STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REPUBLICANISM

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The paper develops two main linked themes: (i) strategic planning reveals in practice limits that are hard to overcome; (ii) a complete planning system is efficacy only in the framework of a republican political, social and government culture. It is argued that the growing disappointment associated to strategic planning practices, may be due to excessive expectations, and the difficulties encountered by strategic planning are traced to three main issues: (a) the relationship between politics and planning; (b) the relationship between government and governance; and (c) the relationship between space and socio-economic development. Some authors recently supported an idea of development as consisting in the qualitative evolution of forms of social rationality and argued that a reflection about the relationships between physical transformations and visions of development could be a way of testing innovations. But such strong demands might be satisfied only if we manage to make a «new social and territorial pact for development», recreating a social fabric imbued with shared values. The re-creation of a social fabric imbued with shared values requires a rich conception of the political community and the possibility that the moral purposes of the community may be incorporated by the state. All this is missing today. Outside a republican scheme planning activities are principally instruments for legitimising vested interests and facilitating their investments, and the resolution of the conflicts that arise between the planning decisions of the various levels of government becomes at least impracticable. A complete planning system can be practised if can be referred to the authority and syntheses expressed in and by statehood, which suggests that in a democratic system planning is republican by necessity rather than by choice.

INTRODUCTION

I should begin by telling you about at least two limitations of my lecture, one linked to my academic and professional background, the other to the peculiarities of the country in which I have always worked.

Since I am a planner, and not a regional scientist, my approach is first and foremost normative. Also, as will emerge from what I am about to say, my approach is not comprehensive, if by this we mean an attempt to consider the economic, social and spatial aspects of an urban or territorial issue simultaneously. On the contrary, mine is a selective approach which considers space as the key topic of study, and not as a resource for vicariously exploring other topics and resources. And, in terms of the possible technical practices, space as particularly lending itself to ‘regionalisation’ through the drawing of boundaries – a practice sure to produce political, cultural, social and economic effects and, in short, to produce different forms of political and social control through control of space.

Secondly, despite some consultancy work in other countries, my practical experience has been gained in Italy and especially the north of Italy. Spatial planning is an activity too dependent on the political, cultural and administrative tradition of the context, in which it takes place, to think that one country’s planning procedures and methods can be transposed to another or even be the subject of easy comparison. Thoughts about a planning case in Milan cannot be compared directly with those about one in Belgrade, Paris or Berlin. One of the reasons why I am grateful for the invitation to speak at this conference is to understand how far a dialogue between planners operating in different national contexts is possible and useful.

I have mentioned the main limitations of my lecture to justify its particularly theoretical approach and also to stress that despite the theoretical nature of my arguments, they do not claim to be universally valid.

In summary, there are two main ideas that I am putting to you: (i) in its practical applications strategic planning reveals limits that are hard to overcome; (ii) a complete system of planning – i.e. the development of national, regional and local planning – is possible only in the framework of a political, social and government culture that is republican.

To develop these ideas I examine three questions that highlight the reasons for the current difficulties encountered by strategic planning: the relationship between politics and planning; the relationship between government and governance; and the relationship between space and socio-economic development. I conclude by asserting that a republican approach, founded on ‘constitutional patriotism’ can restore authority to the state as well as legitimacy and meaning to planning.

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UNCLEAR STRATEGIES: THREE REASONS FOR DIFFICULTIES

The need for overall visions and plans capable of steering local and town planning already exists at the beginning of the twentieth century on both sides of the Atlantic, but practices everywhere see relatively similar forms of zoning plans. We must wait until the end of the 60s to have the formal distinction between structure plan and action plan introduced in the British system, and to begin the journey towards strategic planning. Strategic planning accelerates in the next twenty years when, especially in the United States, it seems to provide the answer to the problems created for planning practices by neoliberal culture. Such was the enthusiasm for strategic planning that many were led to believe that this alone was real planning, and the only form worth addressing in the academic and professional world.

Enthusiasm is on the wane: the numerous instruments falling under the broad label of strategic planning have produced results that in too many instances have fallen short of expectations. After an explosion of ideological hostility twenty or thirty years ago, planning now has to consider widespread scepticism about its efficacy, and a low level of agreement between planners themselves about the purposes and uses of strategic planning. This lack of agreement is manifest, for example, in the multitude of definitions offered in the literature. The range of interpretations is really far too wide: it sweeps from traditional and institutional formulas, linked to experiences of subregional and structure planning in the sixties, to dubious transpositions of business culture to the public sector, not only in America. It embraces governance and the design of institutions, or communicative approaches, without forgetting an emphasis on creativity and strategic imagination.

To get over this difficulty Albrechts has written that «There is no ‘one way’ or ‘better way’ of strategic planning» and «strategic planning can be defined as a process guided by the public sector, through which a vision, actions, and their means of implementation are formulated, giving a form and framework to that which a place is and can become». In a more recent essay Albrechts proposes a normative view of strategic spatial planning and indicates its «five main characteristics (selective, relational annex inclusive, integrative, visioning, and action orientated)». But his conclusions are quite general and open-ended: «The normative view includes a plea for a shift towards a more hybrid democracy, for a type of planning that expands practical democratic deliberations rather than restricts them, and that encourages diverse citizens’ voices rather than stifles them; that directs resources to basic needs rather than to narrow private gain; that uses public involvement to present real political opportunities, learning from action not only what works but also what matters».9

6 Even a few years ago strategic planning was defined by John Bryson as «a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an (entity) is, what it does and why it does it» (Bryson, 2003, cited by Healey, 2007, p. 30; but likewise Bryson, 1995, pp. 4-5). A definition so closely connected with corporate planning as to be of little use in the public sector where profit is not the be all and end all and where there are a variety of missions often competing with each other. In the public sector strategic planning can produce satisfactory results only if applied to a specific sector with a well defined and relatively straightforward mission. For the rest, if we exclude forms of economic planning, such as that seen in France in the 1950s and 1960s, it has not been possible to bring the activities of all sectors of public administration under the umbrella of overall strategic frameworks, capable of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of government and administration. 3


8 Albrechts, 2006, p. 1149. Albrechts uses “building blocks from literature (planning and business) and [his] experience in practice to construct a workable normative definition of the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of strategic spatial planning”.


Patsy Healey, who in the past has used the expressions ‘strategic planning’ and ‘strategic spatial planning’, now prefers ‘strategy-making’, which she defines as a key activity that «focused on urban areas involves creating some conception of an ‘urban region’ and forming institutional arenas in which to develop and maintain the strategic focus».10

Recently, Gabriele Pasqui has traced three different interpretations of strategic planning: «as an institutionalised instrument of territorial government; as a governance device capable of integrating networks of players and building consent around important development strategies; and as a practice of ‘societal conversation’ capable of selectively activating players and resources around new or reinterpreted projects».11

A more selective approach is taken by Friedmann who, after acknowledging how strategic planning has been imported from the business world, argues that it is normally used to refer to the key issues of spatial planning over a timescale of 20-30 years.12 But he emphasises the controversial nature of this form of planning and adds: «Some see strategic planning as a way to set out an ideal vision of the future; others see it as a vehicle for generating technical studies that would otherwise not be undertaken; still others see it as a way for substituting technical for political rationality or, alternatively, for undergirding and strengthening political reasons with technical studies; a fourth group may see it as a way to create a broad conceptual framework for wider public discussion and/or collaborative planning. And undoubtedly there are other purposes that may be claimed».13

Considering, among other things, the difficulties in drawing up long-term policies and plans, Friedmann believes that an approach which concentrates on high-priority projects – ‘strategic focus’ – is more convincing than comprehensiveness, and suggests how to develop these through studies that go into greater detail. Strategic focus seems better suited to cope with the static nature of traditional planning and to provide a sufficiently rapid response to problems that cannot always be predicted.14

2 Geddes’s vision is regional and involves continuity between large-scale spatial ordering and the design detail of public space: note, continuity and not large scale determining small-scale. Omitted’s idea of a general plan focuses particularly on the design of large urban areas and anticipates the pairing of the comprehensive plan and zoning, where in theory zoning should be the detailed and operational translation of the general lines proposed by the general plan. 3 In actual fact the pairing of general plans and detailed plans is already witnessed with the Greater London Plan 1944 and the City of Manchester Plan 1945; in the following years it will be the turn of the first subregional plans such as the Preliminary Plan for Lancashire 1951. The reform introduced by the Town and Country Planning Act 1968 is preceded by lengthy debate: see, for example, the Royal Town Planning Institute 1976, Ministry of Housing et al. 1965. For a theoretical framework, see Taylor 1988. In Milan, some of the schemes drawn up by De Finetti and by the AR plan in the 1940s can be defined as structural schemes, and it is singular how the amendment made to the Milan General Town Plan by Haizone in 1967 appears in substance and also in its graphic expression to be a structure plan.


5 Faludi, van der Wall, 1994.


12 And in support he cites Salet and Faludi, 2000; Albrechts et al., 2003.


14 We ought to ask what the static nature of planning consists in and why it has to be overcome. In the case of urban planning, its ‘static’ nature, if interpreted and used properly, is its strength, but a footnote can only touch on this theme and certainly not address it properly.
Uncertainty about the meaning of strategic planning is accompanied by an explicit lack of confidence about the possibility of applying it in practice. For example, in his introduction to a research into experience of strategic projects in seven European cities, Willem Salet writes that: «The evolution of cities is the largely unplanned and unintended outcome of more or less deliberate actions by many individuals and dispersed agencies searching to find a way out of the problems and circumstances they experience. As such, urban evolution is consciously man-made and even policy-made in many respects, but it does not unfold harmoniously according to the lines of a strategic plan. There is no complete control, not even in countries where powers are shaped to enable hierarchical planning».

Salet believes, however, that there is a strategic dimension of planning practices which lies in «the transcendence of individual horizons in scope and time»; therefore, he thinks it useful to focus attention on framing, by which he simply means «the different ways in which individual agents can be held together». Salet does not seem to stop and consider on what terms and how in the current situation a perceptible ‘transcendence of individual horizons’ could be achieved, with the effort that this would require, or, especially, what the not inconsiderable political implications of that transcendence might be, or the necessary repercussions that it would have on the design of planning practices and the justification behind them.

Even from these few citations, a situation emerges as ramified as it is uncertain; a situation certainly explained by a host of reasons, partly inherent to technical culture, and partly supplied by the political and cultural contexts in which planning practices are developed. But it is a situation rather too ramified to be convincing, bringing to mind an old essay by Wildaskey, ‘If Planning is Everything, Maybe it’s Nothing’, one which is much cited but which unfortunately has produced no great results.

Without claiming in any way to exhaust the subject, I believe that a critical exploration of this situation must begin with careful thought about three issues within technical culture: the relationship between planning and politics; the relationship between government and governance; and the relationship between the physical and socio-economic aspects, i.e. between territory and development. Three issues that seem useful in casting light on the current predicaments of strategic planning.

Planning and politics

A talk on strategic planning is forced to consider the shifting boundaries between planning activities and political activities as well as the equally shifting boundaries between techniques and ethics. To a large degree the political nature of spatial planning activities is linked to the redistributive character and to the mechanism of exclusion and inclusion that follows from this. The main effects of planning practices are therefore political and social, rather than economic and spatial. Above all, these main effects redesign citizenship, to the extent that the undoubted spatial and economic effects can be correctly defined as resources for pursuing the political and social effects, rather than the actual aims of planning. It is these political and social effects that make the relationship between technical knowledge and ethical principles indissoluble; after all, control of space has always involved ethical assumptions.

If we agree that an ethical framework is indispensable to the building and application of technical knowledge, this does not mean that planning must be so mixed up with politics that it becomes ‘a form of politics’. The implicit and explicit values and purposes of planning knowledge are unrelated to political practices and, precisely for this reason, can reveal - because they are in agreement or at variance with them - the values and purposes often implicit in decision-making processes as well as the political and ethical implications of the decisions under discussion.

For example, the principle of preserving vestiges of the past is based on the ethical value attached to those vestiges; if there is a conflict between this principle and a decision to redevelop an area, the arguments that technical culture may use for or against conservation serve to highlight the ethical cost of the decision. In other words, planning knowledge serves to raise ethical as well as technical questions about decision-making processes, but certainly not to replace these processes by taking the decisions itself, on a technocratic basis.

If we believe that it is the task of planning to come up with visions and strategies for designing the future, we are entrusting it with a political role, such as proposing values and objectives, and an ideal society or city. From a technical perspective, this can be an exercise in political philosophy and law: to create visions and devise strategies planning must bring about syntheses that are not technical, but characteristic of societal conversation and political debate. Unless the approach is technocratic, it is inappropriate to entrust technical practice with the task of guiding societal conversation about a design for the future without the mediation of those civil institutions – political parties and clubs, cultural associations, pressure groups, etc – to which this role is assigned. Importantly, when they seek the contribution of experts these institutions are not so much interested in the

16 Salet and Gualini, 2007, p. 3.
17 The subject of framing is also the focus of a comment offered by Fausto Curti who suggests «creating light frames (whether they are called structural or strategic plans) capable of having some diagnostic efficacy. These frames should especially regard the infrastructural and environmental matrices (which also involve commitments and constraints for the administration)». He then suggests «trying to pilot the portfolio of possible options, by exploiting incentives, partnerships and competition» (personal communication).
19 Mazza, 2009.
20 One example is the story of the car park built near the Church of Sant’Ambrogio in Milan. The Church and its surroundings are one of the sites marking the origins of the city, and the memories that they guard have been very carefully tended over the last few centuries, as expressed by the spatial equilibrium maintained despite the numerous and considerable changes witnessed over the course of time. One could say that until now the piazza of Sant’Ambrogio and its surroundings have been an example of particularly good conservation within a wider development. The addition of an underground car park with entrances in the immediate vicinity of the Church seems an excessive risk that could and should have been avoided, especially after various negative experiences of this kind in the past, such as the ruining of the nearby Piazza dei Borromei. One does not have to be a Catholic to recognise that the area of Sant’Ambrogio is an important monument, to be respected and saved from excessive modernisation. Evidently, the local authorities did not believe that the opening of the car park could result in a ‘disfigurement’ and, without any particular justification, went ahead with the decision. This case also shows that only widespread recollection of the past can defend a city from risky or ‘wrong’ developments; the opposition of the neighbourhood itself is rarely sufficient.
21 Luca Gaeta observes that if creating visions and future strategies is a political task, when undertaken by political philosophers and lawyers it cannot become more of a technical one than it is when undertaken by planners. While acknowledging the sharpness of this observation, I believe that a difference lies in the fact that when philosophers and lawyers design models of an ideal city, they propose them within the context of philosophical and legal debate as subjects or examples of argument and not as the elements of plans or laws to be actually implemented.
technical merit of their proposals as in the likely political consequences. To entrust political tasks to technical practice may seem a generous decision, showing commitment. But it is a decision that, on the one hand, is at risk of tumbling into technocratic arrogance and, on the other hand, of seeing the technical content—still to be found in even frail practices such as those of planning—evaporating into the common sense of what that content should be.

Just as unconvincing, though widely held, is the idea that the task of planning might be to identify and involve interested parties. To give a voice to interested parties and involve them in the decision-making process is again a political task. It is part of the game that politicians are ready to let certain interests and political tasks to technical practice may seem a professional activity such as planning. A planner always refers to ethical and political values and aims, even if he is not always aware of doing so. It is possible that the planner's values and aims agree so closely with those of government and the wider common sense that the planner is led to believe that his action is ethically neutral and that his contribution is solely 'technical'.

Planning, since it redistributes rights, is nonetheless a process of reform, whether progressive or conservative. Therefore, the state of unawareness can be read as one of 'mechanical' reformism. In the sense of a systematic, if not entirely uncritical, implementation of values and aims that are taken for granted, because they are based on values and aims endorsed by majority consent. For example, in the last thirty years mechanical reformism has been driven by the idea of the 'market' and of every type of reform being conditional on the resources, and not just financial ones, provided by the 'market'. In this case too, the redesign of citizenship brought about by planning is following principles but these, paying homage to the 'value' of the market, establish that citizenship should be 'contractualised'. Therefore, individual rights are, directly and indirectly, 'purchased' on the market, for example through insurance schemes and contributions in exchange for services. Moreover, the production of public goods is conditional on the amount of profits that the urban market generates.

Mechanical reformism can be contrasted with a critical awareness of the values and aims attributed to planning practices. An awareness that takes values and aims not as inalterable givens, but as the products of the competing action of political and technical practices. This state of awareness can be read as one of moral reformism: in other words a state in which the expert reflects critically on the principles and values proposed by societal conversation. To reflect critically in this way implies acceptance by the expert of theories of state and citizenship that form the terms of reference for the values and aims of planning and the ways of pursuing them.

22 Above all, the effect of this decision is to water down the substance of the expected technical contribution, by rendering its political effectiveness inversely proportional to its recourse to moral arguments.

23 It is probable that the most poorly represented voices are those of the weakest interests, but to give a voice to these interests is, once again, a typically political rather than technical task. To entrust this task to planning in the belief that politicians are ready to let certain interests have a voice and not others. If, for example, politicians do not let weak interests have a voice, it is not because they are incapable of doing so, but because they are not interested in doing so. And if politicians do not let weak interests have a voice, this does not mean that planners, merely because they wish to, are politically and technically able and institutionally authorised to do so. A planner may act as a political advisor or directly as a political activist—this is an important commitment assumed by many experts in every disciplinary field. The problem is not to expect a commitment, on the part of an individual or a group, to be transformed into the institutional goal of the technical practices of a professional activity such as planning.

If designing the future and development of a society was the job of planning practices, it would no longer be possible to trace the boundary between planning and political activity. As a result planning would be completely absorbed by politics, or a situation would arise in which the independent contribution, that techniques can give to societal conversation and the formation of the decision-making process, would disappear. The theoretical approach that considers planning as a 'form of politics' is the most explicit expression of the confusion between political decision-making processes and planning practices. And it is also the safest way of denying independence and specificity to planning activities. The confusion between planning and politics often seems to arise from the fact that many planners are not satisfied with collaborating in government activities. They believe that they should have an independent role in devising and implementing public strategies. The suspicion arises that this may be due, not so much to their irrepressible public spirit, as to their inability to understand the technical problems and work out useful solutions to the questions on the government agenda. Moreover, it seems to be forgotten that politicians' decision-making responsibilities are based on an electoral mandate, which planners do not have. And this is probably the most embarrassing aspect of the debate about strategic planning.

Not to consider planning as a form of politics does not mean that we should ignore the political nature of technical planning knowledge or neglect the issue of how to use technical knowledge in political dealings, in other words the problem of the shifting boundaries between techniques and ethics. In his work, a planner always refers to ethical and political values and aims, even if he is not.


26 It must be acknowledged that in some cases, for the most varied reasons and more or less explicitly, political decision-makers delegate certain decision-making powers to experts. And it is not easy to act in this situation because there is no formal basis for the delegated power, which can thus be withdrawn unexpectedly and the expert's decisions overturned; and because the expert often does not have all the necessary skills and information to handle the situation properly. Moreover, delegated powers are often exercised in matters that the political system considers irrelevant, with the result that, whatever the expert's decision, it is possible that it may never be implemented. In short, only when there is very great trust between decision-maker and expert can the latter be prompted to accept a delegated power that tends to confuse their roles and muddy the decision-making process. Acceptance of this power provides decision-makers with a form of 'cover' that can only produce confusion in public debate; therefore, as a general rule, it should be politely refused.

27 See, for example, Somers, 2008.

28 For moral reformism, the theories of state and citizenship are not easy conditions to fulfil. In the final part of this lecture I argue that the intrinsic nature of spatial planning, an authoritarian instrument of governance, reduces the field to republican theory. Meaning by that a theory in which, also in compliance with the principles of devolution and subsidiarity, the collective interest prevails over individual interests.
To recapitulate. If we assume that planning is an instrument of government, when the political system and government know how to express clear values and aims, planners have two alternatives. Either to accept those values and aims as givens and to work within that reference framework, or, if they are unable to share those values and aims, to turn down the work. The situation is more complicated when politics and government do not know how to express clear values and aims. To operate in this case, the planner is forced to stand in, an action which rarely dispels the uncertainty in which the government is mired. Moreover, it is very improbable that it will produce any significant political results. The government is very likely to drop the planner’s proposals or only take up those which it thinks will satisfy its immediate requirements, ignoring the general reference framework from which the planner has drawn inspiration.

It could be argued that, in actual fact, there is a third alternative, seeking to modify the values and aims expressed by government. Anyone who pursues this purpose is engaged in political activity, regardless of his professional role and possible use of technical arguments. Once again, it is not a question of preventing experts from adopting political positions, but of clarifying that these positions are such regardless of the technical arguments used. This distinction may appear formalistic, but let us see how it applies in real life.

Let us suppose that an advisor has been appointed to collaborate in drawing up housing policies only to discover that he does not share the government’s aims, which he considers to be too subservient to the vested interests of property companies and too insensitive to the issue of social housing. If his attempts to convince the administration to change its objectives are unsuccessful, all the advisor can do is resign and explain why. To make public the reasons for his resignation is a legitimate and necessary professional step that has an evident political value. But if, after resigning, the advisor begins to campaign against the administration’s policy, his action is that of a political activist who uses technical arguments to support the values and aims that inspire him as a citizen. The problem is that not so much of ethical professional practice as theoretical: if a political activist and a politician are entitled to use technical arguments to support a political idea, a technical expert who does so can convince people that there are decisive technical reasons for deciding on a public policy, which is almost always false. A public policy can be analysed and evaluated technically if that means exposing the expected costs and benefits, but it cannot be judged technically because the judgment of the costs or benefits varies according to the values and aims pursued politically.

Government and governance

In talks about strategic planning the opposition between government and governance is almost always cited. The opposition emphasises how strategic planning no longer refers to a government allocating resources and resolving problems, but to governance perceived as the ability to trigger a search for creative solutions by mobilising various players, with different and even conflicting interests, objectives and strategies. In other words, a narrowing of the role of the state in favour of greater social involvement in the design of collective action. But this is not the only way of understanding governance that we find in the literature, with the result that we have another polysemic term tending to create more problems than it manages to resolve.

The opposition between government and governance is possible if government is caricatured as an autonomous institution cut off from its context, autocratic and totally unapproachable. The opposition between government and governance is of analytical value provided that governance is not considered as overtaking government, Because governance is, if anything, an instrument of government, which retains powers and responsibilities that no form of governance can replace or limit and that, on the contrary, are reinforced by good governance.

Some authors seem to believe that with the appearance of governance the processes of government have changed. Whereas it is primarily our ways of describing them that have changed and with positive effect. The links between government and vested interests have become more explicit and less confused and are covered by procedures that tend to render them more transparent and more controllable. This does not mean that governance itself should be able to «trigger a search for creative solutions differing by territory», unless one believes that the ‘creativity’ of a public decision-making process is proportional to the number of interests involved and not to the planning and leadership skills of the manager of the process.

Goverance and institutional planning are useful instruments within the framework of a clear and sound political strategy. While in a complete turnaround it seems that at times we expect that strategy can be the product of governance and institutional planning. It is possible and desirable for a circular process to be triggered between the three components but the trigger can only be political strategy.

Development and space

Many supporters of strategic planning processes identify two dimensions: «One dimension of this process is the value attached to the qualities of places and to appreciation of their diversity; another dimension is the accent on integrated socio-economic approaches, which go beyond the mere physical dimension of traditional planning». In the last ten years, perhaps because of the ever-increasing number of large-scale town plans, there has been a particular focus on ‘places’, whose qualities and differences have been emphasised. Healey stresses the role of places in connection with strategy-making, which she considers to be «the development and deployment of a strategic imagination about the qualities of the places of urban areas».

The first dimension revisits themes already dear to early twentieth century authors, such as Geddes and Unwin, and ever present in Italian culture. In reverting to them now we ought to be aware that these themes did not become

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29 In brief, if the political system does not provide reference values and goals that the expert considers appropriate, there is no space for his planning activity. This does not mean that other experts, because of their beliefs or for gain, may not share those goals and values that the political system recognises and pursues.


31 For example, governance is now used not only to indicate informal non-vertical ways of organising decision-making processes, but to indicate new forms of government, so that the distinction between governance and government eventually disappears. To take account of the different interpretations of governance Healey resorts to the expression ‘urban governance landscapes’ and acknowledges that the «new organisational forms for governance activity raise difficult questions about how the accountability and legitimacy of such activity can be established and blur the boundary between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ sectors». Healey, 2007, p. 19.

30 Albrechts, 2005, p. 271

33 Albrechts, 2005, p. 269.

less topical due to lack of attention or knowledge, but because of choices made in the context of modernist poetics and social philosophies characterised by egalitarian welfarism. To consider the quality and diversity of places is a choice based on values and objectives. From a technical perspective, to consider the quality and diversity of places is just as valid as not doing so. For example, it was not considering — or only very partially considering — them that enabled the construction of the «autostrada del sole», the ‘Motorway to the Sun’ which linked the north and south of Italy for the first time. Therefore it is incorrect to assume that this dimension is a technical aspect of strategic processes; rather, it can be traced to the ‘poetics’ of planning.

The second dimension — the accent on integrated approaches — was widespread in the early twentieth century among English planners, even though they had been trained in the schools of architecture and engineering. It was then lost but re-emerging in the issues addressed in the British debate, between the end of the ’50s and early ’60s, about recovering and integrating the socio-economic contents and effects of land-use decisions. This was the debate that would lead to the subregional strategic plans of the ’80s and to structure planning. If nowadays we are again addressing the same topics, we have to ask ourselves why in the span of a century we have not made some advances in the process of integrating physical and socio-economic questions.

The associations between the physical and socio-economic dimensions are taken up within a wider and more problematic consideration of the associations between the processes of developing territory and governing territory, the subject of two essays by Palermo and Pasqui. Their argument is that ways and forms of thinking about possible contamination between the two planning logics are still very unsatisfactory.36 For Palermo «the very unsatisfactory results of integrated territorial development programmes in Italy, are over the last ten years perhaps partly due to certain limitations cited here. On the one hand, a certain overestimate of the wealth of identity, and quality and relational capability of local systems. On the other hand, the generally artificial and often opportunistic nature of networks and contingent coalitions; as well as the difficulty in interpreting and managing multi-scale and multi-level dynamic relationships».37 Pasqui, in particular, complains about the excessive number of instruments used in the last few years and their negative results, and the terms that he uses to describe these results are ‘failure’ and ‘washout’.38 According to Pasqui, the errors can be traced to three factors. First, the inadequacy of the main human and procedural components of government processes. Second, the inability of technical cultures to acquire a thorough grasp of the nature of planning topics and their differences in order to handle them properly.39 Third, the idea itself of reform, too little attentive to social intelligence, and to the embedding and institutionalisation of development policies. Pasqui’s observations are thoroughly convincing when they address general questions such as those just described, while they are a source of perplexity, mainly for the reasons already set out in the section on ‘politics and planning’, when they address technical questions. If, on the one hand, mixing political and technical themes enriches political argumentation, which is better constructed and more persuasive as a result, on the other hand it burdens planning activities with expectations that are too high and historically bound to end in disappointment. ‘Societal conversation’ is a political activity that is possible when the relevant players are willing to debate the chosen subject, but this willingness is increasingly rare, especially in large cities. The impression is that many strategic planning approaches refer more to an imaginary society than real society.

Does not happen for that in the last few years disappointment with general strategies has resulted in a shift of attention to specific strategies and especially strategic projects that attempt to treat an area according to its main functional aspects: activity and mobility. Strategic projects very ambitiously present themselves as integrated development projects. Despite citing functional and symbolic values, they actually are above all instruments for breeding capital. In the majority of cases large urban projects, justified by plans, are strategic above all to their investors. Even though they have significant implications for urban dynamics, in terms of public costs rather than benefits. Politically, they use the cover provided by neoliberal culture by the emphasis on partnerships between the public and private sectors, and by the processes of subsidiarity and modernisation. Rarely they are based on overall visions and rarely their possible effects are evaluated in advance. In the majority of cases in Italy, they are explicit forms of privatisation of the processes of urban transformation.

If the technical contribution merely recognises the interdependent aspects of these large urban projects — economic and social action, spatial configuration, and institutional agreement — in order to handle them more efficiently, it ends up in their tow. Therefore, rather than resigning and restricting ourselves to mere analysis after the event, the problem seems to be that of identifying what the collective goal of large urban works might be, so as to base their design on this goal and use it as an instrument for evaluating them. I shall return to this point later on.

Palermo’s article, though using technical arguments, is not only a reflection about territorial and development policies, but a political essay.40 With reference to Donolo,
Palermo proposes an idea of development consisting in the «qualitative evolution of forms of social rationality» and a reflection about «the relationships between physical transformations and visions of development» that could be «a way of putting innovations and hopes to the test». For Donolo, and for Palermo, reference to the principles of economic efficiency and public authority (i.e. the traditional roles of the market and state) is not enough. Other «mechanisms of social regulation must be considered, in the context of reciprocity, and capacity for self-organisation and networking». Lastly, according to Palermo, to usher in a new season of development policies it is necessary to implement the following principles: «shared strategic vision, hierarchy and selectivity of investments, subsidiarity of commitments and strategic vision, hierarchy and selectivity of implementing the following principles: «shared value is a purely political theme. It requires a rich conception of the political community and the possibility that the moral purposes of the community may be incorporated by the state. All this is missing today. During the last few centuries the state has become a secular state, a state which no longer has a religious or ethical basis. The secularisation process and emancipation of the individual create the need for a new community and homogeneity of secular values, which, in place of religious ones, may serve as a basis for state action.

Everyday experience shows that even a secular state accepts certain ethical assumptions, and its citizens participate in public conversations which have ethical contents. It has been observed that this need for values generates an internal contradiction: to develop its action the state needs to support it with certain ethical assumptions, without which its power might be delegitimised. But it is not difficult to discover that, to legitimise its action, a democratic secular state demands values and presuppositions which it cannot reproduce and guarantee. In their debates, political philosophers have held for some time that the non-denominational or secularised state has therefore a need for «meta-political references, without which its power is at risk of undergoing a delegitimisation process».

Nowadays this contradiction, which the state cannot solve on its own, is if possible even more glaring. It reverberates through ideas of citizenship, which have always been developed with reference to notions such as political community and the common good. Due to a lack of shared value systems, these notions are nowadays increasingly problematic, with the consequence that planning activities have less legitimacy than in the past and have lost their basic term of reference: public interest.

A solution to the internal contradiction between the need for values to support state action and the inability of the state to guarantee these necessary values, has been sought by resorting to the classic model of "civil religion". Ten years ago Rusconi proposed that the concepts of republicanism and civil religion be retrieved, reformulated as «models potentially capable of supplying common motives ("presupposed values") for politics, and of producing ties between citizens that go beyond their ethical visions. Values that in the language of republicanism are called the virtues of public spirit and civic integration».

Underpinning the republican outlook is, instead of civil religion, constitutional patriotism:

40 Bockenforde, 1986, p. 121.
42 Vujosevic, 2004. The description he gives of the shortcoming of planning is valid outside the confines of Yugoslavia, but one comes away with the impression that the author’s idea of planning is too demanding.
43 In the American experience a reply to this need has been granted by the classic model of “civil religion”, which is an official fusion of values and religious formulas and of the democratic “faith”. In the French experience we find a secular republican variant of the same reply. Where there was no “civil religion” this homogeneity was initially guaranteed by the idea of nation; the unity of nation was a substitute for unity based on religion. When the building process of the nation-state was concluded, the democratic secular state tried to find in a community of values and beliefs its basis and legitimisation.
44 M, p. 7. According to Rusconi «Republicanism and civil religion have the same roots. They are two ways of promoting the idea of civic integration and civism» (p. 47).
45 Bockenforde, 1986, p. 121.
46 Rusconi, 1999, p. 26. Rusconi writes of the «politics of history» … in the sense of “keeping in mind a path of history open to conflicting interpretations, but at the same time not losing sight of the value of republican democracy as the point of arrival and the criterion for judgment” (p. 96).
48 Pettit, 1997, pp. 36-39. With the side note that, according to Pettit, republicans are less concerned with freedom from interference than freedom from dominion (Dagger, 2002, p. 147).
50 Pettit, 1997, pp. 36-39. With the side note that, according to Pettit, republicans are less concerned with freedom from interference than freedom from dominion (Dagger, 2002, p. 147).
51 In Italy territorial planning is entrenched almost exclusively at local level. There are no forms of national territorial planning, even for those key services that require it, and regional territorial planning is often a fiction.
planning, and especially to design and implement strategies, I believe that the meta-political pre-conditions for this involve the creation of a cultural and social context typical of the republican tradition; also because it is this tradition that embraces an idea of citizenship which, more than any other, can be adopted as an analytical and normative standard for constructing and evaluating planning decisions.

As an alternative to liberal, social democratic, communitarian and ethical approaches, a republican approach is certainly one possible choice; but even with regard to the mere notion of citizenship, it must be acknowledged that a republican approach is anything but unambiguous in the literature. Various authors identify the features of the republican model and contrast them with the liberal model. Taylor and Habermas, for example, highlight the instrumental nature of institutions in the liberal approach, while in the republican approach participating in government is seen as an essential component of the role of a citizen, as a value in itself and as the essence of liberty.

According to Sandel, the republican idea of liberty consists in participating in self-government, an idea that in itself is not inconsistent with the liberal idea of freedom. Vertova does not hesitate to use the term republican within a liberal approach, and Dagger coins a sort of oxymoron, republican liberalism, based on the common commitment by both theories to the rule of law. But Dagger is forced to conclude that republican liberalism cannot be a satisfactory form of liberalism, since it involves a vision, even if perfectible, of a good society. Therefore, the multiple meanings of citizenship accompanying the Republican model are no less ambiguous when a comparison is made with the liberal model. However, crucial to the republican model is the theme of self-government, which can constitute a benchmark for evaluating public policies, in the sense that it holds out the option of considering good policies to be those functional above all to the development of democracy as self-government. For example, improvement of the population’s living conditions, as pursued according to the social democratic concept of equality, does not in itself ensure self-government.

In the republican approach, improving living conditions is not considered a pre-condition for exercising political citizenship. Rather than the objective of social citizenship, as a pre-condition for exercising political citizenship, the objective of the republican approach is the exercising of an active political citizenship. The difference is not marginal because it is assumed that political citizenship may/must be exercised also in unfavourable economic and social conditions, and that in any event it must be this that produces an improvement in those conditions. In the liberal tradition and the social democratic one, citizenship is often reduced to different forms of contractualisation linked to the market and the state, while in the republican model citizenship involves substantive participation in the community.

The theme of self-government does not conflict with constitutional patriotism because the republican idea of citizenship cannot be separated from the idea of being a member of a nation. And especially because obligations play a role in the public life of the community, alongside and before the rights of citizens. But active conceptions of citizenship may not be distinguishable from ethical and communitarian conceptions, and the risk of over-estimating the dimension of local community is ever present. For example, Walzer, following a long-standing tradition, has proposed recognising neighbourhood, district and ethnic communities as effective political and moral bodies, and he believes that community is probably the most important of the goods that are distributed. But he adds that distribution is in the hands of the majority of the citizens of a country and that it would be unrealistic to think of communities with completely open boundaries.

Despite these variations and ambiguities, the republican approach is still indispensable to thinking about a new social contract in which, also in line with the principles of devolution and subsidiarity, the collective interest prevails over the individual interest, and also to thinking about a form of planning that is acknowledged to have the redesign of citizenship as its ultimate goal. Outside a republican scheme, planning activities are principally instruments for legitimising vested interests and facilitating their investments. And, outside the republican scheme, the resolution of the conflicts that arise between the planning decisions of the various levels of government becomes at least impracticable.

Planning can generally be practised if it is possible to refer to the authority and syntheses expressed in and by statehood, which suggests that in a democratic system planning is republican by necessity rather than by choice. One could reasonably object that a republican choice is a political choice to which planning can only adapt itself. But cultural processes are not so linear, even if technical culture takes part in the societal conversation that chooses the political models of living.

I believe it is legitimate to argue that there are no stand-alone principles of planning, and that any general principle can only be worked out in terms of political philosophy and metaphysics. One can consider a planning system to be efficient if it facilitates the operations of the urban market, or one can consider it to be efficient if it favours transparent forms of self-government. One can consider expropriation to be a violent form of state intervention that disrupts the market and damages ownership rights, or one can consider expropriation, when properly compensated, to be an input towards the production of the goods and rights that

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52 See Bobbio, Viroli, 2003.
53 In contrast with an individualistic and instrumentalist concept of the role of citizen, characteristic of the liberal model, there is a communitarian and ethical concept typical of the republican model; whereas for liberals political citizenship is a form of membership on which the citizen’s legal position is founded, for republicans it is membership of an ethical and cultural community which is self-determined. «The reference point for the republican concept is the problem of self-organisation of society, once it has been admitted that the substance of the concept of citizenship should be sought in the political rights of participation and communication» (Habermas, 2001, pp. 113-125).
54 Sandel, 2005, p. 10.
56 Dagger, 1997.
57 This theme is developed by Brandeis and Croly, the two advisors to Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt during the presidential race in 1912; their common concern was what type of citizens the organisation of the economy would have generated.
58 Delanty, 2000, p. 9.
61 For example, even recently in Italy, many difficulties were encountered during an attempt to draw up a ‘law setting out the principles for governing the territory’, because of the difficulty in identifying convincing planning principles.
nourish citizenship. One can consider town planning to be instrumental to the functional transformation of space and particularly attractive aesthetic results. Or one can consider town planning to be instrumental to the reinforcement of constitutional patriotism, by respecting the traces left by history in the urban form and, for example, by making changes in the form conditional upon functional and symbolic values held to be important in terms of self-government.

Even if it is not the task of planning to contribute directly to the political debate on the approaches that must form the reference framework for the action of government, technical planning culture has a responsibility to clarify which theoretical approaches should underpin the principles on which techniques base the models for possible planning systems and which principles these models wish to follow.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The paper argues that the difficulties encountered by strategic planning may be mainly explained by the characters of three uneasy relationships: planning and politics, government and governance, development policies and spatial planning. In the last decades many planners have been thinking that their judgement might be better than politicians’, because of their technical knowledge and moreover because their cleverer skills in involving, understanding and representing the public. Planners have been assuming to have the right and the duty, as planners, of participating in planning decisions on the same standing as politicians. In this perspective it is understandable to prospect an opposition between governance and government, forgetting that without the government authority planning may be only a more or less convincing propaganda. Focusing on ambitious development and spatial policies planners may forget that actual planning actions are a political choice the government may or may not take. Planning is not a governments’ compulsory task, and governments often use planning as a ‘window dressing’ to introduce and cover their real policies. What governments cannot escape is land use control which is an indispensable component of national and local geopolitics, but the need of property defence and territorial control are not sufficient to support a complete planning system. Local spatial planning is somewhat necessary, but the development and implementation of consistent national, regional, and local policies and the solution of inevitable conflicts within the government tiers, demands a shared idea of public interest, which only a republican culture can provide.

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**Bibliography**


