The new building cycle

The immense stock collected in the recent building cycles in our country has threatened to become a restriction and brake for the development, rather than an added value and opportunity. The perception of this situation, both by academic specialists and operators, has grown during the recent system crisis that we have been through and from which, at least in our country, a reliable way out has not yet been found.

The most accredited analysts and scholars are inclined to attribute this crisis, in addition to the exasperated process of valorisation of the financial aspects in the building industry, which caused the first “real-estate bubble” at the origin of the global crisis of 2008, to the “growth without quality” in the decades of an uninterrupted construction boom. As we know, a role that was both crucial and technologically marginal in the national development model was conferred to the building industry - a role that was, moreover, strongly assumed by the sector - starting from the period of post-war Reconstruction: a high moment of social and cultural experimentation, which in that phase gave answers to the great migrations from the countryside to the city, but also gave the final go-ahead to the development of the “city soup” (citation from Calvino) in the urban and rural suburbs of the country. Now, that enormous accumulation which has multiplied over and over again in little more than half a century the building stock made available by the settlement process of all the previous centuries, presents its bill.

All, and all together, the main unresolved nodes of contemporary development seem to be concentrated in and on the national building and infrastructural heritage:

• the faith in the indestructible durability and reliability of reinforced
concrete has been very recently compromised in a presumably definitive way;

- we are now certain that, among all the factors that contribute to fuelling climate-changing emissions, the greatest absolute responsibility must be attributed to that heritage;
- we have verified that this way of building not only has not increased safety and stability in a territory mostly at high seismic risk; but it has reduced it to a point that today is no longer socially acceptable.

The bet for the future is therefore played on the requalification/regeneration of this heritage - which also includes the most consolidated historical values, but above all the contemporary peripheries and will absorb the vast majority of the investments expected in the medium term. It all depends on the way in which the transition towards new qualities of the existing building stock will be managed, to which only relatively modest incremental quantities can be added in the medium term. This is not a predicted conclusion, due to the inertia of actions that in the past have guaranteed exponential growth and advantages distributed over a complex and articulated supply chain. The game that is being played in recent months on the measure known as “unblock construction sites” explains so much about the fascination that still exerts the idea of returning, after the “abnormal” wave, to the use of methods and products that in the past have guaranteed rents and certainties seemingly indestructible. The path towards a new paradigm, which for the moment has proved to be rather rough, has the strength of empirical evidence on its side, and a much better oriented European horizon than the national one. A technical-scientific team like ours, if capable of formulating plausible proposals, can certainly constitute an added value in this crucial challenge.

Antonello Sanna
Editor