



## 2013 Remaking Cities Congress

Planning and Social Innovations for Post-Industrial Cities

Case Study Summary

### Turin, Italy

It Takes Vision, Phasing and Coherent Effort to Remake a City

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October 3, 2013

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#### A Major Urban Change: How it All Started

Home to Fiat and Italy's automotive and aerospace industries, Turin's urban development in the 20th century is synonymous with industrialization. As in many other industrial capitals, in the late 1980's Turin's manufacturing base began shedding jobs. With its economic engine no longer able to drive economic growth, Turin woke in the late 1980's to the harsh reality of rapidly changing economic and social structures. Since then the manufacturing base has been in continuous decline and the city has lost a quarter of its population in just a couple of decades. The economic crisis caused great transformations in urban form and function, leaving in its wake vast tracts of abandoned spaces.

The impact of this local economic crisis became particularly evident in the early 1990's. City leaders and residents alike began to face the prospects of an uncertain future at the same time that drastic political transformation was taking shape on the national scene. The massive corruption scandal known as "Tangentopoli" swept away an entire political generation and led to various reforms, including a new law mandating the direct election of mayors. In Turin, major reform at the national level combined with economic decline at the local level to create the conditions for drastic change.

#### The Recipe (mid 1990's – 2006)

The city's first directly-elected mayor came to office on the heels of national political reform with a strong mandate for change. The political leadership was able to rally a wide spectrum of local actors around a shared vision capable of re-imagining the city's identity, valorizing productive and cultural assets outside of the manufacturing base, and engendering collaboration among a broad range of key stakeholders to turn that vision into reality. Though Turin's local economic foundations were shifting, the mid-90s saw strong performance in the Eurozone, meaning the City could aim to increase its share of the regional and international market. Meanwhile, both a nascent European Union and Italy's national administration were extending financing to challenged economic regions for economic and urban redevelopment.

The vision for Turin's transformation was based on two main pillars of change: the re-branding of the city from an industrial hub to a capital of culture and tourism; and the physical recovery of urban space, repurposing industrial and abandoned uses.

In 1995 the City completed an ambitious land-use plan aimed at reclaiming derelict industrial areas and railway corridors, and it was coherently implemented over the next 15 years. The primary objective was the total transformation of a

“central backbone,” burying an eight-kilometer stretch of railway dividing the city from north to south. Laying the tracks underground allowed the transformation of the surface into a green boulevard while reinforcing the railway system around a new railroad station. The central backbone connected abandoned industrial areas on both sides which became the major focus of redevelopment projects into residential, university, office and retail uses.

In a parallel effort the city embarked on a city-wide consultation process culminating in 2000 as the city's first Strategic Plan. Implemented effectively in the lead up to the 2006 Winter Olympic Games, the plan identified and promoted a new vision of the city as a center of cultural activity. Significant effort was made in transforming the city's image from a dusty industrial town to a vibrant cultural center. Emphasis was placed on both increasing cultural programming and on effective promotion and communication, locally and internationally. The city's many architectural and artistic assets were subject to renewal efforts, and historic spaces were dedicated to cultural activities. Many of the city's public spaces were restored and, through public participation, investments were made to revitalize underserved communities on the city's periphery.

The 2006 Winter Games were considered a milestone in the transformation process, probably also a turning point, rather than a point of arrival. The city's leadership continued increasing the quality of public space and developing major cultural events (such as the Celebration of the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy). Local pride reached new highs and visitors discovered the beauty and liveliness of the City.

### **The Recent Years (since 2006): Open Objectives**

However, economic transformation proved difficult to sustain in the long-term and from the mid 2000's the civic leadership, recognizing the need to sustain structural change beyond the culture and tourism sectors, began to explore new strategies for growth. A second strategic planning effort undertaken in a less consultative process imagined Turin as a city of knowledge and know how rooted in the technical skills developed in its industrial past. The role of Turin's Polytechnic University was seen as crucial in shifting to high-tech and high-value production sectors. In this phase the city invested heavily in incubators, innovation poles and high-tech districts. Yet this plan was created in a more academic context and with narrower engagement and, because it was not well connected to economic actors, met with less success than the first. Promoting economic diversification into other sectors is still a challenge.

### **The Road Ahead**

The storytelling around Turin's transformation usually focuses on the transition from an industrial past to an invented, post-industrial future. But in fact much of Turin's success lay not in reinventing itself but in harnessing the capacities contained in the DNA of a productive center to re-discover its less recent past and build on existing assets.

Today's economic crisis is much deeper and more challenging on a number of levels: the regional European market is now in recession, European Union support is directed to other markets, and national public financing crisis has dried up. The city's third strategic planning process is paying great attention to the inclusion of the remaining business community in devising the key strategies and actions required to emerge from the crisis. The second focus is on fostering cooperation on a metropolitan scale as a way to build a regional identity,

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strengthen regional competitiveness in the European arena and maximize limited public financing. The preliminary goals emerging from this process include developing a friendlier, more supportive business environment, improving the efficiency of the public sector in the provision of social services, streamlining bureaucracy and increasing public engagement. Outreach to a broader stakeholder base, including civil society, youth networks and emerging economic entities is key to this new phase of transformation.