

Keeping the Public Sphere Anchored to Social Changes

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1 ABSTRACT

Despite the theoretical passage from the regulatory approach of (especially Italian) spatial planning to the „soft“ and „synaptic“ dimension of planning theory, due to the spread of European policies and visions towards a broader perspective that considers physical and social aspects as strictly inter-connected, a „stellar“ distance still remains between urban planning and social practices, formal projects and true life, „shadow“ and official „production“ of urban space, and the continue irreducible re-emerging of what formal planning tends to exclude.

Moving from an analysis of the still existing and deeply rooted resistences – and related „dis-regulations“ – against innovative trends in Italian planning practice and research, a possible experimental path (rather than a „best practice“) is proposed as a tentative way to re-lead „shadow“ experiences and actions within official planning processes without denying their alternative vision, in order to keep a broadened public sphere anchored to social changes.

2 INNOVATIVE TRENDS AND ROOTED RESISTENCES IN THE ITALIAN PLANNING PRACTICE AND RESEARCH.

Despite the theoretical passage from the regulatory approach of (especially Italian) spatial planning, that substantially means land-use regulation, to the „soft“ (Faludi, 2010) and „synaptic“ (Scoppetta, 2012) dimension of planning theory, due to the spread of European policies and visions towards a broader perspective that considers physical and social aspects as strictly inter-connected, a „stellar“ distance still remains between Italian urban planning and social practices, formal projects and true life, „shadow“ and official „production“ (Lefebvre, 1974) of urban space, and the continue irreducible re-emerging of what formal planning tends to exclude (de Certeau, 1980). Recalling Rimbaud – and also André Breton’s Manifest of Surrealism, both quoted in Kundera (1992) – one could say „la vie est ailleurs“ („life is elsewhere“).

In the case of Italy – a country in which „planning“ means „urbanism“, and requires a design input so that planning education is strongly connected with architecture and engineering, differently from both French regional-economic approach and the more discretionary comprehensive integrated approach of UK and North-West European countries – the Europeanisation of urban and territorial policies has meant, during the decade of the ‘90s, the flourishing of innovative tools and practices that, despite their heterogeneity, can be grouped at least in two main „families“: on the one hand, programs concerning urban renewal and regeneration; on the other, programs aimed at the economic development. Such integrated and necessarily inter-sectoral experiences, sharing an attitude towards managing rather than planning in traditional „spatial“ terms, tend to emphasise the learning dimension as a basis for further implementations as well as the involvement of both local actors and social networks. Such innovative actions could lead to a shift in traditional planning practices, since the old and rigid hierarchies of plans (in which only one solution is allowed from the general to the more detailed level) are subverted, as more contextualized multiple suggestions can usefully come from the local level.

But traditional approaches still remain, and seem to be strongly rooted also in academic research,¹ so that we can find proposals aimed at regenerating urban peripheries based on a 1000 x 1000-meters „rational“ grid (with a central place obviously located in the centre: where, otherwise?) that is exactly the same of certain plans of the early ‘30s – such as, for example, the Albertini’s or Greppi’s plans for the city of Milan (see: Albertini, 1929) – in which the idea of the territory as an a-historical tabula rasa, traffic (and market)-oriented engineering, juridical technical tools and „methodologies“ were utilised for the increasing of the value of soils as well as the role of the planner itself was to be framed within the need of clearly identify (and steadily occupy) its own disciplinary (and professional) field of action outside the architectural sphere (see: Bianchetti & Ernesti, 1987).

¹ As an extreme case, see: http://www.urbanisticatre.uniroma3.it/RICERCA/cerasoli_periferie_cittalia.pdf (anyway, a Spanish version also exists, and it is surprisingly labelled as „peer reviewed“).

In other words, the three main (often interrelated) research paths explored since the end of the '70s – networking, governance, and rescaling – often seem to remain still ignored in certain pockets of Italian planning theory and practice, and this probably deals with the difficulties in abandoning an (also professional) „mythical” role by making space for further social actors. Not to mention the too often ambiguous relationship between planning practice (and practitioners) and always changing political purposes, which are strictly linked to electoral needs and end up to be „intricately involved in framing and re-framing property markets“ (Adams & Tiesdell, 2010) (in other words: to be functional to global/local private interests). In this sense, it is to be added that, in the highly bureaucratic and sectoralised Italian administrative context – too often collusive or, at least, concentrated in preserving its fragment of corporative power – each administrative step can correspond to a „dis-regulation“ (Donolo, 2001), that is: a hypertrophic characteristic of formal system that is used by particularist circles to strenghten their power of intermediation as well as the production of non-decisive regulations, whose sense consists of preserving ad infinitum the power of such particularistic circuits by multiplying the opportunities that allow the mediators to mediate.

Such strong persistence of the traditional „rational” and bureaucratic planning frame ends to lead to a substantial distrust towards the „suspicious intentions“ (De Carlo, 1980) of the rhetoric on civic engagement in planning processes in all its multifaceted and variegated declinations, since the comforting recipe of standardised and self-referential participatory „best practices” can be seen as corresponding to the first five – „manipulation“, „therapy“, „informing“, „consultation“, „placation“ – of Arnstein’s (1969) „ladders of citizens participation“, where the latter is thought as embedded in a „system maintaining“ and not in a „system transforming“ (Chawla & Heft, 2002) approach. According to this perspective, also the „collaborative rationality“ (Innes & Booher, 2010) substantially ends to support the structure of hegemonic power, as it supposes mainly cooperative interactive networks and tends to deny the existence of conflict. In fact, even though a somewhat political dimension of urban planning is recognised, the latter paradoxically ends to be not really explored.

Furthermore, this merely formal approach to civic engagement cannot allow the production of social capital as a pure public good unintentionally resulting from participatory activities and constituting the prior condition to the development of a local society (Coleman, 1988). On the contrary, it rather tends to favour the persistence of the particularistic social capital, i.e.: the result of intentional actions and utilitarian strategies of certain (and often well-known) groups whose scopes are limited and unsustainable in the long run for the society as a whole. As also the academic context tends to be (and too often really is) involved with such particularistic networks and economic interests, the lack of independent academic research – focusing more and more on often unilaterally defined „best practices” as a useful way to avoid considering the existing critical scientific literature produced abroad – obviously does not help in offering insights into the ways in which both contrasting dis-regulations and strenghtening innovative existing trends. It is not a coincidence, however, that illegal planning (and academic) practices and their negative spatial effects are little studied² in a country in which illegal interests are strongly rooted due to the historical presence of criminal organisations and activities, and, as many national scandals have shown, corruption largely influences the economic development (and sometimes the academic world).

Last but not least, the described situation does not allow to understand the shift concerning social needs that contemporary planning is asked answering, namely post-modern social needs emerging from the relevant changes occurred in the still ongoing re-structuring of the contemporary urban space/society.

3 FREE-ZONES INTO URBAN VOIDS, AND THE PARADOX OF CREATIVITY.

3.1 Something happens in residual urban spaces.

Structural changes that have led to the emerging of the so called „new economy” are also the origin of a visible change in urban morphology. Indeed, the European and North American cities that were invested by the processes of industrialization, are dotted with „urban voids“ following the process of de-industrialization. The large urban containers, emptied of their previous functions, remain unused for a long time and caught between the complexity of decision-making and speculative expectations dictated by the market. Thus, they end up being both resources diverted from cities and places of insecurity. These abandoned and unused areas

² Exceptions can be found, for example, in studies carried out in recent years by Marco Cremaschi or Daniela De Leo.

are often gradually repopulated by spontaneous, creative and often temporary actions reflecting the self-organizing capacity of urban communities and their minorities. These „free-zones” are often located where living and working arrangement have momentarily run wild: areas of illegal building, residual spaces and demolition areas, red-light districts, temporary occupations, and so on. They are characterized by permanent elusiveness, guerrilla tactics, fundamental uncontrollability and relative isolation, and they also often deal with the ever-shifting relationship between what is legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized.

Free-zones are strictly connected with the practice of squatting: these are urban actors, with specific needs, that are generally excluded or undervalued by the traditional planning practices and urban policies, and they have neither the political power to see their interests prevail in the ordinary property market and through traditional planning practices. But their presence may enhance the general cultural diversity of an urban area since they often introduce there those uses, such as open spaces, social, cultural and commercial amenities as well as new kinds of informal accessible spaces where people can act, perform and interact (Franck & Stevens, 2007; Haydn & Temel, 2006), that the existing urban form, property values, institutional regulations had previously precluded, so that one could say that these uses compensate for deficiencies in publicly-founded action (Urban Catalyst, 2001).

3.2 Free-zones and creativity.

As Jacobs (1961) had noted by underlining lower rents of disinvested building as a reason enabling creative and risky experimental tenancies for their location, architecture, and former uses, post-industrial „free zones” of cities often host and inspire those „creative” activities that are seen by the well-known Richard Florida’s theory (2002) as a driver of attractiveness of the city, since it is believed that economic growth and competitiveness do not just depend on the presence of high-value production, services or flows of goods and investments, but also rely on the city’s innovativeness and creative environment, which in turn will attract further creative people and innovative knowledge. Such approach has emerged as part of the broader debate on social economic regeneration as a consequence of the transition to a post-Fordist economy, within which urban cultural policies – in both consumption-oriented and production-oriented version – have assumed a relevant role. Their nature has substantially changed compared to that they originally played from the post-war period onwards, since their function shifted towards fighting the economic decline through flagship projects, city marketing, and the „construction” of decisive mutations in the social behaviours and lifestyle of the urban population (Zukin, 1995), affirming a new post-industrial identity (Cochrane, 2007). All these factors have led to a „culturalisation of entrepreneurialism” (Ribera-Fumaz, 2009) as part of the new „cognitive capitalism” (Moulier-Boutang, 2007), based on the „convergence of economic and culture” (Garcia, 2004) aimed at producing „goods and services whose consumer appeal is derived pre-eminently from the fact that they transmit non-utilitarian aesthetic and semiotic signals” (Scott, 2007). Thus, the cultural dimension has lost its meaning of empowerment (in the sense used by Friedman, 1987) as it has become nothing but an „instrumental” goal.

Thus, on the one hand, creative milieus tend to appear in those areas (and related to those themes) which are deliberately left unplanned, revealing a sort of „shadow planning” involving niches and disadvantaged or neglected zones: contested and „waiting” spaces located in-between different options regarding uses, different life trajectories, different projects and city ideas. On the other hand, instead, creative use of derelict urban sites can also be interpreted as a case of post-fordist production aimed at exploiting the niche of amortised investments – and creative enterprises are typically small, low-capital, and flexible about the spaces they occupy – that are able (and especially in time of reduced public spending!) to accelerate their re-commodification and to optimise their economic potential by cultivating new consumer groups. These ambiguous aspects are documented in the case of Berlin (SenStadt, 2007), where both creative actors and the unused spaces they transform are seen as „the few remaining pools of untapped resources” (Colomb, 2012a), since such new goldfields of symbolic capital fit well to neoliberal demands. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that many scholars (Colomb, 2012a; 2012b; Hamnett, 2003; Pratt, 2009) have found significant parallels between creative re-appropriation and earlier waves of gentrification of post-industrial cities such as New York and London, since they can be seen as „an attractive ‘first step’ for numerous start-up ventures in the creative economy” (SenStadt, 2007). Thus, those urban actors generally excluded or undervalued by the traditional planning practices and urban policies can also end being seen as „entrepreneurial self-starters”

or „role models for a neo-liberal society“ (Lange, 2007) as well as the activities they informally introduce can be framed within the neo-liberal shift from stable government-led urban service provision and regulation to flexible governance and increasing reliance on entrepreneurial private investments.

3.3 Free-zones and current (preoccupying) trends in urban policies.

At the same time, especially in recent times, tolerance – whose crucial significance for the city’s creative and innovative capacity seems to be obvious – is often at odds with another challenge facing metropolises, i.e: how to guarantee sufficient basic quality in areas such as safety, restricting anti-social behaviour, preventing street garbage and so on.

A (preoccupying) example in this sense is given by the British case, where a „zero tolerance“ program (Hubbard, 2004a; Belina & Helms, 2003) was promoted since 1997 by the Tony Blair’s New Labour party as well as a „Crime and Disorder Act“ (1998), an „Anti-Social Behaviour Act“ (2003), a „Respect Action Plan“ (2006) (see: Johnston, 2004; Lees, 1998), all focusing on the enforcing on control especially over the youth (Rogers & Coaffee, 2005) through „Anti-Social Behaviour Orders“, „Child Curfews“, „Parenting Orders“. Together with the spread of surveillance and control techniques, such as Closed Control Television systems (Coaffee, 2005; Fyfe, 2004; Fyfe & Bannister, 1998; Norris, 1998), such legislative tools, mirroring the Major Giuliani’s policies in New York (Schneider & Kitchen, 2002), include not only crimes, but also a wider spectrum of incivilities and anti-social behaviours (Charman & Savage, 2002; Flint, 2006; Flint & Nixon, 2006), which tend to blur the distinction between disruptive and criminal behaviour (Charman & Savage, 2002) and to highlight the emerging of a „politics of behaviour“ (Field, 2003) aimed at removing forms of „intimidation“ and „tyranny“ (Bannister et al., 2006) in public spaces and based on a concept of „majority“ that seem to correspond to a specific target group, i.e: the „respectable“ (Bannister et al., 2006) consuming urban dwellers (Coleman et al., 2005; Amin et al., 2000; Flusty, 2001). In this sense, many scholars (MacLeod, 2002; MacLeod & Ward, 2002; Atkinson, 2003; Raco, 2003b; Hubbard, 2004b; Bannister et al., 2006; Cameron & Coaffee, 2006; Johnstone & MacLeod, 2006) underline that elements of „revanchist urbanism“, as defined by Smith (1996), have characterised New Labour’s urban policies. They also highlight the fact that such forms of control of public spaces against certain specific categories of people or activities considered „suspicious“ (Coleman & Sim, 2000; Coleman, 2003; 2004) go hand in hand (Morton & Kitchen, 2005) with the emphasis on the concept of „quality“ of public spaces given by a extremely detailed design, i.e.: „interdictory architectures“ (MacLeod, 2002) of regenerated urban spaces, associated with expectations of specific behaviours (Atkinson, 2003) in spaces where non-consumption can be seen as a form of deviance, according to the deterministic assumption of „a relationship between urban forms and urban behaviours“ (Raco, 2003a; as an antecedent, see: Newman, 1972; 1997).³

Therefore, a paradox is to be highlighted here. On the one hand, the acceptance of a multiplicity of compatible or conflicting outlooks, lifestyles, codes of behaviour and urban expressions is assumed as a prerequisite for innovation. On the other hand, the strict rules on city use and zero tolerance for wild-side activities tend to snuff out inspiring innovations and lead to the migration of creative potential. But, beyond the absence of commercial attention to derelict urban spaces, cheap rents, and flexible spaces, it is precisely the freedom from constraints that allows new creative actors, who are not purely motivated by profit, to inhabit and operate there.

Furthermore, it is to be underlined that, although free-zones activities may take shape in specific locations, since its informal nature the so-called „creative class“ is not so much organised around places as around

³ With reference to the Italian case as described in the previous chapter also in its academic and cultural (but also political) dimension, it is to be noted that, despite the existing vast and harshly critical literature on the London case and the wide public debate involving academics and opinionists, with criticism also coming from Richard Rogers himself (i.e: the main New Labour’s planner), in Italy Blair’s urban policies are presented, instead, as a „best practice“ by generically emphasising the concept of „quality of design“ as well as the „zero-cost“ dimension especially concerning social aspects (who quality is for?). As a significant example, see the issue n. 231 of the Italian journal „Urbanistica Informazioni“ (which claims being a peer-reviewed journal) and, particularly, the Lucia Nucci’s article (p. 14), without bibliography with the exception of a few official documents. In this sense, the title of the journal allows some irony, since „informazioni“ means „informations“, so that one could say „dis-informations“: in fact, the violent riots occurred in London in August 2011 (with the regenerated and gentrified Southwark literally fenced by police testifying the substantial failure of such approach in achieving its explicit social goals) as well as the related intense debate are not mentioned.

autonomous networks of like-minded participants. The condensation of free-zones activities is not particularly determined by physical conditions, but rather by societal and informal forces in local and global networks of innovators. This means that the creative milieus cannot simply be pinned down in a defined zoning perimeter or in bureaucratic regulations. Finally, as creative activities and uses are intrinsically „bottom-up”, they are difficult to create „top-down”, and being them short-term, unavoidably contrasting with planning’s general focus on fixed long-term visions. Thus, as creative milieus simply happen, and basically cannot be planned, how can urban planning – which is too often primarily oriented towards imposing and regulating – possibly be expected to come up with an effective, appropriate response to something like the fostering of creative milieus? How should policies respond to bottom-up movements and how should the free-zones be facilitated in a way which preserves their own dynamics and characteristics?

4 FREE ZONES AS „RE-ACTIVATION DEVICES”.

4.1 Unpacking free-zones.

The establishing of free-zones derives from temporary actions that may have different lifetimes, visibility, opening and closing effects, may result in improving or deteriorating the physical conditions of the area, may produce involvement or mimesis, cohabitation or conflict among actors. Anyway, opening and cleaning, designing and changing, imagining and adapting residual spaces can be intended as a creative activity that requires actors’ organisational and relational skills and may be defined as „re-activation devices”.

By analysing such re-appropriation of urban spaces as a process, it is possible to clearly distinguish different phases corresponding to specific behaviours, tactics and roles of actors. The first phase may be termed as „colonization”, for which well fits the geological metaphor of the earthquake, flooding space with new activities and communication codes, upsetting established local balances and activating energies and competencies that are able to re-organize the area but also to arouse strong oppositions and turmoil. It may take the form of an „event”, which can be a planned action and have different durations: the rave parties are the extreme version of this tendency to such rhapsodic constructing of temporary and mobile places that leaves a trace only in the local imaginary. Vice versa, the event can become a pioneer tactic when some temporary uses redefining the abandoned site are able to settle and become permanent. Ephemeral actions can then trigger new uses and practices permanently subverting the semantic codes of that space by staying as symbols of a project and, finally, becoming a rooting place. In this case, seems appropriate the botanic metaphor of the „graft”, understood as a practice with different transformation stages: sowing, flowering, and harvesting.

In fact, the beginning of temporary activities results in a start-up phase disseminating new uses and populations; then a waiting time to flowering, in which practices may die or germinate to root and, finally, to be collected and cared for by a „community of practices” (Wenger, 1998). Such communities are spontaneous groups of individuals whose identity is defined from a common interest or a shared activity and who interact in an informal and not hierarchical way through a process of socialization of forms of knowledge that are not easily transferable or formalizable through traditional learning procedures. Therefore, the gradualness of such a process of creative re-appropriation allows time to root activities, and this rooting is a premise in constant care, which is not simply public and civic maintenance of spaces – even necessary – but a guarantee that the re-activation process will continue over time.

When a temporary action stops a permanent use or an already established practice (e.g.: by occupying spaces as a political action), this addresses the need for networking with other organizations and/or finding the support of media. Otherwise, it will be a practice of short lifetime, which, anyway, will show how that space could host other activities. It also may be the case of coexistence (or clashing), in the same abandoned spaces, of different actors and temporary uses, which can be understood in two ways: the first concerns the possibility that the same space is contested by groups with different goals. There will then give rise to conflict or to negotiation and possible co-habitation. A form of co-existence is the persistence of temporary uses even after the settling of new permanent activities, as in the case of an abandoned area that „officially” becomes a parking, but continues to host an informal market on certain days of the week. Anyway, the consolidation of re-appropriation practices can occur after a long period of negotiation with the institutions, but especially by building consensus around temporary activities through the establishing of the new informal uses within the collective imaginary and, then, by formalizing them. In this sense, information and

communication are active devices in witnessing the existence of activities and actors in the residual spaces: both short neighborhood and longer networks may accompany the transformation. At this stage, the artistic expression and experience can play a relevant role.

4.2 Extending networks and coalitions.

In fact, moving from the link connecting art and society (Dewey, 1989), the metaphorical „natural” language historically allowed over time a constant creative reinterpretation of spaces, in which the artistic experience played a crucial role in self-representation of communities: think of religious or popular celebrations and events that defined urban hierarchies and structured public spaces. In this sense, artistic experience can be seen as strictly (re)linked to social practices.

This leads to focus on the articulated field of the contemporary urban art, especially on those artistic experiences based on an overcoming of the concept of form, as dadaist, surrealist and situationist approach. These kind of artistic expressions are based on an interpretation of space as inter-relation and on practices, which are intended as „la partie la plus vivante qui se joue sur l'échiquier de l'art“ (Borriaud, 2001). Therefore, it is possible to intend contemporary aesthetic approaches as a contested field of perceptions, experiences, lifestyles and values which articulate cultural practices, research of meaning, processes of individual or collective identification. It means that the artistic experience constitutes a sort of potential multiplier of sensitive experiences, also by those who are not definable as belonging to underground urban movements. In this sense, examples in establishing larger coalitions are given by experiences in which squatting constituted a tactical tool used in the preservation of a cityscape or landscape (for example: against the construction of roads or office blocks) by occupying those places where original inhabitants and users have already been displaced. In neighbourhoods that are under threat of function change, opportunities exist for coalitions between squatters and „legal“, traditional inhabitants that share the same interest in protecting their dwellings. Furthermore, coalitions can be extended to cover the issue of quality of life in the neighbourhood. Wider coalitions, across neighbourhoods and across social groups, are possible as well. In Amsterdam, squatting played a role in most of the major protests in the '70s that substantially thwarted the planners' program to modernize the old city. The 1979-1981 squatting wave in Berlin started as conservational squatting. In 1979 in Kreuzberg, the community action group „SO 36“ occupied an empty fire station to prevent demolition. The activists proceeded to occupy houses that were slated for razing, because they wanted to preserve both useable housing stock and the structure of the neighbourhood. Historically, squatters have also played an important role as initiators of community groups, as in the case of the neighbourhood committee in Amsterdam's Bethaniën district, the first neighbourhood group to resist city development. Also, protesters against the destruction of a cityscape or landscape deliberately occupied houses that were in the way of a planned subway line (Amsterdam, Nieuwmarkt, 1972-1975), a motorway (UK, the No M11 Link Road campaign in the 1990s) or railway (Betuwelijn, Netherlands. 1998-99). In the case of Rome, occupations of publicly-owned (sometimes historical) office or industrial building that are going to be sold at a very low price in the name of the economic crisis mean highlighting a relevant national issue, and claim social uses rather than 5-stars-hotels or luxury residences, as well as occupations for housing needs show that a low-cost housing problem exists and needs to be urgently tackled, exactly in the same way in which occupations of public schools and universities demand public investments in public (and not private) education.

Finally, such low-impact and reversible „re-appropriations“, which act on the urban fabric as an „acupuncture“ (Oswalt, 2000), seem able to create micro-economies, as witnessed by experiences such as „Bricolage Plantage” in Bremen, „No Longer Empty” or „Mutual Housing Association” in New York, „Micronomics” and „Micromarchè” in Bruxelles, and many others.

5 CREATIVELY MANAGING URBAN TEMPORARITY.

5.1 A more sensitive approach for re-connecting „shadow” to official planning.

Moving from the evidence of the relevance of free-zones – „micro-utopias under construction“ (Paba, 2004), „spaces of insurgent citizenship“ (Sandercock, 2003), „places of possibilities“ (Lefebvre, 1968) – also in the achievement of an international status, the challenge is to involve within planning theory and practices such interstitial, molecular and often invisible micro-movements without erasing their distinctive features.

Such challenge is to be framed within the emerging deliberative planning theories focusing on the need to elaborate new forms of interaction and innovative not codified answers and solutions to urban (social) problems. This research field focuses on an interpretation in which city is not only intended in a physical (material) sense, but also as a complex plot of inter-subjective emotional inter-relations which involves places. The attention is oriented towards the effects of social representations and actions on urban spaces in order to allow the construction of a local (not global) „actionable knowledge“ (Argyris, 1996) enlarging the objectives of planning to the production of social capital. Sensitivity thus needs to be developed in urban and planning policies regarding the conditions under which spontaneous bottom-up initiatives arise. The formal, regulatory, ossifying, territorial-based aspect of urban policy needs to be at least complemented with a greater attention to informal, self-managed, pioneering, elusive, network-based free-zones issues. The reference to Landry's concept (2000) of „cultural literacy“, although not appropriate at all, perhaps may be helpful to recall the fracture historically determined between languages – between the objective, scientific („modern“) language of planning and the subjective, metaphorical and symbolic („pre-modern“) language of „natural“ (Alexander, 1975) historical cities – used in the construction of public spaces. In this sense, Landry's „cultural literacy“ may be intended as close to the Sandercock's „new literacies“ (Sandercock, 2003) through which planners should plan „by negotiating desires and fears, mediating memories and hopes, facilitating change and transformation“.

Re-connecting „shadow“ to official planning, inter-acting with the always changing free-zones, understanding the role of creative temporary activities within urban regeneration strategies delineate a subtle and contaminative path, which is difficult to lead within a model since shadow planning, free-zones, ephemeral creative activities can assume diverse forms and intensities. Furthermore, because the terrain of some particular artistic experiences is that of a playful dimension, it is implicit that rules are in turn determined by the players. In addition, the difficult to lead them within a model lies in their strong relationship with the specificity of places and problems. But, surely, such an approach may constitute an interstitial experimental space, open to free expression, and also to errors. It need time to be spent, an inter(trans)-disciplinary and contaminative attitude, investment on social capital and also a sort of renewal of planning imaginary. In this sense, the co-evolution of both actors and spaces directly involves the public administrations and their capacity in overcoming traditional and codified procedures and practices: this needs a „visionary leadership“ (Sandercock, 2003), which is able to decide to assume and manage all the (inevitable) risks in terms of political consensus, also related to the time factor, strictly linked to this particular kind of experiences. This also implies a shift from an only „material“ renewal of spaces towards a broader meaning of regeneration intended as empowerment, which also includes the „immaterial“ dimension. Last but not least, problems and risks related to the ambiguities connected to „processes of construction of images“ (Scopetta, 2006; 2009) – as observed in many cases of gentrification – are not to be excluded.

A common feature of such tentative experiences may be that they generally start from spontaneous phenomena of appropriation and often illegal occupation in order to develop self-interested actions that – once proved effective with respect to a wider circle of people – end up to attract the attention of institutions. The latter comes into play later, by making themselves available to negotiation paths that may result in agreements and partnerships not initially considered and sometimes defined through incremental and even conflicting processes. Very often the contrast between the regeneration purposes expressed by the local institutions – inspired by traditional models and oriented to the demolition or renovation of spaces in order to set up traditional functions and/or conventional services – and the aspirations of the informally settled groups (also carrying out their own informal experimentations) can generate an inter-active space that may become an opportunity for collaboration and creative planning, developing new frames within which mobilising additional skills and expertise (architectural, technical, commercial, management, and so on). Obviously, ideas for project cannot derive from pre-established patterns, but they rather may be the innovative outcome of both the area and the long rooting process of new activities. Even the identification of possible managing models, moreover, can only derives from the practical organization and functioning of spaces, by involving multifaceted and different expertise, knowledge, experiences and interests.

5.2 Shifting in planning practices by introducing the concept of temporary „re-use”.

Anyway, what is sure is the loss of meaning of certain traditional categories, such as that of „destination of use“, which is well adapted to a no longer feasible model of government alluding to an unidirectional and pre-structured assignment of functions. On the contrary, the category of re-use can be more easily traced back to an idea of planning as an articulated and incremental process resulting of the intersection and overlapping of multiple forms of rationality and dynamics among the actors. Such an approach also allows to tackle in an integrated way physical and social aspects that – despite the evolution of planning discipline from the rationalist and functionalist spatial planning, now finally passed – continue to be pointlessly considered as opposite spheres. It shows, on the contrary, that one can be functional to the other: physical aspects, in fact, may be an opportunity in new ways to tackle social aspects, while the latter may be in turn a diriment criterion for rethinking the first ones.

The way in which the temporal dimension is tackled and perceived by the actors becomes crucial since it concerns the possibility of sedimentation and rooting of actors, knowledge, interactions, images and imaginary, mutual learning processes, policies and projects. In this sense, difficulties lie in the fact that public institutions and social groups generally have different routines, needs and time horizons: while the former are stable organizations that base their ability to act and their legitimacy on standardised procedures responding to internal logic (too often allowing dis-regulations), the latter usually act according to different times and priorities, which are related to the achievement of specific goals. Therefore, two different needs are to be reconciled: on the one hand, to construct inter-active spaces that will enable the institutions to move according to their specific abilities; on the other hand, to allow social groups to develop their potential by following appropriate times.

All this implies, of course, a radical shift in urban planning (in fact, already occurred, at least in part) and forces to rethink the role of planner: although – as Faludi (2000) suggests – many planners still like to see themselves at the centre of the action, controlling or reining in other actors, in the globalization age, they can no longer play the „mythical” technical role of the origin of a discipline founded to address the problems due to the industrial revolution by clearly separating functions and designing „modern” orthogonal grids as if there had been neither the crisis of the so-called „normal science” nor the assumption of the paradigm of complexity (Prigogine & Stengers, 1979). Time (and post-colonial studies) raised, moreover, the veils that concealed the essentially political nature of „technical” solutions. And, on the other hand, European policies have definitively sanctioned the shift from government to governance, i.e: from a model centred on the exclusive role of the public actor to another based on collaboration among different and multifaceted subjects.

6 KEEPING THE PUBLIC SPHERE ANCHORED TO SOCIAL CHANGES (A CONCLUSION).

It is evident, therefore, that re-connecting „shadow” to official planning also implies a radical shift in public administration in terms of a greater inter-sectoral and integrated approach, by re-organizing the internal structures. Neither the involvement of creative resources of the society can be intended (as it commonly happens) as a strategy of conflict anticipating/mediating or as an action aimed at building consensus in advance on institutional initiatives. And, in practices of „participatory planning“, in spite of significant investments in listening and consultation processes, ideas and proposals are too often trivial and obvious (more green, more security, a playground, a parking ...). It rather means moving on to consider citizens not only as passive recipients of services but as active agents, with knowledge, experiences, skills and abilities that are no longer exclusively concentrated within the institutions. This rather requires the experimentation of innovative configurations of the relationship between institutions and society by exploiting the specific resources that both are able to offer in different situations: for every actor involved, this means to be ready to play different, sometimes multiple and not pre-defined roles, with the institutional as a potential point of reference.

More generally, it is to be understood – by both public administrators and planners – that re-connecting „shadow” to official planning does not deal with the need of subtracting urban spaces to irregular, anti-social and dangerous activities according to a pervasive (presumed) „safety” demand (too often hiding not explicit interests of specific groups). It rather deals with the possibility to enlarge and re-conceptualize the public sphere by intercepting the new and not always easily decipherable social needs (Amin & Thrift, 2005) that have added to the well-known traditional ones, which are (were) normally faced by conventional services. In

this sense, considering free-zones as a not irrelevant factor in the production of urban space means to keep the public sphere anchored to social changes by abandoning the traditional (but no longer useful) logic based on the old concept of „needs” (which requires direct strategies) and rather privileging the opportunities for action, which refers to indirect strategies through which the new emerging needs may be intercepted.

As delineated, the proposed experimental and contaminative path aims to offer insights into alternative ideas of „creativity” – into what creativity could be – by shifting from a neo-liberal vision in which it is intended as a tool for attracting global investments towards, instead, a more comprehensive concept of creativity as „capacity” (Sen, 1999), positive freedom and awareness.

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