RICERCHE

Federica Leone, Corrado Zoppi

Participatory processes and spatial planning

The Regional Landscape Plan of Sardinia, Italy

territorio sostenibilità governance

FrancoAngeli

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Territorio sostenibilità governance
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La collana, suddivisa in tre sezioni (saggi, ricerche, quaderni), analizzando le trasformazioni territoriali, la sostenibilità ambientale e il governo dei processi, vuole contribuire alla costruzione di una nuova concezione del progetto in una cultura multiscalare attraverso tre concetti chiave: complessità sistemica, limite, progetto. Il primo è legato ai risultati strutturali ed estetici che le trasformazioni hanno prodotto e che devono essere governati nella loro complessità; il secondo è definito dalle leggi della sostenibilità; il terzo è frutto della razionalità del fare.
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Foreword

In the introductory section the Authors propose a discussion concerning their position on the core issue of the book, that is participation, in the conceptual context of contemporary theory related to planning theory and practice, progressive planning and theory of complexity.

The second chapter of the book proposes our theoretical assumptions through a literature review. After that, we discuss research strategies, design and methods (chapter 3) and the planning framework of the Sardinian Regional Landscape Plan (RLP) (chapter 4).

The following three chapters present three case studies concerning the theoretical discussion proposed in chapters 2-4. In the first, we assess the RLP through a participatory-action-research-based approach. Chapter 6 discusses the implementation of the RLP into the municipal masterplan of a Sardinian town, Sinnai, and we address conflicts related to participatory processes. A case study related to the characterization of investment of European Union Structural Funds is presented in chapter 7, where we analyze the expenditure for public services and infrastructure in the Sardinian coastal municipalities under the provisions of the RLP.

Chapters 8 and 9 discuss two important theoretical and technical issues concerning participatory processes: the analysis of data that characterize participatory processes and the tentative definition of a procedural protocol to implement participation into − spatial, regional, urban − planning processes.

The last two chapters present two case studies related to data analysis and procedures. In chapter 10 we assess the issue of capitalization and impoverishment of cultural and landscape resources in the conceptual framework of Strategic environmental assessment (SEA). In the following chapter we discuss the evaluation of revealed preferences by the local community concerning future land uses in the coastal area of a Sardinian municipality.

This book comes from the joint research work of the authors.

Federica Leone has taken care of chapters 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9.

Corrado Zoppi has taken care of chapters 5 (co-author Sabrina Lai), 6, 7 (co-author Sabrina Lai), and 11 (co-author Sabrina Lai).

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1. *Introduction*

What Hillier (2010) highlights in the introductory essay of a Companion to planning theory can be applied to this book, whose chapters can be viewed as «concerned with conceptual challenges for planning theory – including concepts such as contingency, complexity, subjectivity, schemes of signification, creativity, etc. and the challenge of reconceptualizing or retheorizing planning practice – and for planning practice and its key concepts such as sustainability, multiculturalism and so on» (p. 13).

The overall view of planning theory and practice is that planning is empirically-founded, and that its current theoretical issues are attempts to give foundations to planning analyses and decisions, which are important points of reference for theory since theory arises from observed practice, that is, from past and present analyses and decisions. There are two main narratives that we propose in order to tentatively design the contemporary key concepts of planning theory: post-structuralism and complexity.

From this perspective, we consider these questions as intrinsically multifaceted. This is in line with Hillier's (2010) position, «following the principle of heterogeneity triggers the emergence of new ideas and prevents theories and processes solidifying or getting "locked in"» (p. 21).

In the following sections a set of possible reading perspectives concerning the chapters in this book are presented in the form of narratives, which mainly refer to entanglement of planning theory and practice, progressive planning, and the relationship between complexity and structuralist and post-structuralist interpretive positions. In the last section we introduce the issue of participation, which defines the theoretical and technical framework of the book.

1.1. Planning theory and practice

A first narrative refers to important issues for theory derived from planning practice, which entail discussions on:

- the meaning and role of governance with respect to planning processes;
- the complex relationship between planning and politics, with particular reference to informal economies and the recognition of local cultural peculiarities;
- the interpretive approaches in planning practice, which support a relativistic view of planning analysis and interpretation, since «The subject [humanist philosophy, that is the transcendental and free-willed subject which history and society are founded on] is a form, not a thing, and this form is not constant, even when attached to the same individual» (Huxley, 2010, p. 144), and the issue of the role of planning in contemporary urban and regional contexts: is planning an increasingly-technocratic economic and social exercise? or, is planning a social mobilization (à la John Friedmann, 1987), or an advocacy exercise in favor of the poor?;
- the issue of creativity in planning, viewed as an effective way to implement strategic planning, where creativity is a necessary condition for planning effectiveness.

Most of the chapters emphasize that planning practices are characterized by heterogeneous technical and procedural approaches which require attention to theory. According to Healey (2010), it is hard to derive universally-valid lessons at present, but it is worth making a decided effort to conceptualize current planning practices, paying attention to the particular contexts in which these practices arise and are shaped. A central issue concerns the analysis of relations between planning, power and politics. This entails normative analyses, which include subjectivity and intentionality, and possibly a politically-active role of practitioners, and, consequently, of planning theorists who «[should] not treat practices in the language of stereotypes and broad generalizations. Instead, they should be encouraged to see them as a myriad of institutional sites, with particular histories and geographies, specific power dynamics and variable capacities to promote progressive futures» (Healey, 2010, p. 52).

1.2.Progressive planning

A second narrative for the book could be identified by finding appealing and convincing ways to build new theoretically-founded progressive planning. New approaches to define and analyze cities, which «can hardly be

conceptualized without a physical infrastructure of buildings, streets and various conduits for the circulation of matter and energy, defined in part by their spatial relations to one another» (DeLanda, 2010, p. 251) and new approaches to analyzing and problematizing cities in contemporary planning theory are also discussed, in a vitalistic perspective, by Pløger (2010) who notes «The fact that humans are attached to the world bodily, by sensing, by memory, by experiencing and imagination, has not moved urban studies to consider vitalism and the role of its forces in the production of social spaces and forms of urbanity;» (p. 327).

Progressive planning practices can be viewed as the effective implementation of the concept of subsidiarity into planning processes[1].

> The attributions of functions] have to observe the principle of subsidiarity. The majority of tasks and administrative functions should be attributed to the cities, provinces and mountain communities, on the basis of their territorial size, and community and organizational complexity, with the only exclusion of the functions inconsistent with these size and complexity. Public responsibilities are also attributed to the part of the public administration closest to the citizens in order to help families, organized groups and communities to take on social tasks and functions;...

A Foresterian narrative[2] shows that everything could change, if each participant changed the way he sees the role he has to play, and if each participant changed the way he sees the role the others should play. In particular, the fundamental point is that the regional administration should change its attitude towards subsidiarity. It is worth quoting the definition of subsidiarity given by the European Union's Glossary:

> The principle of subsidiarity is defined in Article 5 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. It is intended to ensure that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen and that constant checks are made as to whether action at Community level is justified in the light of the possibilities available at national, regional or local level.[…]

[1] Italian Law no. 59/97 titled "Law which delegates the Italian government to establish the procedures to attribute administrative tasks and functions to the regional and local administrations, in order to reform the public administration and to simplify the administrative procedures", article 4, paragraph 3, letter a.

[2] An analysis is developed in the light of the lesson learned from Forester (1999). One of the main points of Forester's approach is that the practitioner should try to understand and solve conflicts concerning decision-making in the public domain by favoring empathetic dialogue between the fighting parties. Forester's narrative is that conflictual processes can succeed (that is, can be deliberative) if the parties start esteeming each other, and, by doing so, try to understand and possibly appreciate the other's point of view.

The Edinburgh European Council of December 1992 issued a declaration on the principle of subsidiarity, which lays down the rules for its application. The Treaty of Amsterdam took up the approach that follows from this declaration in a Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality annexed to the EC Treaty. Two of the things this Protocol introduces are the systematic analysis of the impact of legislative proposals on the principle of subsidiarity and the use, where possible, of less binding Community measures[3].

In other words, the principle of subsidiarity indicates that the regional and national − and of the European Union − authorities should not interfere with the administrative autonomy of the local communities as long as the local communities are willing and able to deal with and successfully govern certain matters. Urban and city planning are certainly among these matters.

From this perspective, there are two main normative points which should be kept in mind. First, the right concept of subsidiarity has to be restored in planning implementation codes. Second, planning activity has to be based on a true cooperative-planning approach so that the relations between the different sectors of the public administrations may lose their conflict-derived inefficiency.

Dissemination of information and fairness of the decision processes, which are most likely to be ensured by awareness and participation of local communities in defining and implementing public policies, are certainly important in generating the most socially desirable outcomes.

1.3.Structures and complexity

Another narrative for the book is that the idea that structures matter is not rejected; but we do reject theoretical approaches founded on dualistic readings of the relations between agents and structures. In other words, the substances of structures − capital, class, linguistics, etc. − and of agents are interdependent; agents can influence the substance of structures, and their behavior is not deterministically dependent on structures: causality flows both ways. Notwithstanding the intrinsic problematicity of the questions at stake, the reader can easily perceive that good governance, uncertainty, forecast, and the continuous intermix of theory and practice are strictly connected to complexity. Moreover, positions on these subjects are expressed in very plain and culturally rich terms, and the meaning of some important concepts related to the context of these positions as well: that is, innovation, strategy, landscape, participation, planning support systems, sustainability, spatial analysis, environmental assessment, urban and regional mobility, transport

[3] The Glossary is available at the following Internet address: http:// europa.eu/ scadplus/ glossary/ subsidiarity_en.htm [accessed 21.03.2012].

planning, creativity etc. These definitions are very helpful in understanding the conceptual frameworks of these papers.

Reading the book chapters in the conceptual context of complexity is not easy, since its aim is to provide a comprehensive picture of contemporary state of the art of planning theory and practice, and to define possible narratives which may lead from practice to theory, more than the reverse. This state of the art is very complex, and it resists being identified as an ordered set of categories.

1.4.Participation

Participation and the participatory processes remain central elements of modern society, representing a prerequisite and a democratic right in Western nations. However, although their importance is underlined at the international level, the implementation of participatory practices has resulted in some criticisms and problematic aspects due to the ambivalent nature of the concept of participation. Indeed, although theoretically it represents a democratic right, governments sometimes implement inclusive processes in order to reinforce the existing power relations (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). From this conceptual framework, our research focuses on participatory approaches in support of decision-making processes, by analysing problems and criticisms to translate theoretical concepts into practice. We propose a qualitative strategy based on a triangulation of methods, implemented into the assessment of the RLP. In particular, a procedural protocol is elaborated in order to integrate the participatory processes within the planning processes at the regional scale.

This paragraph analyses the following issues:

1 relevance of participation in the field of study, in order to clarify why it is important;
2 research questions;
3 contributions of the research in terms of discussion of positive and negative aspects concerning participation.

In relation to the first aspect, the research derives, on the one side, from the authors' personal interest in participation theory and from the specific Sardinian experience. On the other side, it is related to the overwhelming social importance of participatory processes. Moreover, governments and communities sometimes abuse this term, which is easy since its definition is not straightforward. Indeed, the planning system concerns different interests and positions. Improper management of the various aspects involved in the planning processes could be a source of planning strategy ineffectiveness. In