

The scientific journal VALORI E VALUTAZIONI is one of the promoters of the International Conference on “Designing Quality into Cities of the Future – new approaches to the evaluation of planning and design” that will be held in Florence in 2019.

The international sponsoring committee consists of the following scientific journals, universities, research centres and organizations:

- *Valori e Valutazioni (Italy);*
- *Building Research and Information (BRI);*
- *ENEA (National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development) (Italy);*
- *DIDA (Department of Architecture of the University of Florence) (Italy);*
- *IOER (Leibniz-Institut für Ecologische Raumentwicklung of Dresden) (Germany);*
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- *Eclipse Research Consultants (Great Britain);*
- *Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias of Lisbon (Portugal).*

The sponsoring committee has the ambition to start a series of initiatives during 2017-2018 aimed to understand, analyse, and debate the present problems related to the design and implementation of complex architectural projects and urban plans with the understanding that their decision making processes requires a deep change. According to the results of this stage, a possible agenda of the international conference to be held in spring 2019 will be defined. At the same time, the sponsoring committee is also launching an international consultation among individuals and organizations (academic and professional) interested in the theoretical and operational research of evaluation as well as in the development of evaluation tools and techniques in order to stimulate a fruitful debate and to direct a qualified participation in the Conference to be held in Spring 2019.

In order to foster a debate on these themes and guide the Italian contributors toward a high-quality participation, the scientific journal Valori e Valutazioni proposes to its readers the following document.

Problem Statement

Urban transformation is a complex process in which urban planning and architectural projects form the arena for interplay between different interests, public and private, environmental, economic and social over both short and long term time periods. Decision-makers and experts are confronted by multiple variables, in perceptions of individuals, needs, demands and value systems. The complexities in the conception, design and implementation process of urban plans and architectural projects engaging a range of different decision-makers (architects, planners, engineers, investors, users, etc.) is very unpredictable and this can often result in unintended negative consequences for the social structure and environment of cities. Participation in both plans and projects has been seen, at least in part, as a solution to the issues surrounding increasing complexity. However, the widespread range of values among urban actors, the decreasing power of public interest in favour of individual or partisan interests, calls into question the credibility of the decision-making process and the anticipated results of projects and plans. Therefore local politics is itself failing to deliver effective strategic decisions when faced with globalisation, market conditions and local individualism.

Starting an exchange of thoughts and experiences

In this context, due to the expanding task of project and plan evaluation (see: COP21 21st Conference of Parties and the objectives of EU 2050 Energy strategy), an international conference is required in order to:

- *explore urban decision-making processes in the light of the above stated problems;*
- *understand the ability of evaluation to manage complexity and uncertainties of decision-making and deliver better quality outcomes in the many different dimensions (e.g.: economic, social and cultural, ecological and urban design);*
- *explore of the concept of quality in terms of a fusion of parametrised and non-parametrised dimensions of Human Development (economic, social, cultural, ecological, political and spiritual) in relation to a variety of*

perceptions of the wide range of stakeholders involved in urban (re)development;
 – *track the range of values, the dynamics of actors' points of view and variety of preferences in the evaluation process.*

Six core Conference Questions are proposed for debate on the development of evaluation practice:

- 1. How to manage the issues surrounding equity in the evaluation process and mitigate the imbalance of power among the various actors involved in or affected by the project and its outcomes?*
- 2. How to foster effective participation of civil society (especially of the weakest or marginalised voices) in decision-making mediating between bottom-up and top-down approaches?*
- 3. How to manage and evaluate the wide range of risks (environmental, socio-cultural, economic, political and innovation-related) over time and at different levels (Global, regional risks, local, personal risks) and of their interdependences (common risks, joined responses) in order to minimise unanticipated consequences?*
- 4. How to define the role and position of the evaluator (active/passive and/or internal/external) within architectural and urban projects, to manage risk of bias, as well as ensuring timeliness of the various evaluations in the overall development process?*
- 5. How to manage the complexity of the problem situation whilst at same time promote the "utility" of evaluation as a means to improve the quality of the architectural and urban project (its outcomes and the process itself)?*
- 6. How to improve the utility and the quality of communication, consultation, participation and understanding of the outcomes of evaluation in the creative process, project*

approval and direction; as a basic precondition for the quality of learning empowerment and social participation processes and for more constructive outcomes?

The consultation is to be managed primarily but not exclusively through structured interviews. To explore the issues outlined above and to help shape the agenda of the proposed conference, we ask the following questions to people interested in the evaluation of architectural and urban projects and urban planning:

- 1. Do you recognise the need for fundamental change in the way urban transformation is conceived, designed, managed, funded and delivered - as explored above?*
- 2. What do you see as the current failings in one or more of these dimensions of decision-making for urban change, i.e. as outlined in the six core conference questions above?*
- 3. Are there other issues, barriers or features of the problem that are overlooked or that you find lacking in the discussion paper and questions above?*
- 4. Would you be interested to contribute to workshops and/or the conference and if so which topics are you most interested in?*

NB. Participation and contribution to the Conference may include:

- Replying to the six questions and propose an article to Valori e Valutazioni editorial board and, once it passes the usual quality screening (double-blind peer review), it may be published.
- Replying to the four orders of questions illustrated above, and contact the member responsible.

Valori e Valutazioni editorial board

(for more information please contact Marta Berni, marta.berni@unifi.it)