Speaker: Prof. Alessandro Balducci
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Transcript (cleaned version)

Thank you very much, Marco. Thank you to AESOP, to the president, to the distinguished colleagues who are here, to the students present, and to those connected online.

The title of this talk was chosen in dialogue with Marco, but what I am going to do is present some thoughts about my experience as an academic and as a planner, as I approach the conclusion of my career at the Politecnico di Milano. This is partly an assessment, and partly a reflection. I would like to reflect on aspects of my academic life that might have a broader meaning.

Let me start with a picture that some of you know well—my mentor, Pierluigi Crosta. He was my professor during my master's degree in 1978, and later during my PhD in Venice.

I also owe much to a series of mentors with whom I've worked over the years:

- Professor Luigi Mazza, internationally known, in whose documentation centre I started working in the early 1970s;
- Bruno Dente, at the Institute of Social Research, who taught me public policy analysis;
- Antonio Tosi, an important urban sociologist, who taught me how to conduct disciplined research;
- and Bernardo Secchi, winner of the Grand Prix de l'Urbanisme in France, from whom I tried to learn the art of lecturing.

I've structured this presentation in two parts, plus a brief conclusion. The first part deals with the themes I've worked on in research and teaching, reflecting on what I believe I have accomplished. The second part concerns the institutional and political responsibilities I have taken on.

First part: Research and Teaching

When I was still a student, I volunteered in a poor neighbourhood of my hometown, San Donato, a municipality bordering Milan. It was an immigrant quarter at the time.

I was elected as a member of the city council as part of a local group called *Movimento Assemblare Certosa*—the Assembly Movement for Certosa, which was the name of the neighbourhood. We were involved in a battle against a major development project—3 million square metres—proposed by the oil company Eni, and against the doubling of the railway that would split the poor district in two.

We were also advocating for investment in public housing, which was severely lacking. Thrown into the mix, I learned my first lessons about politics, policy, and power. I was 22 years old. And, perhaps most importantly, I learned that technicians and planners are not always right.

I learned how to use knowledge to dismantle the distortions of partisan urban planning. Those were the 1970s—years in which planning was believed to have the capacity to rectify injustice and market imbalances. I rode that wave, and I chose planning precisely for that reason.

My first small book, written immediately after graduation, was a proposal to expand public participation into every formal step of the ordinary urban planning process. That was how I began weaving together my interests.

I studied the actors involved in the urbanisation process in Milan and the metropolitan area in the 1970s, together with a research group working through a peer logic. This helped me understand how to open the black box of territorial transformation, challenging the dominant portrayal of planners as neutral, technocratic, and impartial.

We studied large-scale development projects led by figures like Silvio Berlusconi, who—thanks to his ability to organise deals—anticipated his later entrance into politics, much like his larger successor, Donald Trump. My second book, *Dal Parco al Cemento Armato* (*From the Park to Reinforced Concrete*), dealt precisely with these dynamics.

Those were years of intense university life and civic engagement, during which I began my long-term "commuting" between research, theoretical reflection, and concrete planning practice. By day, I would spend hours with colleagues and professors interpreting case studies. By night, I would join others in occupying the railway to prevent the destruction of the city's poorest neighbourhoods by high-speed rail development.

I was selected for Italy's second cycle of the PhD programme—PhDs didn't exist in the country before that. We're now at the 41st cycle. During those passionate three years of study, I developed a framework that I found both convincing and solid—one that explained the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of planning, and that considered conflict not as an obstacle, but as a resource in the planning process.

This was a kind of discovery of actors—an element entirely absent from traditional urban planning at the time. My doctoral thesis, which later became the book *Designare il Futuro* (*Designing the Future*), published by Il Mulino, allowed me to merge public policy analysis with the analysis of planning processes.

It also enabled me to begin practising a form of planning open to interaction with residents and local actors—blending expert knowledge with common language and common knowledge. Participation was no longer just an ethical choice, as it had been at the outset, but rather a means of harnessing the intelligence of society, as Charles Lindblom suggested, and as many scholars I engaged with during my PhD also theorised.

With these tools, I returned to practice in the 1990s, after the major corruption scandal known as *Tangentopoli*—a pivotal moment in Italian political history. The professional planning market, which had previously been entirely controlled by political parties, opened up to new possibilities, including for universities and research centres.

Our proposal was to bring urban planning back into the streets. It gained some traction, and we conducted some of the earliest experiments in participatory planning—in *Il Chance* in San Donato, in Pesaro, and in many other cities. These experiences followed one another through a process of exchange and communication among administrators.

Following our work in *Il Chance*, we continued with projects in the new city centre of San Donato, Correggio, Rio Saliceta, and several others. Our theoretical reflections also helped us to recognise the limits of what we were doing.

I recall a paper in which I argued that during the initial, almost heroic phase, participation occurred—but the projects were not implemented. Later, when participatory approaches became more institutionalised, projects were delivered, but participation was limited and compressed. It's a complex argument, one I don't have time to fully explore here, but it's an important one.

Nevertheless, our capacity to design planning processes and use interaction as a form of knowledge opened up new opportunities for us. We became involved in European urban projects, regeneration programmes, *contratti di quartiere* (neighbourhood contracts), and strategic plans that were just beginning to emerge.

A key turning point was the *Lambro-Seveso-Olona* project—a planning initiative led by Alberto Magnaghi, another important planner and scholar, in the early 1990s. It was commissioned by the Lombardy Region to develop a strategy for the environmental restoration of central Lombardy—at the time, the most polluted and degraded area in Italy, due to industrialisation and urban sprawl.

I worked on that team, with the responsibility for designing the planning process. This forced us to confront large-scale issues and mistreated territories, where we had to trigger a process of environmental recovery—an extremely difficult task.

We began to realise the need to see regional urbanisation in the Milan area in a completely new light. As one image in our report showed, we tried to identify different settlement areas and groups of municipalities, and to explore tools and experiences capable of mobilising a wide range of actors across different levels—a goal that the traditional, capital-P "Plan" could not achieve.

We discovered and studied a parallel experience: IBA Emscher Park, a regeneration initiative in a rural area of Germany. It introduced a new planning model based on a synthetic scenario that encouraged local stakeholders and citizens to engage and contribute actively. That experience revealed three key directions for innovative planning:

1. The need to articulate a vision for the larger urban region, broken down into different environments—each with its own character and capacity for self-recognition.

2. The importance of involving the many environmental initiatives that were already emerging from local actors.

3. The possibility of experimenting with non-directive, enabling forms of planning.

Building on this, I coordinated a ministry-funded research programme on the grassroots production of urban public goods. We investigated society's self-organising capabilities in addressing common problems—issues that the public sector was no longer able to manage effectively. (One of the maps we produced shows all the areas and cases we studied during that programme.)

We also identified the need to describe urbanisation processes in the Milan area in ways that went beyond administrative boundaries, which were limiting our understanding. Institutions were unable to grasp how the new city was evolving—and what new challenges that evolution posed.

In retrospect, these were two invisible dimensions of urban life:

- On one hand, the invisibility to politicians of the enormous resources and energies developing at the grassroots level—what Bagnasco called *traces of community*—which we observed in peripheral neighbourhoods.
- On the other hand, the invisibility of the city itself as it expanded across territory and redefined its functions—without institutional recognition.

Starting in the early 2000s, we became involved in various strategic planning activities—first in Iesi, then in and around Milan—responding to requests from groups of municipalities in the urban region. They came together to develop projects and to counter the prevailing notion that they were merely peripheral or suburban. These groups aspired to be recognised as part of a larger urban entity, with significant potential—if considered collectively.

We worked in areas such as North Milan, Dalmine–Sengon, and Adda Martesana. This journey led us to a series of major assignments, the most significant of which was the City of Cities strategic project for the Province of Milan. It was an intense, four-year planning process in which we proposed looking at the urban region as a *city of cities*. The goal was to engage the various communities to improve habitability and address strategic weaknesses and opportunities.

Here are some of the images from that strategic project. It was a major initiative involving dozens of colleagues from our department, offering a significant opportunity for both practical experimentation and theoretical reflection—the kind of work that only a university can truly undertake. We published extensively on it. One of the outcomes was a book that documented and analysed the entire experience.

During these years, together with Luca Bertolini, professor of planning in Amsterdam, we wrote an article for the journal *Planning Theory and Practice*, titled *Reflecting with Practice*. In it, we discussed the importance of university-based research that engages directly with real planning processes—rather than merely observing them from the outside, as is often the case in American academia.

It must be said that the trajectory of the *City of Cities* strategic plan was interrupted by a change in political leadership. However, many of its ideas continued to circulate. For us, it was an essential testing ground that helped define the direction of our research in the years that followed.

Around this time, I began collaborating with my colleague Raine Mäntysalo from Aalto University. Together, we developed a theoretical reflection on Peter Galison's concept of the trading zone—the idea that, in complex societies, planning can no longer expect to reach general consensus through traditional negotiations. Instead, it can offer a space of exchange between actors who may have conflicting goals. Through engagement with *boundary objects*, they can reach partial and situated convergence that allows progress. This became the foundation of our joint book on the subject.

Another major development stemming from the *City of Cities* experience was the Postmetropolis Research Project—a large-scale research initiative funded by the Ministry of Universities. I coordinated the project in collaboration with eight Italian universities. The aim was to move beyond administrative boundaries by studying major Italian urban areas at the scale of 100 kilometres by 100 kilometres.

The project produced a web-based atlas containing over 500 indicators, as well as numerous reflections that were published across several volumes. These studies helped us understand how the relationship between centre and periphery is being redefined—and how the inability of institutions to recognise the *de facto* city generates new inequalities and a new *urban question*.

This line of research led to several further studies—some commissioned by the Italian Prime Minister's Office, others by the European Commission, including through the S.POINT programme. During those years, I also worked with Louis Albrechts and Jean-Yves Yerlès on an edited volume that gathered experiences in strategic planning from across the globe—from north to south, from east to west.

The years of COVID were difficult for everyone. We tried to understand the roots of the institutional failures in responding to the pandemic. Amid that crisis, we opened a dialogue on its implications for cities and planning. That reflection culminated in a book I co-edited with a group of young colleagues, focused on preparedness—how cities responded, and how they could be better prepared for the unknown unknowns.

In recent years—aside from a failed ERC grant application—I dedicated myself to the Annals of the Feltrinelli Foundation, a prestigious institution that assigned me a leading editorial role.

The title of the edition was *The Invisible City: What We Do Not See Is Changing the Metropolis*. I invited numerous colleagues and experts to reflect on the major issues transforming our cities—issues that had been building up after years of apparent, but misleading, success.

The title of that *Annuario—The Invisible City*—evokes the famous book by Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, which has been translated into nearly every language in the world. The thesis of the volume is that many of the phenomena transforming the metropolis are invisible—or made to appear invisible.

These include:

- Climate change
- Public health crises
- Digitalisation, which transforms urban functions from within
- Accelerated ageing of the population and the failure to address the needs of young people
- Rising social polarisation
- Institutional failure to recognise the *real city*, which has spread across territories
- Infrastructure gaining excessive governance power over urban life
- Urban planning becoming increasingly reliant on private initiative
- Peripheral areas lacking meaningful projects
- And finally, the progressive growth of city-makers—grassroots actors and associations who meet their own needs for space, work, housing, and gathering, often through contributions that remain invisible in formal planning processes.

These are, broadly speaking, the main themes I've worked on—bridging research and planning practice. And at the end of this long journey, it is fair to ask: Can we draw any conclusions about planning?

As I mentioned earlier, I began at a time when planning was considered an instrument of societal modernisation—a discipline full of ambition and expectation. Over time—due not only to external causes—urban planning has lost centrality. Economics, finance, and digital platforms have taken its place at the centre of decision-making.

So, the question arises: Does urban planning still serve a purpose? I believe it does—but two key considerations support this belief.

The first is a hopeful one. There is now an extraordinary convergence in how we think about the climate crisis, growing inequality, the lessons of the pandemic, and the crisis of globalisation. A new consensus is forming: that *places*—and the care of places—can be the key to resolving the increasingly damaged relationship between space and society.

Space, long treated as the passive end of transformation driven by the entropic forces of globalised, financialised economies, can now become the starting point for recovery.

Bruno Latour speaks of a "return to the terrestrial" as a way out of crisis. Jeremy Rifkin sees it as the only viable strategy to avoid ecological collapse. Tim Ingold proposes a return to place-based, short-term networks for food production and manufacturing.

These are not planners or architects—they are philosophers, economists, and anthropologists. Yet they are calling us back to place.

If the space of life becomes the starting point, then urban planning can once again play a truly significant role—as part of a return to the Earth, and as a practice of care.

The second consideration is a conditional one. For urban planning to fulfil the role I described, it must change profoundly. It must abandon the lingering ideas of a rigid, linear, pseudo-rational approach—an approach long discredited in theory, yet one that continues to reappear in practice.

Planning today must embrace a more exploratory and enabling approach—one capable of tapping into the vast resources that are emerging from below. These resources carry enormous potential, but often go unrecognised and are, as a result, weakened.

I have worked extensively from the bottom up, as I've already mentioned. But that, too, is not enough. And when I have found myself working from above, I realised that it is not sufficient either.

Peter Galison, the scholar who introduced the concept of the *trading zone*, wrote a fascinating book titled *Einstein's Clocks and Poincaré's Maps*. It's a dense, 300-page study of the late 19th century, when scientists and politicians across Europe worked to coordinate time and measurement between cities and countries. Until then, each place had its own standards for time and distance.

This was a tremendous scientific and political challenge—one that eventually led to the creation of the metre and the standardisation of time.

I found the book quite difficult, and at first not especially useful—until the final page, which was illuminating. There, Galison reflects that in the past 30 years, it has become commonplace to contrast bottom-up with top-down explanations.

But neither is sufficient. He quotes a medieval saying, once used to describe the relationship between alchemy and astronomy:

"Looking down, we see what is above. Looking up, we see what is below."

This, I believe, captures perfectly how planning must be rethought—as a close integration of top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

We learn this from the many difficulties faced by promising grassroots initiatives that were left unsupported. We also see it in the failures of technocratic, top-down planning. But we learn it, too, from the most interesting forms of strategic planning—those that have provided meaningful direction to transformation processes that engage the energy dispersed throughout society.

This is a form of planning that believes in the power of democracy.

It reminds me of a quote by Charles Lindblom, from an article in which he explored the relationship between the market and democracy:

"I've been working for a long time—still with inadequate success—to try to think clearly about the market system and about democracy. One difficulty may be that we, people across the world, have actually tried the market in many of its possible forms, learning from both its flaws and its merits. But we have not yet tried democracy—only a distant approximation of it."

This is certainly true for planning. We need a form of planning—just as Patsy Healey has suggested—that is designed to identify and consolidate episodes of innovation by offering frameworks for action that can truly change governance culture. This has been attempted in Germany, in Milan, in Flanders, and in many other places.

We can interpret these experiences through the lens of the trading zone—as opportunities to create spaces of exchange between what emerges from below and what is organised from above. The trading zone perspective tells us that innovation can begin from the encounter and clash between different values and conflicting objectives.

Many grassroots initiatives emerge from a refusal to engage with broad political discourse, due to a lack of trust in institutions. Instead, they focus on the space of everyday life—the home, the workplace, community centres—where real and tangible results can be achieved today.

Top-down initiatives, on the other hand, continue to produce plans that are weak in implementation. They fail to engage the active forces of society—forces that operate on their own, often because the political system no longer believes it has the capacity to act effectively.

From a trading zone perspective, we can open a phase of experimentation—a space where a new top-down meets a new bottom-up. These are impartial processes that allow for a different way of caring for the city to take shape.

Peter Galison, in explaining the trading zone, draws an analogy with the evolution of language among people who are forced—or simply find themselves—in situations where they must interact without sharing a common language. In order to communicate, they invent a simplified form of expression: a pidgin.

This *pidgin* allows basic communication. Over time, and through sustained interaction, it may develop into a richer, more elaborate Creole language—and eventually into a fully-formed shared language. But it all begins with that simplified, improvised code.

This is what we can expect from the encounter between:

- A new top-down approach, one that genuinely seeks to utilise the intelligence of society by opening up to interactive, experimental, and less pre-coded forms of planning; and
- A new bottom-up approach, one that transforms local innovations into broader processes of transformation, and that, by linking with institutions, can aspire to have generalised impact.

It is a pidgin phase—a preliminary but crucial stage of the journey—that may lead to the construction of a new language for the city.

In my teaching, I've tried to bring these ideas into my work in the Urban Policy Design Studio, where I've been teaching for many years.

In my teaching, we always tried to work on real problems, not on simulations. We invited actors and stakeholders to help prepare the brief and the assignment, and then invited them back to discuss the results. I also tried to place the link between theory and practice at the centre of the PhD programme in Spatial Planning and Urban Development, which I coordinated.

As for my publications—I once laid out all the books I've worked on, whether as author, co-author, editor, or co-editor. There are 25 in total. As you'll see, the earliest ones list only my name. All the later ones are the result of collaborative work and research.

Now, if you're still with me, I'll move on to the second part of my presentation—on responsibilities. If there was one idea that was clear to me during the confusion of youth, it was this:

You have to get out. You have to see what's happening in the world outside.

After earning my master's degree in architecture, I spent a period at CSU in Paris, with the *Centre de la Mod Présage* and its group, thanks to a small fellowship and the support of Pierluigi Crosta, who was a friend of theirs.

I stayed in Paris for a few months. I had prepared by studying French in advance—and, in fact, some of my first jobs came precisely because no one else in Italy at the time still spoke French fluently.

During my PhD, I was a visiting doctoral researcher at UC Berkeley, where I had the chance to discuss my work with Peter Hall, Judith Innes, Manuel Castells, and Melvin Webber. They were, as we say, "sacred monsters" of planning and policy analysis.

I remember Castells treated me like a grandson. Aaron Wildavsky invited me to lunch and began with a riddle to put me at ease—I almost choked. I mistook Eugene Bardach for his assistant, since in America

it's possible for a young professor to have a very senior research assistant. In Italy, such a thing would be unthinkable.

It was an important phase of my life. I was testing fragile ideas and trying to understand how a university like Berkeley—*a true temple of learning*—was organised.

There were welcome weeks, lunchtime and evening seminars at professors' homes. I was invited to Manuel Castells' house, to Alan Jacobs' gatherings. There were concerts at lunch, lectures open to the public, extraordinary sports facilities for relaxation. I was taking notes constantly, wondering how we could create the same at the Politecnico—my university—where I could see the elements for this kind of environment, but also a difficulty in the institution's ability to bring them together into a shared vision.

As soon as I became an associate professor, I went to my first AESOP Congress, in Lille, I think it was 1993. I was welcomed by Patsy Healey—the "mother of planning"—who invited me to join the Working Group on Planning Research.

I was thrilled by the exchange in those meetings and eager to learn as much as I could. Since then, I've been to every AESOP annual congress, and I've also been involved in the European Urban Research Association, which I helped to found.

I realised early on that not everything was perfect at conferences. But there were two things that, without fail, I would always take away from an AESOP congress.

First, an idea or suggestion I had never thought of before—something that emerged only by listening closely and with passion to the variety of sessions.

Second, a clearer sense of where I stood in the world—which issues mattered in other countries, and how my work fit into that borderless community of scholars working on cities and planning.

These are things one can only gain through active participation, not from passive attendance or by simply giving a paper and leaving, as many do.

After a few years, I was elected President of AESOP, and I tried to strengthen these two aspects—not only within AESOP but also in the other organisations in which I became involved. I believed strongly in trust, dialogue, exchange, and in the importance of crossing boundaries—because true knowledge often emerges from interaction.

In the Italian Society of Urban Planners (SIU), I first joined as the youngest board member and later became president. I convinced our more influential, older colleagues that it was no longer productive to gather at conferences just to listen to each other. We needed to follow the example of international scholarly societies that had long promoted open annual conferences, accessible to everyone and welcoming all contributions.

From 2001 to 2008, I served as Head of the Department of Architecture and Planning at the Politecnico di Milano—a difficult role in a large research institution with 150 professors and researchers.

I tried to follow the example of Willem Salet, a friend and colleague who had been AESOP president after me, and was then Head of Department in Amsterdam. When I visited him just after my appointment, he told me:

"Our job is to value every member of the department—even those farthest from our own views."

It's complicated, but if you succeed, everyone works better and contributes more. I tried to do exactly that—though not without difficulty.

We were transitioning from a vertical model—organised around individual "masters"—to a more horizontal school structure. And once again, confrontation and open dialogue were key.

I organised several major departmental conferences where architects, planners, historians, geographers, sociologists, and economists were invited to work together across disciplines. I also initiated the first experiment in external evaluation of our department's research—inviting scholars such as Patsy Healey and Patrick Le Galès (who is here today) to carry out our first peer review.

My experience as Vice-Rector of the Politecnico was a major adventure. While I was at MIT on sabbatical, the candidate for rector approached me and proposed that I become his Vice-Rector if he won the election. He was an engineer and a manager, and he wanted someone with a planning background by his side—to help implement a programme of major reforms at our university.

This was the group of people leading the university during the rector's mandate. Once I was appointed Vice-Rector, I was entrusted with many responsibilities:

- Internationalisation
- Social responsibility
- Campus sustainability
- The merger of the two architecture faculties
- The new Bovisa campus
- The relaunching of the Mantua campus

At that time, we still had two separate faculties of architecture.

Regarding internationalisation, I built a network of 15 regional delegates, each responsible for different parts of the world. They worked intensively, and their efforts were instrumental in strengthening the international reputation of the Politecnico di Milano.

I also helped manage a difficult but crucial transition: the shift to English-language instruction for all master's programmes in engineering, design, and architecture. The decision was made in 2010 and implemented two years later. I coordinated English language training for 400 professors, year after year.

On the front of social responsibility, I launched the Polisocial Programme, which aimed to put the expertise of the Politecnico at the service of society—particularly in contexts that could not afford consultancy. We mobilised the design skills of students and faculty, creating what we called *on-the-ground teaching activities*.

We also launched the Polisocial Award—an internal call for research projects with social impact. Over the years, we allocated more than half a million euros to these projects. The initiative gave rise to the "Off-Campus" centres—university hubs located in underprivileged areas like San Siro, Nosedo, and even within the San Vittore prison.

As for sustainability, we were one of the first universities in Italy to develop and implement a comprehensive sustainability plan—with visible, physical outcomes. One example: the square in front of the main Politecnico building, which was once dominated by car traffic, was transformed into a public space, open and active. It even became the site of student demonstrations about the housing crisis.

That square has since become an important space for the city.

The merger of the two faculties of architecture was, as expected, quite difficult—it's a typical academic challenge. But we succeeded.

On the development of the new Bovisa campus, which became the second urban hub of the Politecnico, I led long and complex negotiations with the Municipality of Milan to redefine an outdated agreement. In the end, I delivered the new framework into the hands of Renzo Piano, who designed a beautiful new section of both the university and the city.

As for Mantua, the external campus of the Politecnico, I wanted to give new impetus to its heritage-oriented architectural programme. I succeeded in securing the UNESCO Chair in Architectural Preservation and Planning in World Heritage Cities—a very significant result.

In short, many of the things I had seen and admired at Berkeley, MIT, Helsinki, Geneva, Rizhao, Shanghai, and other universities around the world—could be realised here. And we did, at least partially—and we continue to work toward them.

In 2015, my time as Vice-Rector came to an end because Giuliano Pisapia, the Mayor of Milan at the time, asked me to serve during the final year of his mandate as Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning, following the resignation of the previous deputy.

It was a difficult decision to leave the university, but I accepted—driven by the desire to test some of the ideas I had developed over the years about cities. It was another way of *reflecting with practice*. And it turned out to be a remarkable experience.

I tried to bring a bit of university style into City Hall. For example, I regularly invited colleagues to review what I was doing—thanks to the great trust the mayor placed in me. Together, we dealt with the immense number of challenges that a city like Milan faces.

It was also the year of Expo 2015—a particularly complex and intense period. Still, we managed to introduce meaningful innovations in city planning:

- Cooperation with surrounding municipalities, which is often completely absent,
- And a new approach to peripheral urban areas, including finding funding for development through innovative mechanisms.

After that, I returned home—enriched by the experience, and with new insights.

Back at the university, I was asked to take on the scientific direction of a new project on territorial fragilities. This project had won a Ministry of Education competition for “Departments of Excellence”.

The most important initiative I launched there was the creation of 16 three-year research grants for young scholars, all focused on territorial fragility. This gave strong impetus to a research field that has become increasingly relevant in recent years.

Over the past few years, I have also dedicated myself to the national research assessment process. I was responsible for the evaluation expert group for the entire area of architecture, and later became President of the Committee for the Selection of New Professors.

Independent evaluation is, in some ways, an unavoidable necessity for universities. It governs the allocation of public funding and encourages system-wide improvement. But evaluation criteria are always debatable, and one must be aware of the complexity of assessing thousands of institutions and hundreds of thousands of researchers.

There are real risks—distortions created by opportunistic adaptation to shifting rules. We are witnessing a proliferation of publications, especially in journals. Increasingly, quantity is valued over content.

Many researchers publish in English—but language alone does not grant international standing to a piece of work.

What truly matters is the ability to participate in an international scientific dialogue. Yet many of the products submitted for research evaluation today are not really research outputs. Bibliometric criteria, while not fully applicable in our field, are nonetheless being imposed.

In short—there is still a long way to go. Many are impatient, but instead of resisting evaluation altogether, we should work to improve the process.

Conclusion.

Looking back on this long academic journey, I can say: I’ve done many things. And as Forrest Gump says when he stops running:

“I’m a little tired.”

I’m convinced that in order to understand the city, and to intervene wisely, one must approach it from many different perspectives.

This is what I have always tried to do—in planning and design projects, in research on urban transformation, in political decision-making roles, and in theoretical reflection that always stemmed from direct involvement in real processes of change.

None of this was ever done alone. It has always been a collective endeavour. I have worked with large research groups that I helped organise, tackling the challenges we felt were most pressing—challenges we believed were worth confronting in order to improve the city and its territories.

I have never worked alone.

These were intense and exciting undertakings. Even in the most difficult situations, we acted with the belief that there is always a way forward. As John Forester once said:

"The task of planning is the organisation of hope."

I carried out this work while remaining within the university, committed to renewing its role in society. I did so out of the belief that today's complexity demands, more than ever before, an engaged form of scholarship.

I have, at times, been criticised for having too much policy enthusiasm, and for lacking critical distance. That may be true—I acknowledge that. But I have always been guided by one principle, expressed in a line I often quote and placed as the epigraph of this talk:

"Any idea that is not encouraging is probably wrong."

As a teacher, I do not believe in discouragement. As an educational strategy, I think that to encourage is an attitude that aligns closely with the spirit of design and planning.

There are different ways to encourage. My professor, Pierluigi Crosta, never told me something was right—but he always pointed out how to go further. That was his way.

Then there's my own way—the one I use with my students and PhD candidates: First, help them discover their talent. Then, encourage them to put their value to work. Many times, I've felt more like a parent than an academic mentor—and I must admit that, quite sincerely. From the perspective of age and long experience, when I look at the younger generation, I find myself wishing that they may live as I have tried to live: with a desire to improve themselves, while also improving the university as an institution.

So now, I really conclude.

This journey through the nexus of planning and democracy, practised through research, teaching, city-making, and academic life, suggests a reframing—both of planning *practice* and *theory*.

First, participatory planning should not be understood simply as the transfer of power to "the people", but rather as the creation of a shared space where planners, citizens, and institutions co-produce meaning and action. This vision resists both technocratic dominance and populist romanticism, and instead grounds planning as a situated, relational, and dialogic practice.

Second, conflict should not be feared or suppressed in planning. It is a generative force—a space for negotiation across difference, where plural values and interests become visible and politically productive. Rather than striving for premature consensus, planning should cultivate trading zones, where diverse forms of knowledge and legitimacy are brought into productive tension.

Third, planning is most powerful when it relinquishes control, operating instead as an enabling infrastructure—not prescribing outcomes, but facilitating collective intelligence and democratic agency.

This repositioning redefines the role of institutions—universities and local governments alike—as reflexive platforms for co-creation, learning, and experimentation across scales and sectors.

These insights carry real consequences for the future of both urban governance and academic engagement. Planning must adopt a more adaptive, inclusive, and proactive ethos—attuned to informal action, grassroots innovation, and situated knowledge.

Universities and research communities must act not as authorities, but as mediators—weaving together disciplines, practices, and publics. Evaluation, in this view, becomes a collective reflection on meaning, rather than an instrument of conformity.

Finally, cities do not emerge as static objects of policy. They are living laboratories of interdependence, where democratic transformation is always in motion—never fully captured, but always collectively negotiated.

Thank you for listening to these personal reflections.

Q&A:

Marco Cremaschi (moderator)

Thank you, Alessandro, for what we usually classify as an *inspiring speech*. But I don't want to understate the depth and importance of the thoughts Alessandro Balducci delivered this afternoon. Through the fiction of a personal journey, he led us to some deeply important reflections. At certain moments, I even wondered whether Alessandro was still talking about planning at all. Looking at my academic colleagues, I'd say this talk was profoundly political. As we say, it was about the role of democracy. You quoted John Forester, Alessandro—but you could have quoted yourself:

Planning is the organisation of hope.

There are real structural issues raised here. I want to highlight just a few points—then I'll leave the floor to Maria for her reaction. What we've just heard is, in my opinion, invaluable—not just for thinking about the future of planning, but about the society we live in today. Alessandro Balducci suggests that democracy is both our method and our goal. Political action is not something external to democracy—it must be done *through* democratic means. That's the first key point. The second, perhaps even more difficult to grasp, is his performative approach to action. It's about doing and learning while doing—as we sometimes discuss with students: *we begin by acting, and only then reflect*. Learning emerges from the process of action. What Alessandro adds to this is particularly compelling: not just "performative" in the theoretical or economic sense, but in what I would describe as an Aikido-like approach. He enters the field with intelligence, using resistance, constraints, and opposing forces as resources—not obstacles. It's a very specific kind of planning intelligence. And finally, I want to stress something else: Alessandro Balducci has delivered a reflection on his 50-year journey—a personal and political travelogue through the final decades of the 20th century and into the beginnings of the 21st. He did so in an extremely sober and humble way—but this is not an easy task. Over the past 50 years, democracy has changed radically. We have lived through moments of high expectations, but also moments of open failure and crisis. We are, in fact, living through one of the most difficult moments in the democratic trajectory of Western societies. We are confronted with multiple crises. And I believe that, in his oblique way, Alessandro Balducci has pointed toward some valuable directions. I am personally convinced that both planning and politics must be reframed in the spirit of what we've heard today. Let me conclude with a point that I'm not sure we are fully prepared to deal with—but that is equally important. Cities

and metropolises have changed over the last 50 years—just as democracy has changed. And if you'll allow me a small neologism, I would say that these changes are confusional in nature. Cities have become more ambiguous, more invisible—to use Alessandro's own term—but also more fusional. Many of the binary oppositions we once relied on—such as countryside versus city—no longer apply. These categories have lost clarity, and that opens up both possibilities and challenges. Take Paris, for example: once clearly defined within the boundaries of France's black-and-white urban model. Today, we are dealing with metropolitan regions, regional systems, and hybridised landscapes—with voids, interstitial spaces, and emergent opportunities. I believe all this forms the research agenda for the next 50 years in our field. I'm grateful to be here at midnight with AESOP—and with my dear friends from other, perhaps more 'valuable' disciplines. These are some of the concerns we must face as engaged social scientists in the years ahead.

Maria, I leave it to you to take over these reflections. Thank you.

Maria Hakansson (President of AESOP):

"Thank you, Alessandro, for your contribution—and for sharing these thoughts with us.

Let me say a few words as well. I'm speaking now partly in my role as commentator, but also as President of AESOP. Since this is being recorded, I wanted to make sure my voice is also part of the archive. First, thank you to Marco for inviting me, and of course, thank you to Alessandro. As you may have noticed, we've used first names here today—not titles. That's part of the AESOP culture—a reflection of the organisation's friendly, collegial spirit, and I think it's worth noting. For those who may not be familiar with it, AESOP is the Association of European Schools of Planning. Its core mission is to support planning education—but also planning research. The annual congresses are one of our most visible activities, but lectures like this one are also essential spaces where we can meet, reflect, and grow together. And then there is also another activity within AESOP called the Head of Schools meeting, which focuses particularly on teaching. For the younger people in the room—young academics—this could be an excellent opportunity to get involved. If you're interested in meeting others who are thinking about planning early in their careers—as Master's students, PhD candidates, or postdocs—this is a very useful network to join.

Now, coming back to the lecture—we must remember that this is not only the story about you, Alessandro. It's also a story about the development of planning itself. And that, I think, is very important. We all learn from hearing personal academic journeys like yours. These stories tell us not only about one person's reflections and interests, but also about how the field has evolved over time. It's tempting to think we're always at a turning point—that *now* is the moment of great rupture. But the world has always been in flux. And at the same time, many of the challenges remain remarkably persistent. That's why it's so important to remember what has been done before, to understand how people navigated the complexities of their time. There's a lot to learn from this kind of reflective storytelling—not only about society and planning, but also about how we build our own careers and develop ourselves professionally. From your talk, I noted several important themes—and I also have a few questions I'd like to ask you.

But first, I want to underscore the value of these personal stories. You spoke at length about interacting with society, and you've held many roles—something we've now clearly seen. You moved between positions: planner, politician, academic researcher, teacher, university administrator—and, I would add,

activist. At least, that's how it seems. You started from a point of social engagement and have always maintained that thread. This kind of multi-role experience is especially relevant in planning research, which is a deeply applied field. In many other academic disciplines, such transitions might even be discouraged—but in our field, they're not only common, they're often essential. And what's special in your case is not just that you've taken on different positions, but that you've done so in a highly reflective way. You've *lived* those perspectives—planner, policymaker, educator, activist—and used them to shape your academic voice. You said at the end of your talk that it's important to see from different perspectives. And I agree. Even planners who stay in the same city or region for years need to find new angles—new ways of looking. You have done this in a very concrete way, by taking on multiple roles throughout your career. So, I'd like to begin with a question:

If one of your students came to you asking for advice—wanting to learn how to *practise* seeing from different perspectives—what would you tell them? You mean, facing the kinds of difficulties that arise in planning practice, yes? I feel that what comes across from your talk—and also from many of your presentations at AESOP conferences over the years—is that your teaching philosophy encourages students to cultivate multiple perspectives. Even if one doesn't shift positions literally, it's important to practice that shift in thought, to develop the capacity to navigate complexity."

Alessandro Balducci:

The only thing I can say is that I'm deeply convinced of this. If you want to be good in practice—and by that, I mean effective in working on the transformation of the city's current conditions—then you must try to engage with the city in many different ways. This links directly to the idea of multiplying perspectives. That's essential for grasping the real nature of the situation you are dealing with. In my own career, this is exactly what I've tried to do. I've explored different dimensions, because the complexity—as Marco mentioned earlier—is enormous. If you think of the most recent book by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, they speak about the radical complexity of cities. Their argument is that if you learn to wear the 'glasses of the city', you can begin to understand something even deeper about the complexity of society. Given this context, I think it's crucial to approach problems with the aim not just to study, but to intervene. To do that well, you must explore different roles—placing yourself, even hypothetically, in the shoes of an activist, a researcher, or someone with institutional responsibility. This is how you engage with the complexity of design and of planning.

At the same time, of course, I acknowledge that the era in which I began was very different. Back then, we truly believed that planning could change society. Today, we are far more aware of the limitations of our scope. But paradoxically, those limitations make our role even more relevant, given the challenges of our time.

Maria Håkansson:

Yes—and I think that fits beautifully with your idea of planning as an enabling infrastructure. You mentioned earlier that participation is not merely about shifting power from one actor to another—it's about creating shared spaces. That insight is so important, especially in the teaching of planning. We need to encourage students to understand that they are not just informants or decision-

makers, but rather enablers—contributors to the creation of a broader infrastructure for collective knowledge and action.

One thing you touched upon, perhaps not with this exact word, is the role of academia. You described it beautifully: academia provides theories, but those theories are not just abstract—they are tools for practice. They help offer different perspectives. They help us understand what is happening.

Sometimes, even in our own academic communities, we talk a lot about the gap between theory and practice—as if it were too wide to bridge. But what your talk has shown, Alessandro, is just how interdependent theory and practice are in our field. Another crucial point is the importance of working together. Whether in research or in planning, the value of collaboration cannot be overstated. We need to equip our students with the tools to work together—and help them to not be afraid of it.

Yet we still face challenges. I smiled when you mentioned academic evaluation, because we continue to be assessed under paradigms that prioritise the idea of the strong individual researcher—someone who is expected to have a unique, personal output. And while that is valid to some extent, it overlooks the fact that even these 'top researchers' are often highly effective because they collaborate well, or because they build on others' work.

So, we need to acknowledge that research becomes much stronger through collaboration. We need to encourage this in students, and to model it in our teaching. In my university, I've noticed that planning and architecture students are often trained to work together much more than those in other disciplines. Still, we could do even more. Many students struggle with the question: *How much can I share without losing my own position?* But, sharing is, as you pointed out, essential.

You've also touched on the need for reflection—on oneself, on others, on practice. That, to me, seems central to your talk: different perspectives, openness, sharing, and reflecting as a human practice. It's not outdated; it's still vital.

And now we find ourselves at a point where democracy itself feels under threat. Values like openness and participation, which have long been central to planning, are once again being questioned.

Even though rationalist ideas still persist in our field, there's an opportunity here to do something new with planning. I deeply believe in your idea of planning as a transformative force—but of course, taking that step is difficult. History teaches us that we are often caught in repetition. So, how do we create that leap into something new? Do we move by many small steps, or do we need a big leap forward?

And what is the role of AESOP as an association in supporting this transformation—in teaching, research, and professional development?

Also, what should we, as individual planners and researchers, do first to move in that direction?

These are difficult questions. And I understand if there's no single answer. But I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Alessandro Balducci:

"Yes, it's true—these are hard questions. But I find the quote from Charles Lindblom very provocative:

We have explored the market in many ways—but we have not yet tried democracy. Only a distant approach to it.

And this applies very directly to planning. Even in the best cases, planning tends to reproduce a linear, rationalist logic. You're expected to promise a result, to follow prescribed steps. Yet we increasingly see that success lies in openness—in the ability to adapt, to navigate in multiple directions.

That's where a different model is needed—one that rethinks the relationship between theory, technical expertise, and political decision-making. Because much of this rigidity comes from the way politics is conceptualised.

But when viewed from the planner's perspective, it becomes clear. Let me give you an example: when we worked on the City of Cities strategic plan for the Province of Milan, we tried to take inspiration from the IBA Emscher Park project in Germany.

That project was a major regeneration effort in the Ruhrgebiet—an area polluted, abandoned, and deeply degraded. Instead of launching a traditional plan, they issued a series of short memoranda, inviting local actors to propose projects. Each project could then receive a label of participation in the overall regeneration process.

Over ten years, that method supported more than 150 projects, transforming the region's image.

We tried to apply a similar logic—launching a competition for good practices aimed at improving the habitability of the urban region. This approach relies less on prediction and control, and more on enabling collective intelligence. We gathered 450 proposals—from communities, expert groups, municipalities, universities, non-profit organisations.

Initially, this was conceived as just one step in the planning process. But the contributions were so rich that we should have been forced to completely change our approach. Instead, the structure didn't allow for that. We couldn't fully engage with these contributions in the way they deserved. And this is exactly what I mean when I talk about reconceiving planning. Whenever we experiment with a new top-down meeting a new bottom-up, we see there's real potential for a more effective direction. Marco said, in his usual emphatic way, that this could be a programme for the next years—but I think we already have evidence that this is the right direction for our field."

Marco Cremaschi:

If I may, I'd like to reinforce what Alessandro just said—and perhaps offer another angle.

First, regarding IBA Emscher Park: it was indeed a remarkable model of innovation in planning. But we must also remember that it was only possible because of a strong structural policy framework.

The region of North Rhine–Westphalia invested heavily—not only in planning innovation, but also in cleaning the river, restoring water quality, and reclaiming polluted land. This gave the project a foundation that made the innovative methods viable.

Second, concerning the *City of Cities* experience in Milan: The call for projects was a two-step process. Ideas were first submitted and selected based on political and technical criteria. Then, those that were

chosen were supported—they received guidance, were connected with other ideas, and became stronger through collaboration.

This approach illustrates the potential of a hybrid model—not purely top-down or bottom-up, but an iterative combination of the two.

Forgive the technical digression, but I think it's an important point.

Maria Håkansson:

Yes, and of course, one of the key challenges is that we also need the right people—brave individuals who can act even within existing systems.

Sometimes we don't need to change everything at once. It's more about changing habits and institutional cultures. And that takes courage—brave politicians, and also brave planners who recognise opportunities and seize them.

But the second challenge is: how do we make these examples stick? We have so many innovative case studies—but how do we turn them into new common practice? How do we learn from one another, and create not just one-off moments, but a new culture?

In Sweden, I just read a report about how officials and civil servants are becoming increasingly afraid to speak out—even on technical expertise. That's a danger to democracy too.

Still, as you say—we must continue. That's the message I take from you, Alessandro. We must keep trying new ways, practising differently, for the good of society.

Marco Cremaschi:

Thank you, Maria. We have a few minutes left. If there are questions or comments from the audience, we'll bring you the microphone. And for those online, feel free to send in your thoughts—we'll include them too. Alessandro, would you like to respond or shall we take questions?

Audience Member:

Yes, thank you. First, thank you for this insightful lecture. You mentioned several times that conflict can be a resource rather than an obstacle. I wonder—considering today's environmental protests and the radical contestation of policies around climate and land use—what is the main contribution of such environmental conflicts to current urban planning practices?

Alessandro Balducci:

"If I understood your question correctly—you're asking whether I would apply the same reflection to these radical environmental contestations?

Yes, I would.

In the past, we could take decisions without resistance. But now, every place defends itself—there's a sense of place-based agency. In many cases, these conflicts raise essential questions. If we don't

address them—if we simply treat them as a nuisance or dismiss them—then they can become only negative disruptions. But if there is trust—if we believe that each position contributes something valuable, then conflict becomes a way to engage. That is essential to our practice.

Let me return to an example mentioned this morning—about community gardens. You said two important things: First, that in Milan, these gardens are low-cost for the administration but still deliver real benefits—without triggering gentrification. Second, that recently the administration has stopped supporting this kind of initiative.

This is precisely the kind of bottom-up effort that should be nurtured through strategic support. These are the spaces where new planning languages are created.

This is really the core of what I've been discussing. If public actors recognise the value of self-organised initiatives—like community gardens that reduce costs, enhance green space access, and promote local responsibility—they should encourage imitation, scale them up, and help them become a reference model for others.

This is the way to merge top-down and bottom-up dynamics. Patsy Healey, in a paper I value deeply, argued that effective planning consists in identifying such episodes of innovation and helping them become formalised practices. She suggested that if these grassroots initiatives are acknowledged, supported, and allowed to travel—meaning to inspire and spread—they can change the culture of governance.

At the same time, planning itself must be seen as an episode, one that is consolidated through the act of fostering these exchanges.

This is a double-loop: Planning supports grassroots innovation and in doing so, it also redefines itself. This is exactly what the IBA Emscher Park aimed to do. They even proposed a landmark structure—something visible from afar—as a symbol of regeneration, to signal a change in process and invite imitation. It's not just symbolic; it's strategic."

Marco Cremaschi (reading a written comment):

"We've received a comment from Giovanni Pagano:

Conflict is what brings together institutions, politics, and society. He notes your reference to conflict as a generative force, and connects it to current scholarship on planning as an instituting practice—especially in light of Italian legal restrictions that may limit demonstrations and informal participatory mechanisms. So the question is: As a former Deputy Mayor, what is still lacking in local administrations that prevents them from embracing these generative conflicts?"

Alessandro Balducci:

"It's an excellent question. I think it links back to what I said earlier. We are still working with a very rigid conception of planning—one that is encoded in laws and administrative procedures. It insists that you must analyse, diagnose, and then move step-by-step in a pre-defined sequence.

But if we truly want to tap into the intelligence of society, we cannot pre-code our actions. We need an experimental attitude, one that is open to unexpected relations and exchanges, as in the

trading zone concept. We need examples—and we have some. For instance, Claudio Calvaresi's work with *Segnali di Futuro* has documented many grassroots initiatives in the Milan metropolitan area. The challenge is not only to know about these initiatives—but to develop the administrative capacity to include them meaningfully.

In the past, when we launched our first participatory processes, they were imitated widely. But unfortunately, as participation became mainstream, it was often emptied of substance. That's why we don't just need participation—we need good examples that stay connected to practice and power."

Andreas Sekai Kotos (from audience):

"I'm Andreas Sekai Kotos, working on regional development. I just want to say—conflict, as we discussed here, is essential for planning and development. Listening to your personal journey, Professor Balducci, reminded me of Andreas Faludi, who often connected European planning to individual responsibility and the evolution of the discipline. It's powerful to see how personal history becomes entwined with disciplinary development. Thank you again—it's an honour to have listened."

Marco Cremaschi:

"Thank you, Andreas. That was very thoughtful. And now, perhaps one last question?"

Unidentified speaker (possibly a colleague or organiser):

"Thank you, Alessandro. I must say, listening to you, I started wondering: *What am I doing with my life?* It's incredibly impressive what you've done.

Let me focus on three short but deep questions:

1. Obstacles: What have been the most persistent barriers—both institutionally and politically—that prevented you from going further in your work, either in Milan or more broadly?

2. Conceptual framing: You talk of merging top-down and bottom-up. But do we even need those categories anymore? Should we move beyond this binary altogether and create a new conceptual frame for collective action?

3. The future of planning: You didn't talk much about the private sector. But we are seeing the rise of private planning organisations—infrastructure firms, financial actors, consultancies—doing strategic planning at scale. So:

    - Does local public planning still make sense, or should we now be thinking about planning as multi-scalar, encompassing both public and private actors and should we rethink urban planning not as a discipline, but as part of a broader collective governance mechanism?"

Alessandro Balducci:

"Thank you very much. Regarding the obstacles, I see two main ones. The first obstacle is the *dominant conception of what planning is*, especially in political discourse and public opinion. The rational approach is still considered self-evident—even by those who have little understanding of

the complexity of planning situations. This means that when most people think of planning, they imagine a linear process:

- define the problem
- define the objective
- and then define the strategy to get there.

We need to rethink this logic.

The second obstacle is ourselves—our own belief that we can convince others we are right, that we hold the solution. Instead, we need to experiment openly, understanding the limitations of others' perspectives and conceptions of planning. This is what the trading zone idea helps us explore: Conflicting positions can, at the boundary, find ways to understand each other and move forward together. So these two obstacles—external and internal—must both be addressed."

About the private sector: yes, there's a lot of planning done by private actors, and it's substantial. But if we think in terms of a new meeting of top-down and bottom-up, we often find ourselves limited to peripheral or *trivial segments* of urban transformation.

Yet, cities now face challenges that are qualitatively different. Yesterday I heard that there are 5 million square metres of empty office space in Paris. Commercial malls are closing. The old urban formula—offices, malls, residences, some services—is crumbling. Housing remains viable, but even that—especially the kind of housing the private market produces—is not aligned with real needs. In Milan, there's a major debate now about housing as a deep social issue that the city itself must address. So, yes, the private sector is planning intensively, but it's not necessarily renewing the market effectively. And public actors are increasingly aware that simply *extracting benefits* from private-led projects is not working anymore."

I don't know if I have a full answer to your third question. So far, planning beyond the local level has been quite poor—metropolitan, regional, and national planning have often been absent or weak. But we have seen exceptions. For example, when the EU launched initiatives like Urban I in the 1990s, or more recently, Integrated Territorial Investments, they created *multi-level governance mechanisms* that had transformative potential. These forms of planning succeed because they foster coalitions across levels, blending bottom-up energy with top-down resources. This kind of coalition-building—across governance levels and actors—is perhaps the most promising direction forward."

Marco Cremaschi:

"Thank you, Alessandro. I confirm my belief that many of the themes discussed here will shape the agenda for the next 50 years. So we'll have plenty of time to revisit them.

We may have time for one final question before we close. Alessandro—thank you again. Your talk was fantastic and extremely rich—perhaps too rich! Thankfully, we recorded it (we hope!), and if the recording works, we'll all return to many of the points you raised.

Now, I have two final pressing questions for you:

Going back to the concept of trading zones—which you reworked so insightfully—What do we do when we encounter bad actors? Or more precisely, how do we navigate between the inclusiveness of trading zones and the unchecked power of majorities? Because in many democracies, the relationship between majorities and minorities is becoming increasingly unbalanced—especially when minorities are defined by ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status. The promise of democracy to balance *majority rule* with *minority protection* is failing.

How can planning—and planners—respond to this democratic shortcoming? Especially when our democratic systems seem less and less able to uphold the very values that planning has historically tried to support? And the point is that with *trading zones*, we can do very well — but we can also empower a logic that grants power to the majority of the population. And while that may seem good, it can also be detrimental to some people. Things can shift quickly, and for many reasons, turn against them. What we're witnessing in places that were once mildly democratic but are now turning authoritarian is precisely where planning performs at its worst. What was my first point.

The second relates to the transmission of knowledge. Unfortunately, I haven't read all of your texts, Alessandro, but I consider myself a careful reader of your work — from your impressive PhD thesis on *Firenze per l'Europa* to your more recent contributions on regional planning, materialization, and trading zones. You're undoubtedly a democratic scholar — Lindblom and Hirschman come to mind. But how do we transmit this legacy? Because, when I look at the average state of planning education — let's start with ourselves — I must say: we're not doing enough. At Politecnico and other institutions, we don't fully transmit this heritage. We transmitted "a bit", which was good some years ago, but today, we lack structured reflection and education around these ideas. This heritage is no longer present in our institutional practices. We lack democratic robustness in our education. And I'm not sure that what we've done so far — even when quoting important classical thinkers — is still sufficient.

So, the issue of *transmission*, I would say, is critical.

Alessandro Balducci:

Thank you very much. Those are wonderful and important questions. Your remarks remind me of something I studied many years ago, which may still be relevant. I recall a book by Jon Elster, translated into Italian as *Commentare e negoziare*, in which he compares the constitutional processes in the US and in France. He observes that during the American constitutional convention, some states wanted to preserve slavery — the "bad guys" you mentioned — while others wanted to abolish it. But since they were in a formal deliberative arena, they couldn't simply say, "We want slavery because it suits our interest." They had to formulate their arguments in publicly acceptable terms — such as, "If we abolish slavery, the economy will collapse." This, Elster called *the civilising force of hypocrisy*.

Today, we see the opposite. The president of Poland recently burned the European flag — so this civilising force of institutional constraint seems to be diminishing. But I believe that formalising the arenas in which conflicts unfold can still compel actors to justify themselves publicly — and in doing so, catalyse deliberation and transformation.

I recall my first participatory processes. On one side were people who wanted to build, on the other, those who wanted to preserve the environment. Within a formalised arena, each had to explain themselves — to make their views acceptable to others. And that process set things in motion.

As for your second point: the concept of *trading zones* is closely related to *boundary objects*, as theorised by Susan Leigh Star. In a 1999 article, she describes the creation of a vertebrate museum in

Berkeley in the early 20th century. The idea was supported by hunters, preservationists, the university, and the local administration — all with conflicting interests. But the museum became a shared object that served each of their marginal goals. For example, hunters wanted a list of animals to be hunted; preservationists wanted to protect certain species. The museum, as a boundary object, facilitated that coexistence.

So yes — you've raised a critical point: how do we connect this concept of boundary work to the idea of formalised arenas? It's a much more complex question than my brief answer can capture, but this is the line of reflection I would pursue further.

Marco Cremaschi:

Thank you, Alessandro. On this optimistic note, I think we can now close our session.

Maria Håkansson:

Thank you all — and especially Alessandro. I feel honoured that you concluded the session with us. And thank you again, everyone, for this collaboration. It truly was *food for collaboration*.

See you next time.