



*It is high time for
Europeans to return to
their time-tested models of
urbanism*

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*É mais que tempo de os
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seus modelos de urbanismo
comprovados pelo tempo*

Stefanos Polyzoides

Climate change is caused primarily by random urban development. European political and architectural elites have not yet come to grips with the negative effects of the post-war urban growth of continental cities based on the bankrupt ideas of CIAM Urbanism. This auto-oriented *Slaburbia*, as the Swedes are fond of calling it, is still marching along triumphantly in almost every country. Consuming urban, suburban and exurban land with highways, fragmentary subdivisions and random, oversized architectural projects that entirely deny the millennial European model of place-specific urban development in favor of an urbanism

of nowhere. The social, economic and environmental consequences of this fateful design choice have been, and continue to be, catastrophic.

Few architects have been willing to pin the responsibility for class segregation, economic and fiscal decline and global warming on their country's bankrupt model of urban growth. Ettore Mazzola, an architect/urbanist based in Rome, is a notable example of a voice that has dared speak out. He has dedicated his practice and his teaching at the University of Notre Dame program in Rome to exposing the failure of the hermetic, mega-structural housing projects of the late 20th century, and to charting a design alternative to them. His recent book *Urban Regeneration* documents his opposition to the process that promoted these abhorrent modernist nightmares. It exposes the confluence of top-down state planning, precedent-free, tech-based design, state-imposed social policy and industrial-scale production that continue to make them possible. Finally, he proposes an alternative, evidence-based method for approaching the design of cities and illustrates it with two counterprojects, for the Corviale in Rome and for the ZEN in Palermo.

While the musings of the first part of the book do not amount to a coherent theory of urban regeneration, his two projects are a brilliant illustration of the merits of a new, place-based traditional architecture and urbanism. Mazzola advocates a return to the design of housing as a prominent ingredient of use-integrated, human-scaled, walkable, compact, diverse and permanent cities. Solidly based on both Italian pre-modernist precedents and recent American new urbanist theories, his urban development strategy is especially relevant and notable in the European context. In large part, because of the ideological clarity and the design character and quality of his work. The two projects follow a bottom-up design process that is community-generated and community-run. Their implementation is to be incremental, based on precise financial calculations and private-public partnerships. They are to be realized through an open-

ended, phased development process of twenty-plus years, that involves the contributions of many developers and their architects.

Their form is unique and particular by virtue of the climate and culture specificity of their design. No details go unaddressed: The typology and network of streets, the aggregate figure of public and private space, the choice and distribution of many traditional housing types, the appropriate location and special architecture of civic and religious monuments. The final urban form of the new Corviale and ZEN are radically different from what current Italian and European conventional practice would produce. They propose not only a new kind of place for generous living, but a return to a society in peace with itself, in better balance with nature, with a local cooperative economy and a civic realm that inspires participation in forging the common good. The drawings are comprehensive and beautiful.

It is high time that we start thinking about the rebuilding of European cities along these lines.

Ettore Maria Mazzola
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