulties of this experience. The main difficulty lies just in making the inter-disciplinary approach work in practice. When applied to a practical process of framing problems and identifying alternative solutions, inter-disciplinarity is a trial process, meaning that introducing a different disciplinary approach either in the analytical or in the proposal steps of the process, needs influencing the previous results and revise what was considered a possible achievement at this stage, and this is sometimes disconcerting for students.

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<sup>1</sup> In Italy they can become associated to a section of the *Ordine degli Architetti, Pianificatori, Conservatori e paesaggisti* (Association of Architects, Planners, Heritage Conservators and Landscapers) after having passed a State exam.

<sup>2</sup> This kind of intervention was not included in the original PISU. Actually European Funds cannot fund housing provision. This type of intervention was added for teaching reasons (the relation between urban regeneration and housing problems), specifying that it has to be consistent with the general goals of the programme, even if funded with other regional funds.