

Forerunning. Long-distance walking routes and the role of bottom-up practice in urban and territorial planning processes in Italy

Carla Tedesco*

Abstract

This article is based on an understanding of long distance-walking (LDW) routes as both a territorial infrastructure and an emerging bottom-up land use practice which can play a relevant role in the process of innovating territorial planning instruments as well as the idea and objectives of the planning process itself. It is based not only on literature, but also on a concrete experience carried out at an urban level. This is useful for discussing LDW routes, with the idea to develop some reflections useful at different tiers of the planning process. From this perspective, the role of LDW routes as potential ‘forerunning projects’ in relation to the planning/project nexus emerges.

Keywords

Long distance walking routes; Innovation in planning; Bottom up practice; Planning/project nexus

* IUAV University of Venice, Italy

Introduction

This article explores long distance-walking (LDW) routes from a planning perspective. It understands LDW routes as both a territorial infrastructure and an emerging bottom-up land use practice, originating outside the traditional boundaries of planning, and then discusses the role they can play in the process of innovating territorial planning instruments as well as the idea and objectives of the planning process itself.

As it is well known, LDW is an activity historically practiced across several cultures for different reasons (Solnit, 2002). It can be traced back to a religious act such as in the case of the Middle Age pilgrims' trails (De Seta, 1982) as well as to a basic means of transport and an opportunity for leisure drawn on a significant idea of the act of walking as an act of engagement with nature (Hall, Ram and Shoal, 2022).

Nowadays LDW is gaining new peculiar meanings, especially in relation to the pursuing of wellbeing and a better quality of life and the improvement of one's health through outdoor recreation as well as within new tourism and leisure dynamics - being a more sustainable means of travel and allowing community improvement (den Breejen, 2007; Mau et al., 2021; Morrow, 2005).

LDW routes are still overlooked by academic research in the urban and territorial planning field. To date, scientific literature on LDW routes mainly belongs to the domain of economics and sociology of tourism as well as to psychology and health sciences. Even cultural geographers focused this topic, in particular within the so called 'mobility turn' across the social sciences and humanities (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011). Moreover, it is worth underlining that seminal relevant contributions came from artists who crossed several knowledge fields, that have been only afterwards investigated by social sciences (La Cecla, 2002).

An important contribution has been recently given by Hall, Ram and Shoval (2022) who brought together a number of the main themes on the study of walking from different disciplines and literatures from across the social sciences, including planning and design. The role of LDW routes as both a practice and a territorial infrastructure clearly emerges from this work.

From a planning perspective, LDW routes are mainly interpreted as territorial infrastructure in relation to the dimension of walkability and the 'landscape experience' in heritage routes (Frank, 2006; Ram and Hall, 2022; Somosa Medina et al., 2022). However, scarce attention is being paid to the geographical contexts in which these dynamics actually manifest and to their territorial and socio-economic impacts. This is certainly a topic that deserves further exploration. As such, cities and territories crossed by LDW routes are mainly considered as (sustainable) tourism destinations to be promoted for fostering local development and, in some marginal areas, for contributing to regional growth, however with little consideration for the interactions between these processes and those of physical and socio-economic restructuring. Still less attention is given to the understanding of the dynamics of the experience of long distance walking in relation to the planning process. Filling this literature gap deserves further consideration for its implications in understanding contemporary territorial changes in relation to planning processes.

Within this framework, our exploration into long-distance walking routes mainly refers to the Italian context. It is driven by the following questions: How can the longstanding tradition of Italian LDW routes turn into a territorial planning instrument? What role do LDW routes play within the planning process? What learning processes at multiple levels and in various dimensions can be activated through LDW routes?

In order to answer these questions taking a step back can be useful, considering not only LDW routes, but, more widely, walking practices and their - certainly larger - uses within urban and territorial planning processes in Italy.

This contribution is divided in three sections beyond this introduction. In the first section the emergence of LDW routes and the use of walks as a planning tool in the Italian context are underlined. In the second section some reflections developed within a concrete experience of participative planning including collective walks are developed. In the third and last section some open issues mainly concerning the role LDW can play within territorial planning processes ,even in the perspective of a change of scale from urban to territorial, are developed.

Walking as a policy tool in the Italian planning context

Although LDW cannot be seen as a completely new practice, in the last ten years, LDW routes have multiplied in Italy. An increasing number of people experienced long walking practice prior to the Covid 19 pandemic (Giannino, 2019). After a light decrease in 2020, in 2021 this data further increased, even if compared to the pre Covid 19 period.

The diffusion of these new land use practices and their visibility was fostered by the attention given to them by local governments as well as by the national government policy called *Cammini d'Italia*, set up by The Ministry of Culture to connect art cities and rural old villages. In 2016 the LDW Year (*Anno dei Cammini*) was launched aiming at fostering historical, natural, cultural and religious LDW crossing Italian territories within slow tourism policy. This moved to the Tourism Ministry in 2022, with the new right-wing national government which succeeded the previous center-left wing national government.

As far as planning instruments are concerned, to date no systematic recognition of the use of walking within local planning processes in Italy has been carried out. This is still an open research field. However, based on the available fragmented research landscape on this topic, it is possible to single out three different points of view to observe LDW routes:

- a) LDW routes can be considered to be green infrastructures within the more general design and planning of walkable places - which can be relevant within the setting up of territorial planning strategies oriented towards climate adaptation and landscape preservation and enhancement ;
- b) LDW routes can be considered to be as a lever for enhancing local development, an instrument for attracting people who enjoy cultural and natural heritage in the territories they cross;
- c) LDW routes can be considered as a bottom-up collective practice, collective walks, which can play a role within participative planning processes.

Although the above mentioned perspectives are strictly intertwined with each other, this contribution mainly focuses on the latter, considering the other ones in the background. In Italy collective walks have been experienced mainly within participative planning processes, at a neighborhood and urban level. 'Civic walks' have been mainly conceived as an instrument of citizens' participation useful to include local forms of knowledge about the city and its neighborhoods in the planning process (Jones, 1990). In several cases they have been organized within the setting up of neighborhood regeneration programs with the aim of involving local communities.

As far as the urban scale is concerned, some meaningful cases can be mentioned such as the case of Bologna - where civic walks have been recently organized, focusing on every day life in peripheral areas and the role public space can play

in urban regeneration processes; and Ravenna - where collective walks were recently organized with the aim of widening territorial knowledge. In both cases the walks have been organized within the participative process concerning the new urban master plan following the new regional planning law (n. 24/2017). Not infrequently collective walks aiming at fostering the awareness of natural and cultural heritage are organized in protected areas including different municipalities.

The cases mentioned above concern different territories and different planning scales. However, in all cases collective walks are interpreted as a tool for widening the knowledge the plan is being drawn on, including not only expert knowledge, but also local knowledge.

Regarding the case of Bari, the collective walks organized within the master plan participative process were oriented to widen the knowledge base useful for planning purposes through mutual interaction between the citizens and the expert involved in the process. However, during the process some new meanings emerged. Hence, this case is particularly meaningful in order to highlight how civic walks can design new territories where projects can be implemented bringing forward the implementation of the objectives of the plan.

Civic walks in the setting up of Bari master plan

Bari, with about 330,000 inhabitants, is a port city on the Adriatic sea. It is the capital city of Apulia Region and one out of Italy's 14 metropolitan cities. It was identified as a 'growth pole' within the development strategy carried out by the national government during the sixties. Metal working companies were established, but the industrial area did not progress as expected (Tedesco, 2014).

Nowadays, Bari is still suffering socioeconomic and unemployment problems, although it is becoming a touristic city also due to the cruise ships that harbor in the port.

Since 2008 the municipality of Bari started the process of setting up the new city's master plan, aiming at overcoming the old master plan based on the idea of an increasing growth of the region capital city. In 2011 the Plan Strategic Document was approved. Since 2014 this process was supported by a participative process. In a first phase this was structured in a series of conferences. In a second phase, since 2016, the participative process was fostered and structured in several parallel activities, all assuming everyday life as a perspective (Basco, Moschetti and Pignatelli, 2017; Tedesco, 2021). In particular:

- 30 contact points in the urban neighborhoods of the five districts of the city were activated, located in welfare services' spaces, where citizens could be supported in making proposals about the central topics of the planning process: public space (open spaces and services), everyday life landscape, mobility. These proposals could be sent to the municipality also through an internet platform;
- 9 civic walks which crossed several urban neighborhoods were organized;
- 5 workshops were organized in the city's five districts (municipi) where the first strategic ideas were discussed;
- public debates concerning citizens' participation in territorial planning processes were organized at the Urban Center.

As far as civic walks are concerned, these have been interpreted as a tool to widen the knowledge at stake. Some major features of these collective walks can be underlined: i) they have been organized with the support of local associations and groups of citizens and were driven by artists, writers, archeologists and other experts whose point of view is often not central in the planning process; ii) local

knowledge was included in the process in order to implement de-professionalized visions, with the idea that not only professionals should shape the future of the districts and the city; iii) in order to turn territorial planning into a concrete perspective, the decision making process was brought closer to citizens who are directly involved by decisions concerning the future of the different districts.

Civic walks were organized along several streets, but, of course, they did not cross all the meaningful places of the city. Strategic topics whose relevance crossed several urban areas have been selected: old towns of former hamlets nowadays included within the municipality boundaries; city-sea relationships; the spatial outcomes of the 1970's master plan, which is still in force; urban regeneration in multiethnic XIX century neighborhoods; archeological preservation as a limit to growth and a resource for development; industrial derelict areas; old social housing neighborhoods and landscape in peripheral areas; quality of life in social housing neighborhoods; industrial areas.

A complex picture of everyday life issues emerged. The small scale perspective on urban territory revealed to be useful not only for the setting up of neighborhood regeneration initiatives, but also for urban and metropolitan planning. The participative process report contributed to build up a general vision not only integrating local knowledge and professional knowledge, but also shedding light on the social capacity to take care of urban abandoned areas and to carry out bottom-up urban regeneration actions (Basco, Moschetti and Pignatelli, 2017).

What is more, in this framework, the role institutions could play in fostering social innovation through policy tools - which can be considered a new trend in social innovation practices (Bragaglia, 2020) - emerged. This brought to the idea of rethinking the plan/project nexus opening the planning process to all kind of urban regeneration initiatives,

landscape preservation and climate adaptation projects, as well as social innovation practices. This, when initiatives, projects and practices can be considered coherent with the new plan vision - drawn on the sustainability principle - and can contribute to concretely implement new paths for the development of some marginal areas of the municipality, even before the master plan approval.

These projects were considered to be "forerunning projects" in the strategic documents set up by the municipality. They were considered to be relevant not only at an urban level but also, at a regional (metropolitan) level. This suggests that collective walks can be considered to be not only participative planning tools to widen knowledge involved in the planning process, but also an instrument to intercept bottom-up practice coherent with the planning objectives.

What is more, walking routes themselves can be considered to be a bottom-up practice to intercept and foster within the planning process, at different tiers of territorial governance.

Long-distance walking as a bottom-up practice: what relationships between plan and project?

Coming back to LDW routes, the above described case study sheds light on different modes to turn them into territorial planning instruments. Not only LDW routes can be interpreted as green infra-structures and heritage routes, included in the spatial strategy foreshadowed by the plan; but they can also be interpreted as a bottom-up practice whose role within the planning process can be rethought in relation to the participative process. In particular, the role LDW routes can play concerns the widening of the knowledge involved.

Moreover - and this is the major point addressed by this contribution - they can be considered in relation to the

plan/project relationship, which is at the kernel of planning knowledge and action (Banai, 2012). Put differently, the dualistic relationship between plan and project is a good perspective from which to discuss the role LDW routes can play in territorial planning processes.

Referring to the Bari case study, it suggests specific modes to interpret the interdependence of plan and project. According to Banai (2012): “The lack of plan–project synergy and the disconnection between the aims of the project and those of the comprehensive plan pose controversial issues about the quality of the built form”. This is surely a well-rooted statement, however it does not necessarily involve that projects can be coherent with plans only when they are set up and implemented after the approval of plans.

In a multi-level governance perspective, it is fundamental that ‘forerunning projects’, at different tiers of governance, become part of the planning process. They can be carried out in an independent manner, even before the plan is approved, but in coherence with the strategic objectives of the plan itself. This allows pursuing several objectives.

First. It allows to better focus the objectives of the master plan/regional plan through reflections developed during the implementation of some projects. In fact, there are several issues that can be precisely focused only during the implementation phase.

Second, involving territorial actors’ networks in the implementation of the plan allows to activate concrete learning processes, fostering interactive knowledge which is fundamental for building ‘trading zones’ where actors agree on some actions even if they do not share the overall objectives of the planning process (Balducci and Mantysalo, 2013).

Last, but not least. It allows to give answers to some (socioeconomic as well as environmental) issues which

revealed urgent during the setting up of the plan prior, but in coherence, with the plan approval. Bari, with about 330,000 inhabitants, is a port city on the Adriatic sea. It is the capital city of Apulia Region and one out of Italy's 14 metropolitan cities. It was identified as a 'growth pole' within the development strategy carried out by the national government during the sixties. Metal working companies were established, but the industrial area did not progress as expected (Tedesco, 2014).

References

- Balducci A., Mäntysalo R. (eds.) (2013), *Urban Planning as a Trading Zone*, Dordrecht, Springer.
- Banai R. (2012), Plan vs project dilemma revisited: A progress review of urban and regional studies literature, *Urban Studies*, 50 (4), pp. 807–824.
- Basco L., Moschetti A., Pignatelli G. (2017), *P!UG-Comune di Bari - Report finale*.
- Bragaglia F. (2020), Social innovation as a 'magic concept' for policy-makers and its implications for urban governance, *Planning theory*, 20, 2, pp. 102-120.
- Breejen den L. (2007), The experiences of long distance walking: A case study of the West Highland Way in Scotland, *Tourism Management*, 28, 6, pp. 1417-1427.
- Cassatella C.(2013), The 'Corona Verde' Strategic Plan: an integrated vision for protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage, *Urban Research & Practice*, 6, 2, pp. 219-228, DOI: 10.1080/17535069.2013.810933.
- Cresswell T., Merriman P. (2011), *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, London, Routledge.
- De Seta C. (1982), L'Italia nello specchio del Grand Tour, in *Storia d'Italia-Annali*, 5, Torino, Einaudi.

- Frank L, Sallis J., Conway T., Chapman J. (2006), Many Pathways from Land Use to Health, *JAPA*, 72, 1, pp. 75-87.
- Genovese D., Ostellino I. (2019), Un cammino intorno alla città: il caso del cammino delle colline del Po nel sito UNESCO MAB del territorio torinese [A walk around the city: the case of the Po hills walk in the Turin territory UNESCO MAB site], *Reticula*, 19, pp. 37-44.
- Giannino C. (2019), Il cammino come modalità sostenibile per lo sviluppo del territorio [Walking as a sustainable way of developing territory], *Urbanistica Informazioni*, 283, pp. 9-11.
- Jones B. (1990), *Neighborhood Planning. A Guide for Citizens and Planner*, Chicago, American Planning Association.
- La Cecla F. (2002), Prefazione [Preface], in Solnit R. (eds.), *Storia del camminare [Wanderlust. A History of walking]*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, p. 366.
- Mau M., Aaby A., Harnow Klausen S., Kaya Roessler K. (2021), Are Long-Distance Walks Therapeutic? A Systematic Scoping Review of the Conceptualization of Long-Distance Walking and Its Relation to Mental Health, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 18, 15.
- Michael Hall C., Ram Y., Shoval N. (eds.) (2022), *The Routledge international handbook of walking*, London, Routledge.
- Morrow S. (2005), Continuity and change: the planning and management of long distance walking routes in Scotland, *Managing Leisure*, 10, 4, pp. 237-250.
- Ram Y., Hall C. (2022), Walkable places for visitors: assessing and designing for walkability, in Michael Hall C., Ram Y., Shoval N. (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Walking*, London, Routledge.
- Regione Piemonte (2020), *Progetto di sperimentazione per l'attuazione del Piano Paesaggistico Regionale-Ambito Eporediese*

[Experimentation project for the implementation of the Regional Landscape Plan - Eporediese Area].

Solnit R. (2002), *Storia del camminare [Walking history]*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori.

Tedesco C. (2014), Regional spatial strategies in Puglia between old and new ideas of development, in Vinci I. (eds.), *The spatial strategies of Italian regions*, Milano, Franco Angeli, pp. 133-154.

Tedesco C. (2021), Bari, oltre l'estramurale. Percorsi di rigenerazione urbana e nuove immagini della città [Bari, beyond the estramurale. Paths of urban regeneration and new images of the city], in Carrera L. (eds.) *Bari plurale : storie, analisi, visioni [Plural Bari: stories, analyses, visions]*, Bari, Progedit, pp. 119-127.