Power relationships, citizens participation and persistence of rational paradigm in spatial planning: the Tuscan experience

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ABSTRACT

Since 2005, several reforms in the spatial planning legal framework have taken place in Italy and in some contexts, such as in Tuscany, the joint action of a spatial planning act and a law on citizen participation has established a planning model which is open, collaborative and communicative. Nevertheless, we can observe a re-emergence of a rational comprehensive attitude to spatial planning, useful for a strict top-down control, which limits the possibility to insert measures to rebalance power relations in a normative planning system.
Observing some practical experiences of spatial planning and citizen participation, the article tries to reflect on the different reasons that encourage planners and policy-makers to constantly revert to technical rationality as a supposed ethical guarantee or as a power management tool. In the conclusions it proposes some considerations regarding the connection between rationality, power and social control and concerning a possible regulatory side in a counter-hegemonic planning framework.

INTRODUCTION

The unresolved relationship between a rational and procedural approach to spatial planning and a deliberative participative attitude has been frequently under observation by planning scholars. The shift from a rigid technocratic attitude to a collaborative and deliberative method has been advocated as one of the central conditions for the opening-up of a strongly centralized power management structure, where power is always held by traditional institutions (Forester, 1989; Healey, 1997; Hillier, 2002; 2014), towards a planning framework directed to an open community and to the production of a city of citizenry (Borja, 2003) based on a process of space commoning (Stavrides, 2014). This shift has been seen as unavoidable by those who think it is essential to implement redistributive policies to obtain a counter-hegemonic style of planning (Albrechts, 2015), where direct participation of

inhabitants in the making of planning choices is a key element in rebalancing power relations (Healey, 2003).

This text takes advantage of a process to evaluate the enforcement of an innovative law regarding 'rules on the promotion of participation in the formulation of regional and local policies' approved in Tuscany in 2007 (Regional Law no.69/07 then substituted by Regional Law no.46/13). The law is explicitly designed to open the decisions on public policies to wide and comprehensive citizen participation (Lewanski, 2013; Zetti, 2011; 2012) and the article uses the specific relationship between citizen participation and the decision-making process in significant spatial planning choices to reflect on the resistance of a technocratic attitude in spatial planning against a new planning system reformed according to a strategic (Albrechts, 2013; Albrechts and Balducci, 2013; Mäntysalo, Kangasoja and Kanninen, 2015) and deliberative framework (Beaumont and Nichols, 2008; Silver, Scott and Kazepov, 2010). The Tuscan context is particularly favourable to this discussion because the local system of spatial planning is formally shaped according to a very progressive and participative model and it has a long and legally-framed history.

To theoretically assess the functionality of a rigid rational-comprehensive and deductive paradigm we take as a basis the criticism of ideas developed by Edgar Morin in his works on the method of human inquiry and especially in his work concerning the life of ideas (Morin, 1991). This appears useful when we observe an experience of statutory planning where procedures are part of a supposed progressive model. We assume that collaborative processes require the levelling of power relations (Healey, 2003, see also Habermas 1971/2001) and we discuss how the normative approach to spatial planning contains a sort of antibody that guarantees the invariance of the cultural structure of governance and organization (Morin, 1991) and produces a form of spatial and procedural injustice.

Finally the article reflects on a possible implicit contradiction between a radical alternative approach to planning that Albrechts defines as 'coproduction' (Albrechts, 2015) and a dominant organization of planning knowledge that is used by political power to keep strategic decisions under control outside the political debate.

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF A RATIONAL-COMPREHENSIVE PARADIGM IN PLANNING

Different Theoretical Approaches

In the history of planning the many shifts between different theoretical approaches have not eliminated the original idea that planners are public operators who work with a progressive attitude and with the final goal to produce and protect public goods, whatever this last expression might mean (Alexander, 2017; Faludi, 1996;

Friedmann, 1987). Their duty is to coordinate actions and to make a choice leading towards the goal of public interest and this 'choice is always exercised with respect to a limited, approximate, simplified, "model" of the real situation' (March and Simon, 1958, 138, quoted in Faludi, 1996, 71). This simplified model implies a dependence of planning on a formalized methodology and, apart from a few differences, a parallel between scientists and planners.

Throughout a relevant and pregnant phase of the planning discipline's development this correspondence has positioned planning in the domain of scientific knowledge (of exact sciences), where a rational attitude to the interpretation of reality is strictly needed. Even considering the positive aspects of this phase in limiting the completely uncontrolled action of local interests, nevertheless, the rational-comprehensive attitude, becoming in time a model, was gradually subjected to an increasing number of criticisms, starting from different theoretical approaches and from the evidence of failure in planning practice and results. In a well-known debate the starting points of a real paradigm shift have been the many questions regarding the limits of rationality and the impossibility of an objective definition for the collective well-being (Forester, 1989; Healey, 1997; Lindblom, 1959; Simon, 1955). We can easily identify in this debate the impact of Arrow's idea of the impossibility of stable collective preferences (the third fairness criterion - Arrow, 1951) and Lindblom's idea about the development of planning solutions in a situation of partial knowledge (Lindblom, 1959). In particular Arrow's impossibility theorem denies planners one of the main preconditions for their work: the possibility to identify the general interest univocally. At the same time, the growth in the awareness of the complexity of urban and territorial studies clearly has revealed the impossible mission of controlling all the technical, but even more the social, aspects of planning.

Those criticisms have led to several evolutions in planning models and in some cases also to re-framing legal and procedural practices in the control of spatial planning. The issue of a strategic attitude (Healey et. al, 1997), direct involvement of citizens in the decision making processes and their empowerment (Friedmann, 1992), the concept of coproduction (Albrechts, 2013), and a radical approach (Sandercock, 1998), are all proposals and experimentations devoted to the problem. On the contrary, in many cases rationality and the scientific method are repressive tools (Kamete, 2009; Yiftachel, 1998) and are subordinated to some form of unequal power, but their re-emergence can not be explained simply with the recurrent conflict for power in urban space and calls for an attempt to understand why and how spatial planning practice is so drawn to that attitude.

Objective Knowledge?

According to Morin objective knowledge, in general terms, concerns the specific properties of objects, is pertinent to facts, relational, contextual and can be predictive. But scientific objectivity, which needs to be distinguished from objective knowledge, has a different status: it depends not only on a strict and systematic control of data and of how the data verify the hypothesis, but on a relationship between scientific theory and factuality. In this sense scientific objectivity has had the need to produce its own praxis, memory and community (Morin, 1991).

Objectivity does not mean the truth (Morin, 1986) and in effect several objective scientific theories were false and mistaken, but implies a strict organization of a model of understanding or, better put, imply an explanation of reality based on formalisation (use of a language where symbols have a predefined meaning); reduction (partition of complex phenomena into smaller and simplified components) and disjunction (separation of different entities in a classification). These three pillars of scientific thinking derive from the classical logic born in ancient Greece, but in the classical logic, which has an ontological character, the two main working instruments, i.e. deduction and induction, had an uninterrupted linkage and deduction was strongly based on a substantial consequence of the observation of reality linked with an universal premise (Morin, 1991). In the modern era deduction has become the implementation of a calculation rule, the use of a general law in a peculiar case, something formal and computational. This implies the idea that a formalized language can coincide with reality and that a local reality, that is absolutely complex, can be precisely read through reduction and disjunction. In a certain sense, and thinking of the tools physical planning works with, this implies the idea that the map is the territory (as written in many reflections after a paper by Alfred Korzybski, 1933) and that complexity must be reduced to simple phenomena to be described trough sequential thinking.

During the second half of the twentieth century, also in the field of exact science, the reductionist attitude toward complexity, that can be certainly defined as a paradigm (following the well known definition of paradigm by Kuhn, 1962), was fractured precisely in the field of formalisation by the theorem of Kurt Gödel (1931) and in the idea of reduction by the work of René Thom (1968) and more generally by the study of ecosystems (Morin, 1980). In the domain of planning, the already quoted criticisms and the work of incrementalists, progressive and radical planners, has produced a significant shift in the theory and in many practices. Although the debate regarding the need of a new planning attitude did not lead to one single precise model we can assume that a consolidated set of theories have drastically criticized the technocratic approach. Evidently, in this cultural context, its never ending reappearance cannot

simply be explained as a path dependence of the discipline on its past, but requires an explanation that can relate to three main points.

First, the natural resistance of a system of ideas. According with Morin, ideas always live in a system that can be explained using the model of cells and that, like cells, has an immunological system. New theories can modify some of the system's internal variables, but not its boundaries, not the nucleus which defines it. So an idea can change, but a system of ideas resists to criticism, tends to eliminate everything that can break its unity, is auto-centric and auto-dox (Morin, 1991).

Second, procedures are perceived as a guarantee. In the planning choices the physicality of planning decisions implies that bodies, feelings and emotions participate in the opposition to some decision and this reveals how spatial planning is not simply a technique, but can be the subject of the linkage 'between political/social control and spatial ordering' at least from the time of ancient Greece (Mazza, 2009, 125) and how planners are actors of a political judgement. Considering 'that spatial control is functional to social control' (Mazza, 2009, 133) we can understand how planners are loaded by ethical commitments and consequently how practitioners need to legitimate themselves through some preconditions such as neutrality and a bias-free behaviour. Technical and procedural rationality in planning practice are useful to planners because they give them the possibility to feel secure and to present themselves as ethical and disinterested defenders of the common good (Lennon, 2014; Lennon and Fox-Rogers, 2017).

Third, 'experts sometimes appeal to the scientific method in order to mask tyranny' (Kamete, 2009, 89). Oren Yiftachel has devoted several studies to open the way for a deep analysis of what he has called the dark side of planning. He has re-conceptualized 'planning as an integral arm of the nation-state apparatus which tends to advance two parallel goals: economic growth and ethno-national identity', where planning itself 'provides an important mechanism of oppression and control' (Yiftachel, 1998, 395, see also Flyvbjerg, 1996; 1998; Harvey, 1973; Marcuse, 1978; Yiftachel, 2001). According with the interpretation of power relations developed by Michel Foucault and his followers, planning becomes an instrument to develop state control, primarily over minorities and more generally over society as a whole, excepting elites. An instrument to maintain the present social order (Albrechts, 2015; Beaumont and Nicholls, 2008).

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: PLANNING, CONFLICT AND TECHNICAL RATIONALITY IN ACTION

In the context described in this text the legal framework pays specific attention to set an aggregative planning system with a participative attitude, where conflict is

anticipated and reduced by a previous agreement over a shared concern, forcing the aggregative model towards a sort of not completely established, but adequate, agonistic model (Mouffe, 2013). Nevertheless, the participatory processes described below, connected with spatial planning decisions and conflicts, show how technical rationality can been used to narrow the participative arena inside boundaries that have made the collective decision scarcely relevant.

Spatial Planning and Participation, the Context of the Tuscan (Legal) Planning Framework

From the mid Nineties, in Italy, several regional governments have produced a series of normative acts regarding land use planning under the aegis of an old (1942) national law and some of them are strongly innovative. This re-framing of the planning system was a consequence of a strong criticism of the rational-comprehensive style of planning that in Italy had begun in the Eighties, following the evident failure of many planning experiences and the international debate regarding the limits of rationality. In the emergent vision of the Nineties the territory plays a contradictory role. On the one hand, it is the stage on which to implement concerted actions between political parties and powerful stakeholders, while on the other, it is the context where the physical spatiality of planning has a tangible output in the (re)distribution of social justice/injustice.

Citizen participation, in this framework, has evolved from information sharing in the rational-comprehensive planning model, to a tool for the definition of concerted action. In the present phase of experimentation (at least in the Tuscan planning system), the participative activity in the development of spatial plans is compulsory (as established by an article of the planning act) and, according to regulation, must be wide and inclusive. We can not say this imply a precise model for citizen involvement in planning, but we can assume that the recent evolution of the Tuscan planning system can, in some case, became a strategy for inserting a deliberative democracy practice in the previously established aggregative (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010) planning system (Bortolotti and Corsi, 2012; Floridia, 2013; 2017; Steiner, 2012). In fact the current Tuscan planning act (regional law no. 65/14), is based on a planning model strongly framed around a strategic attitude, where local communities are called to participate in the building of a common vision of future scenarios and this can create the condition for a deliberative setting (Lewanski, 2013; Trettel, 2015). This spatial planning scenario must contain a formulation of the rights and duties of administrators, planners and inhabitants towards the territory, the landscape and towards future generations. A document that implies a collective agreement of the local community and that is the subject of a democratic choice (Magnaghi, 2010; Morisi and Magnier, 2003).

How to rule citizens' participation and what procedural and substantive instruments can planners advantageously use in the interaction with local communities, is again part of the official planning model because of the previously mentioned normative act concerning participation, which gives to various subjects several options to promote a participatory process, supported with public funding and assisted by an independent authority, the Regional Authority for Participation (Floridia, 2008; 2012).

The 'rules on the promotion of participation' (Regional Law no.69/07) were experimented in a first pilot stage for five years and then slightly modified and partially reinforced (Regional Law no.46/13). In this framework the Tuscan experience has frequently been under observation as an interesting opportunity to study the relationship between theoretical approaches to policies and concrete practices (Bussu and Bartels, 2014; Carson and Lewanski, 2008; Floridia, 2008). At a more general level, the dialogue between representative and deliberative democracy (Beaumont and Nichols, 2008; Silver, Scott and Kazepov, 2010) and the effectiveness of a deliberative democracy theory (Steiner, 2012) have often been the centre of a significant debate.

The case studies observed show the re-emergence of a rational-comprehensive attitude that needs to be analysed especially because it appears within a spatial planning system supposedly characterized by a balanced distribution of power. They propose at least three categories of questions about rational and procedural approach in spatial planning. Questioning whether rationality is:

- the never-ending procedural dimension of normative planning (Mäntysalo, Kangasoja and Kanninen 2015; Yiftachel, 1998)?

- A peculiarity inherent in the spatial planning system sometimes fought by planners, sometimes used as a power relations management tool?

- A tool to 'facilitate elite domination and control of the four key societal resources: space, power, wealth and identity' (Yiftachel, 1998, 403)?

Notes on the Method

The case studies that are the basis of this work are part of a research activity conducted in order to evaluate the impact of the RL 69/07 ('rules on the promotion of participation') in planning policies (Zetti, 2011; 2012). This evaluation started as an independent project of the author inside the Regional Institute for Economic Planning of Tuscany (IRPET), but its final stage was commissioned by the Regional Government as part of the official evaluation process of the impact of the law.

The first step of the research implied the definition of a framework to catalogue seventy-two local planning processes, which at that moment meant the entire set of local processes concluded. The question at the centre was a spatial planning issues in

35% of cases, followed by local administration budget decisions in 23% of cases, environmental problems in 10% of cases, etc. and in all the participatory processes the conflictual and contested decisions were always related to spatial planning. Evidently physicality and spatiality are two elements that dramatize planning and exclude the use of compensatory measures.

In a second step of the research, the one specifically directed to investigate if and how the decisions taken or the proposals emerged during the participative activities have been implemented, the work was based on the analysis of official documents produced during the participatory processes, followed by analysis of the specific websites dedicated to the processes and by structured interviews with key actors selected to collect comments concerning problems, obstacles and opportunities, some time after the decisions, from a distant and possibly meditated point of view.

A Pyro-gasification Plant, a water Purifier and a new waterfront. Technical Rationality Vs a Shared Decision-making Process

From the many local participatory projects analysed in the research, here we select three stories. The first two are described one in relation to the other and highlighting exactly how the political power can use technical rationality to justify predefined decisions or, at the opposite, to virtuously manage wicked problems (this expression is used with the exact same meaning as Rittel and Webber, 1973). The third shows how procedural rationality can strongly narrow down the path for a bottom-up and open decision-making process.

Industrial production and waste disposal. An experimental pyro-gasifier

Castelfranco di Sotto is a small Municipality in the north-west of Tuscany where, in 2010, a private enterprise proposed building an innovative and experimental pyro-gasifier, designed to burn the waste of the leather production process.

Castelfranco is at the centre of a relevant production area with more than 500 small and medium enterprises and where leather is the main engine of the local economy, but also the source of pollution. In the past the question was not on the forefront of the political agenda, but from the Eighties onwards the search for solutions to maintain the production while safeguarding environment and health started to be discussed. In this context the private company Waste Recycling has proposed to build a pyro-gasifier of small dimension, sized to treat the waste of the company, as well as a small additional quantity (twelve thousand tonnes per year in total).

Probably to a greater extent than elsewhere, in Tuscany the building of a waste treatment plant is frequently contested and this has happened in Castelfranco too,

where a group of citizens, gathered in a committee, decided to oppose the proposal owing to concerns for their health. Local politicians, especially of the opposition, took the opportunity to force the debate inside and outside the elected assemblies in order to gain some advantage, but an important role was played also by the division of the majority party (the Democratic party) which was governing contemporarily Region, Province and Municipality, but with different allies. In this context the Regional Authority for Participation agreed to finance the participatory process requested by the Municipality with the involvement of Waste Recycling and the Provincial Administration, which is one of the relevant public bodies providing the proper authorisation for this kind of industrial plant. The intentions of some of the players were clear. The Municipality was interested in a mediatory process helping to make the decision regarding the building permission for the plant not against or ignoring citizens, but inside a deliberative process. Waste Recycling supported its proposal not only in the perspective of solving the problem of waste, but also trying to experiment an innovative technology to be, potentially, replicated and for those reasons even accepted to co-fund the participatory process. The Provincial Administration and the Agencies for Public Health and for Environment Protection accepted to suspend the procedure for the required authorisations until the end of the participatory process and to take part in it. The local committee was proposing to solve the problem of waste through separation and composting and small rubbish dumps for the remaining fraction, with the purpose of avoiding the building of a new treatment plant (a position that changed during the process due to a deeper understanding of the problem). Some players were absent during the process, but they have been at least as relevant as much as those present. Above all the Regional Administration, which was openly in favour of the plant; representatives of industrial activities that never took position; trade unions, which supposedly would have to worry about safeguarding the production without damaging environment and public health.

The process itself was very interesting, but not free from problems. The professional mediators that managed the activities proposed to organize it as a programme of negotiation using the consensus building method, but following the Regional Authority indications they had to reach an agreement in order to adopt the instrument of the citizens jury, probably not the more appropriate solution in an already conflictual context. A guarantee committee supervised the process. It was composed by fifteen people selected after self-nomination with only four representatives of the local institutions. Considering the composition, more than a supervisor committee it was an arena for debate, with its members confronting themselves from strong ideological positions. The jury was composed of fifty persons selected thanks to a telephone survey (Pillon and Romano, 2013). The mediators provided a big set of

precise information regarding the plant, but also the question of waste treatment in general and the situation of the area in terms of waste production and disposal, then the guarantee committee and the jury had the possibility to discuss deeply the topic for three months. The activity of the mediators was mainly directed to demolish the initial mood of complete distrust between the players and to build a common ground at least in terms of shared information and problem definition. A the end of the whole debate the product submitted to the jury was a reasonable, well-defined planning document with a series of recommendations for the question of waste treatment in general, assuming for the first time that waste, also industrial waste, is a public problem and not simply a private issue. At the same time the final decision of the jury was to ask the Municipal and Provincial Administrations not to allow the plant to be built, but the jury also presented a proposal regarding a method to take this kind of decision in a deliberative and more correct way. The Municipal and Provincial Administrations accepted the deliberative decision-making process and did not give the required authorisation. A conflict was turned around through a critical but substantially shared decision, following a path that has implied for many of the participants a change with respect of the initial position and the fulfilment of some goals: the local committee has accepted to assume some collective responsibility for the problem of waste disposal, evolving from a preconditional opposition to a proposal for a methodology to individuate a shared solution; the Municipal Administration has avoided taking a decision alone, which would have deepened a conflict with the majority of the local community; the mediators dismantled the general distrust, paving the way for a future shared decision. Unfortunately one of the missing actors, the Regional Administration, after the conclusion of the process itself reversed the decision concerning the building permit because, verifying the expected emission data of the gasification plant, the technical staff guaranteed the respect of pollutant concentration limits in the air. A process that was able to widen the limits of preconceived positions towards a willingness for a shared problem-setting was ultimately narrowed to the trivial question of pollutant concentration in the air. The missing participation of the regional decision-making level was perceived as a lack of consideration for the local participatory project and, in effect, not being present and not playing an active role was a precondition for subverting the decision. The technical competence over public health was the tool to manage the power to decide inside a correct planning procedure, yet this was done outside the participatory setting that the Regional Administration itself had established through its legal framework.

Apparently this decision relies on a question of efficiency, but in practice the result is very inefficient too and because the choice is a social challenge, the effect is conflict, frustration and distrust for the inhabitants, inefficiency for the public administration

and the private entrepreneurs (the whole affair has ended in court), and probably not even the best technical solution[1].

Clean water and environmental protection. The location of a water purification plant

Not far from Castelfranco, in Ponte Buggianese, in 2009 the local administration started a participatory process in order to decide the location of a big water purification plant and to plan a strategy for the reuse of the purified water, connected with the very delicate ecological equilibrium of the biggest internal wetland in Italy. The first proposal was laying on the table of the local administration for a year, locked between the solution supported by the technical staff of the society managing the sewage system (directed to accomplish the general purification for the water in the valley) and by the environmentalist associations (aimed at guaranteeing the presence of water for the wetland also during the dry season), strongly opposed by the hunters associations (worried about the possibility of a reduction of the area where hunting is allowed) and some informal groups of residents (who claimed they would prefer not having a purification plant too close to their homes). On the institutional side the Municipality was the administration more involved in a mediation effort, but in cooperation with the Provincial and the Regional Administrations, the Land Reclamation and Drainage Authority and the Regional Agency for Environmental Protection. Apparently the different players were sharing a common purpose: to manage waste water with a solution that guarantees the clean up and helps to keep under control the ecological equilibrium of the wetland, allowing also the compresence in the area of spaces for the protection of fauna and flora, spaces for hunting and for agriculture. Nevertheless, the purification system and the management of the water that feeds the swamp was contested and the dispute concerning the location of the plant was a strongly controversial topic. A long history of distrust between local associations and between associations, citizens and institutions was the background that prevented any possible agreement and even the opening of a debate. The mediators called to manage the participatory process had to first rebuild a common ground and in this sense the role played by a guarantee committee was crucial. In the committee were involved representatives of the Municipality; of the Regional Administration (the Guarantor for Citizens Involvement in spatial planning processes, that is an official, but independent, authority); of the Provincial Administration; the experts and technicians of the administrative bodies controlling environmental questions and the Drainage Authority. In a second phase the representatives of the many different associations

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1   It is not possible to evaluate the plant from this point of view because after it was built and only very briefly tested in 2013, it was never used and the builder has gone bankrupt recently.

and two citizens selected by the participants, not connected with any association, were included in the committee.

The question of the location of the plant was at the center of: walks and activities to improve the knowledge of the area by the many people not used to visiting the wetlands; interviews with stakeholders; a series of face to face debates (Comune di Ponte Buggianese 2010). All those activities, developed over nine months, made possible the building of a common ground for an open debate which began from opposed positions consolidated by time end ended with, firstly, an agreement concerning a series of principles and a method to identify the most suitable location for the plant, and finally three different proposals for the location and a shared solution for water regulation. What is more relevant is that the real added value of the process was not the best location for the plant, but the fact all the relevant stakeholders accepted to discuss the water purification and regulation issue together, and to share in the common concern (Morisi and Pillon, 2013). The benefit lay in the opportunity to make a decision, or better put, to build a proposal, not through one-to-one negotiation, but inside a common game, by making sense together (Forester, 1989). The central point of the method adopted has consisted in building a complex and interactive definition of the problem, rather than simply being concerned with the technical efficiency of the plant. Even though some of the technicians and politicians involved have for a long time complained of a decision that is not the best in terms of water pumping and road network, it is clearly evident that, since even emotional bonds with the land (the presence of a site with a strong memory of a Fascist massacre near one of the proposed locations) were introduced into the debate, it has been possible to shift from a struggle against the location, to the search for a good location. The physical concreteness of the planning decision was causing the debate to become dramatized and in this case the deliberative process, with the involvement of all the interested actors, was able to empower local stakeholders and push them to reach a common ground.

During the process the planners discovered they did not fully comprehend the complexity of the problem, and the conflict deriving from a rational decision about the site was solved thanks to a trade-off between efficiency (efficiency of the solution) and reliability (reliability of the decision makers and of the participatory process). At the same time the hunters and environmentalist associations had to share the concern of the water regulation of the wetland; the public administration bodies had to force the usual procedures for public works and political decisions inside a deliberative setting

In the end, the solution was more effective because of a positive-sum game based on the empowerment of the players. Not technical rationality, but the building of trust, reliability and collective sensitivity to the problem had been the key[2].

The Harbour of Marina di Carrara. Participatory planning as problem setting or as improvement of a ready-made decision

Marina di Carrara is located in the north of the Tuscan coast and hosts one of the most important harbours in the region where more then three million tons of goods per year were constantly traded in the past, but with some flexion in the period of the facts we are going to describe. Already in 2006 the harbour management administration proposed a project for the renewal of the waterfront, including a reorganization of the accesses to the harbour, as well as new commercial facilities. In 2008, after some criticism and requests from the municipal administration, a second proposal for the waterfront was presented, with the purpose of reaching an agreement between the harbour managers and the city council. The decision was immediately strongly opposed by a substantial number of residents, many of which started organizing protests, drafting documents asking for different solutions and establishing an informal committee to follow the entire question. Although the committee supported the idea that a new waterfront was possible and needed, it proposed containing land consumption; lowering environmental impact and designing the solution not as the premise for an enlargement of the touristic section of the harbour.

When the opportunity offered by regional law regarding participation was discovered by the committee, they collected the signatures necessary to ask the Regional Authority for Participation for the possibility, as well as the necessary funds, to organize an official local participatory process. The Regional Authority led a negotiation with the harbour managers (convincing them to participate, even if with no great enthusiasm), the Municipality (which has the power to make the final decision concerning the project) and the committee, and subsequently funded the process, providing for it a well-established workflow. During the negotiation the committee had to submit to the request of the Authority to substantially transform its role. First of all it had to became a legally recognized association in order to receive the regional funds, but even more importantly, it had to accept the idea that the process was to be managed by external experts and was not a sort of campaign against the local administration and the managers of the harbour, but a real mediation, coordinated by an independent and neutral moderator, and which represented the entire set of stakeholders. The Municipality, at the same time, was a key actor since

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2   The process itself was a success, even if the plant in the end was not built for reasons that are not connected with the location and the participatory process we describe here.

the beginning of the process because the Authority had conditioned the financing also to its formal commitment to take into consideration the result of the process. Not necessarily accepting it, but justifying any decisions taken in relation with the results.

As said before, the committee had to accept several compromises with respect to its initial ideas. The most relevant is to open the whole process to the participation of a wide set of people, representing a statistic sample of the local population. This group carried out a series of workshops aimed to formulate a precise evaluation of the waterfront project, in other words it behaved as a sort of citizens jury. The process was also supported by a guarantee board, composed of the vice-mayor, the president of the harbour management body, two person belonging to the committee and four citizens, neutral concerning the debate, chosen together by the Municipality and the committee.

The activities, developed in five different meetings, were in part auditions of experts and representatives of the institutions involved, in part discussion in groups and in plenary, but also a workshop of participatory planning led by researchers from the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence. The entire affair cannot be narrated in detail here (see Garzella, 2011; Givone and Imbergamo, 2013), but we can positively underline that the participatory process itself was considered a good experience by many of the players. The most relevant result was the positive mood of collaboration during the entire process and, more particularly, the evolution of the vision of the inhabitants and especially of the local committee, from the opposition to some specific point of the project, to the development of a broad vision regarding the entire process of upgrading the waterfront. As in many successful participatory planning experiences the empowerment of the inhabitants coincides with the ability to develop a strategic vision for the planning activity they are involved in. The final document produced by the process was a set of guidelines for upgrading the waterfront containing 'the most relevant values and problems of the area, identified in the phase of territorial survey […]; general broad-based recommendations [for the redevelopment project …]; at a more detailed level, the shared needs and some possible design solutions' (Garzella, 2011 p.87).

Unfortunately, despite the general sense of trust developed during the process, what has emerged from the interviews some time after the conclusion of the affair is a sense of dissatisfaction on the part of those who were involved, mainly on the side of the committee, but also in some of the participants on the side of the administration. The most visible reason is that in the end the mayor and the local council did not accept a relevant part of the proposals which emerged during the participatory workshops, thus not contradicting the law about participation per se, which consider the elected administrators as final decision makers, but, as a local official said in an interview, showing that 'frequently also the more convinced politicians cool down

when they understand that citizens want to have a real weight'. In practice the city council accepted some of the very specific suggestions, but rejected the broad strategic vision proposed during the participatory process explaining (after the end of the process) that, from the point of view of the political majority, the waterfront project was not negotiable in general terms, but only in some of the details. The limits of the citizen's work were clearly established in the programme of the administration, even if they were not explicitly communicated during the meetings. The same logic of the official participatory process was against the opening-up of the real decision making activity because, officially, the planning activity is technically defined and strictly controlled in terms of procedure.

The affair in question gives us the opportunity to reflect about the contradiction between the presumed constraint of maintaining the participatory process within a well-defined path by inserting variables in the official redesign of the harbour and the ability and need, emerging during the debate, to open up a broad strategic scenario, rather than insert small corrective measures into a ready-made plan. Participatory processes, when organized around a significant spatial transformation, show precisely that citizens demand to discuss a general planning policy rather than technicalities and design details. An open and deep confrontation over a new territorial asset in Marina di Carrara gave non-practitioners the capacity to produce long-lasting strategic planning proposals instead of a technical adjustment of an unshared project, and planners know that adjustments are rarely decisive when facing wicked problems. Overall, this affair shows that a positive-sum game, which gives the players the power to change the problem setting (Forester, 2009), is precisely the setting where innovative solutions are produced. Evidently this implies the management of power through trustworthiness and not through hierarchical relationships based on professional knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS. TECHNICAL RATIONALITY, POWER AND THE NORMATIVE SIDE OF CHANGE

In the previous paragraphs some practical experiences of spatial planning with relevant phases of direct citizen participation have been described in order to analyse how in a planning setting, which is far beyond a strict rational-comprehensive approach, technical rationality re-emerges and how this happens the moment a planning option, developed through participation, is negated by a political body. The text also theorizes some of the reasons that bring back planners and decision makers to this seemingly obsolete approach. But the practical experiences reported, confronted with the planning framework and with the official, very progressive policy of spatial planning in Tuscany, propose two more questions. The first regards

how technical rationality is connected with political power and if along this connection rationality became a tool for coercion. The second regards the relationship between the normative side of spatial planning and the possibility of a counter-hegemonic, radical, project for a redistribution of power (Albrechts, 2015), where spatial justice implies inclusiveness in spatial planning decisions.

The question about rationality and power is very old. According to Luigi Mazza, in ancient Greece, 'the tension between political reason and technical rationality that manifests itself in Hippodamus is an opportunity to emphasize the subordination of the second to the first' (Mazza, 2009, 129). Mazza argues that the grid designed by Hippodamus of Miletus is a form of planning because it implies the '(re)designing of citizenship' using spatial ordering as an instrument of control and for that reason rationality is subordinate to political decision. We can easily recognize the same political/social project in the reported experiences but, paradoxically in reverse, since it is politics which appears subordinated to rational technical choices. In fact (for example in Calstelfranco), after an open and participative approach to spatial planning, a relevant policy-maker uses technical rationality to reject a shared decision from the political arena, in which citizen participation and elected local governments were trying to play their positive sum game, based on a laboriously built sense of trust. In the planning stories reported the participatory processes were not even questioning power relations directly, they were simply part of a participative decision making setting because inserted in a mediated dialogical framework, established by acts and procedures, but evidently antibodies were activated by the fact that the problem setting was always reappearing in the requests of citizens limiting the possibility for one single player to control the outcome.

The definition of a reality through a rationality is an instrument of power, useful for its conservation (Flyvbjerg, 1996) and the forced convergence of interests and opinions toward the rational best solution implies a manipulation performed through refuge in a paradigm (this is what tells us the story of Castelfranco). This tendency has two implications: for planners, who perceive this contradiction as an ethical problem, procedural rationality creates a sort of reassurance to escape arbitrariness and unjust outcomes; for policy-makers who work towards the convergence of a project of social control and maximization of land revenue, technical rationality is a very good instrument to reach this convergence. The combination of the two tendencies explains at least part of the resistance of a technical rational paradigm.

The second question is raised in an article by Louis Albrechts while asking 'how are the different types of knowledge [...] relevant for a relational strategic planning' and 'whether strategic spatial planning practices are able to resist the hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism' (Albrechts, 2015, 512). In this vision traditional planning is functional to keep the present social order under control and rational

knowledge is unable to understand social tensions and locally based political will. Albrechts theorizes that to transform spatial planning into a project capable of questioning hegemonic relationships, the practice of citizen participation must evolve into a real co-productive work in which co-production has a normative side.

We certainly agree that co-production and a radical agenda are strongly needed to avoid planning being pushed into a dark arena and we assume that this could have been one of the possible outcomes of the participative decision making process endorsed by the Tuscan planning system, nevertheless the experience regarding the Tuscan experiment in participative spatial planning raises serious questions regarding the possibility of a normative side to co-production. In fact the re-emergence of a rational-comprehensive attitude towards planning choices by some stakeholders and policy-makers could have been expected, but the aggressiveness with which the participatory spatial planning model established by the same local legislative system was challenged is surprising. The aggregative and incrementalist framework that emerged from the Tuscan planning laws, open to the experimentation of deliberative democracy, was seriously undermined by the outcome of several of the practical experiences. Evidently inside a well-established system of administrative rules (as for example in the Carrara case) it is very unlikely to find space to address the question of hegemony and maintenance of social/spatial order and, in effect, it is obviously pointless to question an established order inside a framework of rules controlled by this hegemonic power, especially if there are administrative procedures and property relations on the table (Kirsten and Shahadat, 2012).

In conclusion, having argued that the resistance and re-emergence of the rational-comprehensive technocratic approach is part of the nature of spatial planning and that the integration of an open and inclusive planning attitude in the normative framework is, at least, extraordinarily problematic, we need to imagine a future for spatial planning, if we do not believe in its end. From this point of view we can propose the possibility of a strategic logic where the problem setting is participative and participation is invested by real power to set the spatial planning agenda. A positive sum game played by as many actors as the subjects (single or collective) involved, multi-variable, open and not predetermined. Then at the level of spatial implementation of planning policies we need an intuitionist logic and an incrementalist technique (téchne), in which rationality considers the problem of time and change (Morin, 1991), and related to that, the question of contradiction and the positive option of collective learning.

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