Urban planning practice and urban practice at the city/port interface

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Abstract

This paper aims at investigating the relationships between (deliberative) planning practice and urban practice of everyday life partly drawing on the outcomes of field work carried out from both the geographical and the planning perspectives. The latter concerns conflicts generated by mega-projects at the city-port interface. Difficulties in representing the 'urban reality' in the decision-making process even when communicative approaches are adopted are highlighted.

Keywords

Mega-projects, deliberative planning, urban practice, space/time routines.

Introduction

In the contemporary political and scientific debate a twofold vision of urban issues emerge. The role of cities and urban areas as growth engines within globalization processes and centers of innovation in the knowledge economy is recognized: cities can attract inward investments, events, push political institutions to improve their position within 'urban hierarchy' through

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development of social and cultural capital, investments in environmental quality, improvement of the access to service facilities, development of efficient infrastructure systems etc. In parallel with the focus on the economic role of cities, social and environmental demands linked to uneven socio-economic development within cities are highlighted (Atkinson, 2007). In accordance with this view, EU documents stress the importance of sustainable economic growth: 'Economic growth is sustainable when it goes hand in hand with efforts to reduce poverty, fight social exclusion and tackle environmental problems' (CEC, 2005, p. 3).

The strategies developed by cities in recent years include both actions supporting the engagement of cities in forms of competition with one another and area-based initiatives targeting urban deprived areas, tackling social exclusion and promoting social and economic cohesion. However, during their implementation, these strategies often result in conflicts particularly difficult to face, as actions to support urban competition and actions to enhance the quality of life of inhabitants and promote social cohesion are difficult to be carried out in parallel.

One can argue that by dealing with conflicts planners develop somehow the capacity to deal with the contemporary 'multiple' city. In particular, referring to strategic planning, Forester (2010, p. vii) suggests not to equate 'the presence of conflict with the impossibility of acting and planning well. In the political circumstances in which planning inevitably takes its place, planners must have capacities to work in the face of conflicts. Conflicts present difficulties, not necessarily impossibilities'. He states that in what he calls 'spaces of deliberative opportunities', 'diverse local actors in diverse processes can bring forward creative, if opposing, ideas and suggestions and proposals in efforts to try to shape urban and regional futures…'.

This paper will question the above mentioned arguments by focusing on conflicts generated by mega-projects[1] threatening (or perceived as threatening) to disrupt the existing urban fabric. The processes of setting up and implementation of mega-projects, in fact, are particularly interesting to investigate the

difficulties of representing the variety and complexity of urban practices in decision-making processes, even when communicative approaches are adopted. In this case planning practices and every-day life practices are particularly distant as they refer to objectives and values very far from each other.

In recent times, within the academic debate, the role of large infrastructures within multi-level decision-making processes - as a resource for local development and urban regeneration has been explored (Dematteis, Governa, 2001). Notwithstanding that, in the last decades, referring to the Italian context, in most cases decision making processes concerning large infrastructural development have been very difficult and often projects stood in a stalled situation (Becchi, 2005; Bobbio, Zeppetella, 1999; Zeppetella, 2007). This occurred even when stakeholders had been included in the decision making process. These reflections bring us to question, at least in the Italian case, the effectiveness of 1980s participative approaches to environmental conflicts (Susskind, Cruikshank, 1987), today often still brought up as a model. These approaches stated that trough the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in negotiating procedures, it was possible to 'break the *impasse*'.

Partly drawing on the outcomes of field work concerning a mega-project in a port area of a Southern Italy's city, Bari, on the Adriatic coast (Tedesco, 2009; 2011), the questions we tried to answer are the following: To what extent do planners dealing with conflicts develop the capacity to deal with the contemporary 'multiple' city? Is it possible to fully understand urban diversity through the analysis of conflicting interests in 'spaces of deliberative opportunities'?

This paper is divided into four sections, beyond this introduction. In the following two sections we better specify what we refer to when we mention both 'urban planning practices' and 'urban practices'; the latter are interpreted as spatial-temporal routines. In section *Insights from a case-study*, we focus on the modes in which urban planning practices dealt with urban practice, i.e. the 'urban reality' as shaped by everyday life, in a planning process concerning a port area. In section *The sea-*

front and the port from the perspective of space-time routines a different decription of the area is given. In the final section some brief conclusions are traced.

Urban planning practices...

In her recent book *Making Better Places* Healey (2010) underlines that planning activity is often identified with the procedures and practices of 'planning systems' aiming at promoting public objectives through the setting up and implementation of spatial development plans and the regulation of private property rights. On the contrary, in order to overcome narrowing, reductive perspectives with which many planning practices have become associated, she presents the planning field 'as a practice of bringing imagined futures into being' focusing on '…how the projects were brought into being – how possibilities and project ideas were imagined, how resources were assembled, how ideas progressed from designs to land clearance and building activity, and how attention was sustained for projects that had long-time spans from initial idea to completion' (Healey, 2010, p. x).

These ideas can be traced back to previous reflections in planning theory. In fact, during the 1990s, within the 'communicative turn' in planning theory, several authors examined the day-to-day work of planning practitioners and described the ways in which planners address even abstract cognitive problems within a system of 'interactions' (Mandelbaum, 1996, p. 201). It was recognized that the ways in which opportunities and constraints are perceived, debated and confronted in daily planning practice influence the realization of rules and the patterns of resource allocation (Healey, 1992, p. 19). What is more, in the same period, the importance of knowledge being held by groups other than professionally trained planners was recognized, thus, the establishment of deliberative arenas became part of the planning process (Rydin, 2007).

According to this view, we can broadly define 'urban planning practices' as practices somehow developed in relation to

planning systems (Cellamare, 2007, p. 45). However, among them we can include not only practices by which planners and policy makers describe and interpret problems, draw documents and build up projects but also practices by which they try to include stakeholders and inhabitants ideas, values, needs into the planning process.

What is more, according to an 'epistemology of multiplicity' new forms of interactive planning practices should include listening and talking, as well as learning to read symbolic and non-verbal evidence (Sandercock, 1998). However, the use of deliberative processes as a way of handing multiple knowledge largely prevailed (Rydin, 2007).

... and urban practices as space-time routines

On the other hand, we can consider urban practices linked to everyday life space-time routines (Amin and Thrift, 2005). In this view, it is fundamental to take into account some studies of Geography which make reference to human experience of places and urban reality. This experiential approach, if on the one hand has a phenomenological derivation, on the other is linked to the concept of everyday life elaborated in the '60s by Lefebvre. According to the French philosopher, it may be interpreted as 'the humble and the solid, what goes by itself, what the parts and fragments thereof entangle by the course of time' (Lefebvre, 1979, p. 51). This concept has had relevance in Geography and some scholars have completed it and proposed it once again; for example Crivelli affirms that 'a sphere of relationships by which men learn both how to structure their time and their space, and how to reproduce these structures' (Crivelli, 1986, p. 93). However, it is possible to ascribe another aspect to everyday life that is inventiveness, constant creativity which might be understood as the ability to think to alternative solutions in relation to the present time (Copeta, 1992, p. 108).

Moreover some geographers (for example Raffestin, 1986) have underlined the spatial dimension together with the temporal one of everyday life. These dimensions have the name of spatial-

temporal routines and become evident on the territory of everyday life. For Raffestin everydaylife has its hidden dimension, territoriality; both of them, territoriality and everydaylife, are the sides of the same coin. In the opinion of the Swiss geographer, territriality has its exteriority, that is a *topos*, a place, but also an abstract space such as the institutional political and cultural system, thanks to mediators. These routines or practices – in the sense that practices very often are a routine – according to De Luca (1979, p. 25) may be either subjective or objective, either having sense or unconscious expressions; he underlines that everyday life can be considered 'as the place both of social life and individual life, both of repetitive behaviours and innovative ones, in relation to settled traditions and habits' (De Luca, 1979, p. 25).

These theories, which had been forgotten for a while, have come back in geographic reflections thanks to English-speaking geographers. For this reason we will make reference to geographers such as Amin and Trift, who in their book *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, apply these concepts to the reading of the Urban reality of cities in North Europe. They affirm that 'cities unite, mix, separate, hide, show peculiar social practices as the city is everywhere' (Amin and Trift, 2005, p. 35). In this way they affirm not only a 'fluid' concept of city but also the relevance of practices.

Allen explains the meaning of urban rhythms in this way: 'they are everything concerning the normal going and coming of people to the great number of repetitive activities, sounds also odours which are present in the streets of the city and give to the most of them who live and work there a sense of time and of the place…' (Allen, 1999, p. 56). Amin and Nigel Trift add: 'the metaphor of the rhythms of the city is useful to underline some neglected rhythms of time' (2005, p. 38). For example those of the cities' night life in this way become clear.

Insights from a case-study

Having specified what we mean by 'urban planning practices'

and 'urban practices', this paper aims at highlighting if, how, to what extent and with what kind of consequences, deliberative urban planning practices are shaped in order to take into account urban practices of everyday life.

As already mentioned above, the ideas developed in this paper are partly drawn on the outcomes of field work concerning mega-projects in waterfront areas. In port cities the twofold vision of urban issues between the efforts to enhance urban competitiveness and the attempts to reduce intraurban uneven development enhancing the quality of life of inhabitants and promoting social cohesion is particularly evident. The port can be seen as the area in which local urban networks and world-wide networks meet (Meyer, 1999). As a consequence, port-cities are a very interesting field to investigate the issues we are dealing with as, on the one hand, they are engaged in managing the development of their infrastructures in order to develop their economic potential within the globalization processes, involving an increasing delocalization of industrial production as well as increasing fluxes of people and goods; on the other hand, they have to manage the territorial impact of these infrastructures, relating them to both the inhabitants' everyday life and the conservation and valorization of the identity features of the territory (Alberini, 2006).

A few years ago, within a research concerning urban conflicts in the Bari port area (Tedesco, 2009) it was highlighted that protests of citizens committees against the impacts of large infrastructural development in the port area on the existing urban fabric contributed to transform the top-down decision making process into a 'deliberative arena', i.e., referring to Bobbio (2002), an experience in which all those who are directly affected take part in a collective decision-making process based on the use of arguments.

The theoretical framework used for the empirical work (in brief, the *government/governance* relationship) shed light on two main aspects of the decision making process: i) the difficulties of interinstitutional relationships (the process involved several institutions: the Port Authority, the municipality, many departments of the Regional government, many departments of

the Ministries) ii) the passage in planning practices from top-down to bottom-up approaches. This passage was particularly interesting as in the case of large infrastructural development, top-down approaches traditionally used to prevail (Altshuler, Luberoff, 2003).

Even if some disputes on the representatives of local associations emerged, this opening of the decision making process to a wide range of local actors through the establishment by the Port Authority of an Observatory (a deliberative arena with the commitment of monitoring the environmental impact of the port area large infrastructural development) was considered to be a positive outcome of the process. In particular, within the public discussions not only public institutions, but also associations representatives brought 'expert' arguments either against or in favor of the completion of some infrastructural developments. The impact of these infrastructures on the coastal ecological system as well as on the hydrogeological system was at stake. Besides, many urban practices (as space time routines) which would have been cancelled/supported by the port area infrastructural developments and their consequences on the urban structure emerged (such as jogging, canoeing, waiting for the ferry boat). Hence, one can argue that the 'urban reality' was well represented in this deliberative conflicting arena, also due to the presence of opposing arguments. However, the urban practices which emerged during the process were just a 'selection' of urban practices which it was possible to observe in the area. They were mainly the practices of new comers of the neighborhood (which developed fast during the 1990s and was interested by gentrification processes) while other 'traditional' practices were not taken into account.

In particular people by night, in summer, traditionally use public spaces in this part of the city informally, having their dinner, either brought from home (together with chairs and tables) or bought in street food shops temporarily set up in the area. We will better describe this practice in the following section. What it is worth underlining here is that this practice, which is absolutely central not only for many inhabitants of the area, but also for many citizen living in other areas of the city, was not considered

at all in the successful deliberative planning process! What this process certainly missed was the capacity to intercept space-time routines shaping the urban reality. Some of these forgotten practices produced other quite violent conflicts in the following years opposing the major who focused his attention on the illegal aspects of this practice (many street food shops are illegal) and citizens and sellers claiming for maintaining this traditional public use of areas surrounding the seafront.

In the following section we will describe the urban reality, as it emerge beyond the planning process, assuming space-time routines as a perspective.

The sea-front and the port from the perspective of space-time routines

A contemporary city is a unity which lacks an internal coherence, but also a group of processes which are often disconnected. It is a place of near and at the same time far away connections, an interrelations of rhythms. The method to understand these rhythms is apparently simple: walking, thinking, describing. First of all it is better to define the meaning of walking which identifies the role of the flâneur, as it has been described by Benjamin (1995). More recently, Sansot (2000) describes his walks and his method of being a flâneur: to walk, to speak, to write, to read… and so the streets become metaphors of a new vision of the world.

For Paba, on the contrary, to walk means not only covering a space, but also 'acting on a structure of communication, crossing a palimpsest of cultures, of territorial codes of urban grammars, of models of human geography that lead the ones towards the others. To walk is also reading the contemporary world and even having a dialogue with the past one (…) reading the old texts of the ground and of the territory which emerge from some clefts' (1998, p. 52). It is an active and reflexive walking, through which one can describe the urban reality which, according to De Certeau (2001, p. 33), must be related to everyday life. From this perspective, descriptions do not profit only of the 'eye' of the

geographer but also of literary texts, films, newspapers etc…

So, to walk means first to observe the urban rhythms, which in Amin and Trift's opinion 'are the coordination by which the inhabitants and the visitors look and order urban experience' (2005, p. 32). This flânerie may reveal a lot of the innumerable secrets of the city. It corresponds to the sense of time and space which in the Mediterranean cities express themselves in a different way than in North European cities: for example, usually long breaks for lunch, and most of all very long nights. As the Greek geographer Leontidou (1993, p. 943) affirms, 'it is here in the Mediterranean cities that we find cities which never sleep'.

Apart from the long nights (mostly in summer), other aspects characterize the city of Bari, that is the informal aspect, the spontaneity, the fluxes and what, to use an English term, can be defined its 'sensuous geography'. Such characteristics will be read in that part of Bari's territory which coincides with its nearness to the sea and which is identified with: a) the seafront b) the port.

a) The sea is 'always transparent as a crystal and is completely green-blue, of the colour of the sand which is under it' (Carofiglio, 2008, p. 89).

The seafront is long about 12 km. It represents in the best way the ancient link land/sea of Bari's people. Moreover, it is also the key element of the Mediterranean city (Leontidou, 1993). It is especially relevant from the point of view of its fruitions which correspond to its rhythms. The latter are fundamental for the social life of the city. In fact, in the Mediterranean culture great value is given to the seafront and to public spaces, because they are places which have symbolic value and are landmarks and traces for social relationships and urban identification; moreover they reinforce a sense of belongings and rooting.

With regard to the city of Bari, it is possible to distinguish a day fruition from a night one, and a winter fruition from a summer one. The night fruition of public spaces during summer is particularly interesting: it shows another way of enjoying the city. In other words, it is possible to refer a 'double fruition', and double rhythms due to the fact that its day fruition differs from the night one: during the day the seafront is used as a connected

axis, while by night it becomes a meeting place. However, the night fruition takes place above all during summer. During summer, in fact, thanks to the night rhythms, the seafront becomes a 'public space enjoyed in a private way', that is to say that its space is enriched by the manifold meanings that people ascribe it, thus becoming pivotal for the people and for their identity (Petrignani, 1972). It is an integral part of the city and its inhabitants: it is a resource to be enjoyed.

b) 'The port is a different universe. If it happens to you to go there by night, you will not understand how it is so vast, how it is possible that such a large part may be part of the city, when you might have the impression that it should be the contrary' (Carofiglio, 2009, p. 85).

Thus, a different world: the long arms, formed by the piers, stretch into the sea to underline its versatility, its ability to satisfy different operational needs: wharfs equipped for loading and unloading commodities, with services for ferry-boats, cruises and accommodation for passengers on a cruise.

Rhythms are different: more frequent – many times a day – for those who have to get on board or disembark form the ferries.

The rhythms of the passengers express in waves: they spread in the area of the port towards accommodation services or they try to find a bus for tours outside the city, buses for a scenic tour of the city, taxis, small trains to visit the city. Besides, we can consider the people who work in the port, who are busy with the daily loading and unloading of the goods on different work shifts.

Thus, the port area accomplishes a functional role. This is the reason why everyday activity is mostly routine and banality. As Amin and Thrift affirm (2005, p. 75), 'it is the community of having a specific place not of the place itself (as it happens for the seafront). It is the community which cannot be classified, it is the community without identity'.

Some brief conclusions

The description of the sea front and the port from the

perspective of space-time routines showed us an urban reality which was invisible in the (deliberative and conflicting) planning process concerning large infrastructure developments in the port area of Bari. Our case-study allows us to clearly highlight that even if several urban practices emerge in deliberative arenas, the latter do not represent the 'urban reality', even when they are crossed by conflicts. Put in a different way, conflicts generated in spaces of deliberative opportunities only partially describe the urban reality.

The gap between the emergence of urban practices in conflicting deliberative arenas and the urban reality can be understood in several ways which, put it roughly, refer to the relationship between collective action and the individual practices exploiting 'intersticial' urban spaces. Due to limited space, we will read this relationship focusing on the role of expertise in conflicting decision-making processes. Expertise plays a paradoxical role in environmental, territorial and technological conflicts: it is central to them, but, at the same time, it is a contested element, it is somehow brought in the middle of the conflict (Pellizzoni, 2011). As a consequence, public institutions (as well as planners) face many difficulties because, on the one hand, they do need to be supported by experts, on the other hand, they have to deal with the deconstructin of knowledge by the opposing parts involved in the process, as well as, in more general terms, by social sciences (*ibidem*). Coming back to our concerns about the representativeness of urban practices emerging in 'spaces of deliberative opportunities' we can wonder who possess the expertise which is essential to participate. Expertise is a key but 'selective' resource for the inclusion of people (and arguments) in spaces of deliberative opportunities. Hence, it is not the urban reality as it concretely stands in the city which is represented in deliberative arenas, it is rather the urban reality as it is represented by people who possess and can manage the expertise useful to participate in deliberative planning processes.

What is more, when inclusive urban planning practices are adopted, planners risk to have the illusion to be able to represent the urban reality while citizens bring in the decision-making arena knowledge and expertise which are 'filtered' by the

planning process objectives. This illusion can be a strong limit for planning processes even when different 'knowledge claims' are recognized (Rydin, 2007).

Last, but not least, given that policy instruments contribute to the construction of problems they deal with (Blumer, 1971; Crosta, 1995; Estèbe, 2004), handling multiple knowledge does not necessarily mean to overcome the description (and the boundaries) of the urban reality which we build up in relation to a specific planning process. But in handling multiple knowledge within planning processes we often come across unexpected connections between several dimensions and aspects of the urban reality which we would not expect to acknowledge as linked. Hence, a major point concerns the capacity of the actors involved in the process to overcome the boundaries of the 'objects' they are dealing with, as they are represented trhough planning tools.

Notes

[1] This contribution is the outcome of a common reflection by the two authors. However, section *Introduction*, *Urban planning practice and…*, *Insights from a case-study* and *Some brief conclusions* were written by Carla Tedesco. Section *…urban practices as space-time routines* and *The sea front and the port from the perspective of space-time routines* were written by Clara Copeta.

[2] In recent years the term 'mega-projects' has been associated to a big variety of interventions, ranging from 'large-scale government investments in physical capital facilities … to revitalize cities and stimulate their economic growth' (Altshuler, Luberoff, 2003) to 'work of deliberate urban reconfiguration, of generating major projects… to create or recreate urban locales' (Healey, 2010, p. 124). In this paper the term mega-project is used in quite a narrow way, referring to large infrastructural developments in port areas impacting on valued elements of the existing urban fabric and on the communities everyday life.

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