

Utopias and pragmatism in Italian planning: A dyad of impossibilities

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Introduction

The difficulties encountered by the various agents of urban planning and more generally policymaking in controlling and directing for social and even aesthetic quality aims the set of macro- and micro-processes typical of any economic and financial market are widely known and analyzed in general (Alonso, 1964; Hall, 1998). As a matter of facts, the whole history of 'modern city' - dating from the so-called Industrial Revolution starting at least in Europe from the late eighteenth century, but especially the nineteenth century – to mark the 'impossibility' of the controlling and addressing effort, at least when it has the character of ambitious fundamentalism and ideology rather than gradual reformism and pragmatism (Hall, 1992; Friedmann, 1987; Morbelli, 1997). In particular, taking a cue from a singular failed legislative reform of the soil occurred in the Italian market in the years 1960 ("Sullo Reform", based on the attempt to take away the property of urban building land from the private sector in favour of the public sector), here we try to investigate on the dialectics of idealism (utopianism) and pragmatism (reformism) in regional and urban laws and policies and on the different performances achieved by the two models. As far as Italy is concerned, it is believed that the failure of planning reformism and urban

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reforms is due to the powerful alliance formed between land and house owners and builders and social support groups (technicians, traders, media), first approved by the Conservative Christian Democrat governments and then by unexpected alliances between the Christian Democrat party and other occasional parties of the Italian political scene. Moreover, for Italy it is believed that an original extremist vice occurring in the first half of the twentieth century, during the Fascist period, and then in the second half of the twentieth century dominated by Christian Democrats and Socialists, led to such a weak-willed and frightening political environment, crowded by extremist elites far from the common sentiment of individuals and communities. It is, of course, an 'easy' thesis, which could be invoked for many other situations around the planet and therefore not only for Italy.

Fascism and post-fascism

The political and economic continuity, in many fields, between fascism and post-fascism, in Italy, has been significantly debated in recent Italian historiography (Pavone, 1995). The middle class and the peasants were privileged interlocutors of fascism and this holds also for the early Christian Democrats governments which follow the strap of the II World War; the IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction) remains between fascism and post-fascism a pillar of the economic politics of the state. In the territorial and urban policies the main laws, from the two 1939 laws on cultural and landscape goods (“Bottai laws”) to the so called “fundamental” 1942 town planning law, remained the same well beyond the delayed enforcement in the 1970s of the 15 regions referring to ordinary constitutional statute¹. Also the fact that the fascist

policy in favour of disurbanization, against the cities with their working class antagonistic toward the regime, declared in the incipit of the 1942 law, remained a mere statement of intention – if only we think to the massive growth and the transformation of cities that was promoted by the fascism in Italy and in its colonial oversea territories – is a confirmation of this assumption of continuity (Bottai, 1940, 1982; De Felice, 1974; Del Boca, 2008; Calchi Novati, 2011).

There is continuity, in Italy, between fascism and post-fascism, also in technicians, that is in practitioners whose training needs years: in Apulia, for instance, the technocrats-engineers of fascism – those of the hydraulic and territorial land reclaiming – will be essential in the birth of the School of Engineering in the University of Bari in the 1940s; in Italy, Valletta will dominate FIAT and Italy fully remaining at the chair of command before and after the II World War, with Banca Commerciale Mattioli will further develop the finance state system which appeared during the fascism with the Beneduce's IRI (Masella, 1983; Castronovo, 2010; Berta, 2015; Barca, 1999).

When the scholars who had conquered the scene with fascism, for example in the university system, become leading elements of the political system and the governments of the post-fascism (Aldo Moro, Amintore Fanfani, and many others) the rationales – but also the contradictions – of continuity become important and intriguing: for example the Christian Democrat Fanfani, professor of corporative economy during fascism in the Catholic University of Milan, at the end of the 1940s, with the law which creates the INA-Casa (Insurance National Institute-Housing) and the successful support to a small housing property often characterized by high urban and building quality is a leading actor of this transition-incontinuity (Giovagnoli, 2005).

Also the profession of planning will see relevant continuities – think to Luigi Piccinato, the author of the 1942 town planning law – even if in a context of contaminations and innovations coming from both the Anglo-American culture (Adriano Olivetti and his “Community Movement”) and European socialism culture (Berta, 2015).

New idealism and new radicalism

When Christian democrat Fiorentino Sullo sets up his own law on the 'nationalization' of soils, on a new 'statist' regime of building land in Italy, he is Minister of public works in an entirely Christian Democrat government led by Aldo Moro, a professor of Philosophy of law at the University of Bari, Italy. In the Ministry seat in Rome, between 1961 and 1962, a brain trust of young people belonging to Christian democracy and socialism is set up for the preparation of the law. It is an apparent repetition, in provincial key, of innovative international experiences in the field of political confrontation between blocs that are unwilling to abandon development.

The city of Rome was characterized by its hypertrophied development plan of 1962, still highly sensitive, like the first 'fascist' plan, to the interests of the 'strong powers' of the capital, originating in the real estate finance. Because of that, Rome highlights some of the reasons of Sullo's utopian policy, being a city contextualized by a set of abnormal urban growth, far more marked apparently by an economic model based on concrete and cars than by the needs of the "reconstruction" after the war (Dear, 2007).

Mr. Sullo, basically a political meteor, perhaps is intended to appear on the left of the Communists, who in fact will not complain much for the abandonment of his design and

the immediate 'retirement' of the minister imposed by Moro -an often politically puzzling man, but in this case smart and pragmatic connoisseur of the basis of his own party, devoid of any idealism and radicalism. After all, in 1962 Sullo anticipates radical political ideas and solutions, at that time travelling on the path of overcoming the inefficiencies of the many local 'corporations' and 'small countries' (that prevented, among other things, wide territorial strategies), passed smoothly from fascism to post-fascism. Shortly after, the 'nationalization of electricity' in 1964 will be a reality, the expression of a new alliance between catholics and socialists (Crainz, 2005; Ginsborg, 1989).

However, we should wonder about possible similarities between this failed attempt promoted by radical exponents of the Christian Democrats for the reform of soil regime, marked by the abandonment of the catholic vogue of inter-classist adjustment and by a return to a severe yet non-fascist statism with the private sector, and the idealistic policies, perhaps à la Gentile, for the protection in the territory of the so-called "things of historical interest" and "natural beauties" promoted, as occurred for Bottai and his 'twin laws' of 1939, by senior members of fascism -no matter if belonging to its criticist wing (De Felice, 1974; Gentile, 2002, 2007; Guerri, 1996; Stone, 1998).

Interestingly, in the armamentarium of the failed Sullo law, some slogans of the Communist and Marxist critique on "rent" and "accumulation" are largely absent and, conversely, clear references to a communitarian solidarity are present, derived from a graft between Catholic tradition and socialist vision of possible innovations in the administration of cities and their territories.

The "failed reform" of minister Sullo is set up in late 1962 by a committee of valuable technicians, but is immediately hailed as "a second nationalization after electricity" by a

significant array of conservative political forces supported by flanker press but also by the authoritative *Corriere della Sera*. On the eve of the 1963 elections, the CD party disavows his own Minister of public works. Sullo resigns immediately and his successor makes a minor version of reform that will be nonetheless disregarded, this time permanently, in the turbulent 'putsch-like' summer of 1964. On the other hand, the President of the Republic, Mario Segni, announced via Aldo Moro that he did not want to sign a law of "house nationalization": a building lobby successfully opposes an "expropriating government". The failure of Sullo reform was accompanied by the failure of the Quinquennial Economic Plan set up by Minister Giolitti, to support the reforming design. The "Agreements of Villa Madama" of July 1964, which were the basis of the second Moro government, mark a point of no return, especially for the history of public industry that had seen substantial continuity between fascism and post-fascism in the first republican phase led by Christian Democracy. Minister Pieraccini replaces Giolitti and tries to continue his original plan (in fact also known as "Pieraccini Plan"), but a substantial failure of the reformist perspective will come out in the end (Crainz, 2005, pp. 29-30).

The anti-reformer formation is large and at the same time unique: builders and various speculators are accompanied even by the Constitutional Court, which amputates the law on social housing ("edilizia popolare", law no. 167 of 1962) (Crainz, 2005, p. 69). On the other hand, in the 1960s Christian Democracy looks compact against urban reform efforts promoted by the Socialist Party. An example is the story of the "bridge law" (n. 765 of 1967) following the collapses in the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento resulted from an insane development favored by CD municipalities – being Sicily and its regional government an actual feud of CD. In that case, the socialist minister of public works

Giacomo Mancini is openly opposed by prime minister Aldo Moro, Industry minister Giulio Andreotti, and leaders of the party as Emilio Colombo, Luigi Gui, Paolo Emilio Taviani, in support of the Church and the catholic associations of Agrigento sided with the manufacturers (Crainz, 2005, p. 72). Indeed, the anti-reformer role of Moro in urban planning in these crucial years of development needs to be reflected more deeply than what we did, because since the years immediately after WWII Aldo Moro emerged as one of the grid points of CD left wing. In fact, Moro's positions have been systematically ignored by the historiography of Italian urban planning, favouring the statesman's social policies and sensitive and anticipatory international relations as well as the sensitivity to dialogue with the Communist Party). Mancini manages to pass the "bridge law", even if yielding to the imposition of a one-year "moratorium" that will cause huge damages throughout the country by promoting an exceptional concrete wave: just in Milan, they were as many as 200000 rooms, i.e., seven-eight times the normal production of a year in the city. It becomes a complete reform, but in subsequent years the socialist party will fail to build new and solid legal ground on which the "bridge" between old and new should have been founded.

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Sullo will be minister of education again in 1968, in the government led by the Christian Democrat Mariano Rumor, but he will not survive to the student protest. In fact, in 1969 it will overwhelm his law for the reform of school and university, aimed at replacing the old "Gui law", being opposed also by his own party. Sullo resigns also from this ministry, denouncing varied resistance to his dialogue action, ranging from those of the Prime President, Rumor, and the Interior Minister, Restivo, to those of Ciriaco De Mita, emerging party rival in the CD area of

Avellino. Sullo law will be resumed by the successor to the Ministry, Mario Ferrari Aggradi, with an even more innovative attempt, boosted by the initiative of the socialist Tristano Codignola, but it will finally result in an incoherent collage of mutually opposing forces.

Sullo's disappearance from the scene of urban planning and building policies abruptly dismisses the design of a radical change, but on closer inspection it speeds up a reforming design. In fact:

- i. in the same year 1962, the Christian Democrat government, as an apology to the ostracism stated by Moro on Sullo's radicalism, launches law n. 167 on zone plans for affordable and popular housing, anticipating a significant space for public and 'conceded' - instead of 'owned' - regime for building sites for social housing;
- ii. in 1967/1968, law n. 765 ("bridge law") and ministerial decrees of April 1 and 2, 1969, nrs. 1404 and 1444, outline an efficient and effective model of political contrast the destructions that economic, particularly real-estate, liberalism is causing in the Italian territory (the Agrigento damages), while the general recourse to the building permit (*licenza edilizia*), as well as the equating of private planning initiatives (*piani di lottizzazione*) to public planning initiatives (*piani particolareggiati*) try to modernize and promote the entire building industrial sector;
- iii. in 1971 law no. 865 ("house law"), beyond introducing specific plans for industrial development -assisted by a regime of public-based management of areas similar to social housing- it starts breaking the mechanism of market-value-based compensation of urban areas expropriated under the law of 1865, and until then never

- changed, introducing a conventional agricultural value reference, heavy penalizing private property;
- iv. in 1977, after enforcing the planning legislative powers of regions, law no. 10 ("Bucalossi law") again tries to introduce elements of state-guide soil regime, with the transition from building "licensing" to "concession" (concessione edilizia): a legal subtlety that will prove to be inconsistent.

Theorists-in-action of this interesting season of reform policies for the territory were not, apparently, the designers involved in the many urban plans of central Italian areas governed by the "reformist" and "realistic" communism, preferably with a party card or some exceptional militancy to show. (Such plans were those running along an actually virtuous road, whose violent abandonment caused by others ended up damaging Italy, as represented by Paul Ginsborg in the history of Italy from the end of WWII to mid-1980s) (Ginsborg, 1989). They were the politicians, protagonists of a new season of government (or 'governance', as said a few years later), able to drive a persistent idealism and radicalism to pragmatic reformist outcomes. Their names are Michele Achilli, Salvatore Lauricella, Giacomo Mancini, just to mention some of the most prominent ones (Achilli, 1972).

The "defense" of "historic centers" - the ancient and old parts of the city - in Italy, significant in an international comparison, is the precious fruit of the season of the reformist policies of the territory, able to integrate theory and practice inspired by idealistic-historicist positions (Giovannoni, 1931) and by leading and political control positions of transformations. As recently emphasized by Settis, this contributes to make incoherent but also highly interesting the evolution of the positions relevant to that issue in Italy, in a three-centuries perspective, centered

around the country's political unification in the mid-nineteenth century (Settis, 2008).

It is a reformist season tuned on international cultures and policies, in particular European, bridging gaps in positions and awareness and indeed expressing leadership and ability to provide reference. This is the case of the historical and formal analysis of urban “tissues” inspired by of the Roman-Venetian school methodology that in the second half of the twentieth century involves Saverio Muratori up to Aldo Rossi (Muratori, 1960; Rossi, 1968).

Conclusion

We have analysed the violent abandonment, occurred in 1962, of the radical and utopian urban planning reform of minister Sullo, caused by the same party affiliation of the minister, i.e. the Christian Democrat party, which was totally dominant in Italy in the two decades following World War II.

This analysis allows seeing the history of territory and cities in Italy, both in technical terms and in political terms, somehow in a different, innovative sense as compared to what occurred so far. The strong technical, political, interclass block, characterized by an attitude to the transformation of the territory and the city that can be defined as violent, totally subordinate to cement and brick lobbies even when credited with realism and social representativeness, has long seen as compact. Yet now, in the context of the failure of Sullo reform, it appears as crossed by contradictions and outright fractures.

In fact, new paths do emerge, aware of the great cultural tradition of city and landscape in Italy, as well as of the processes and opportunities for economic and social development that follow. They are paths able of breaking

down the previously mentioned block and of creating alternative positions. They may be idealism-storicism positions, as occurring in the classical evolutionary analysis and planning for Italian cities proposed by Saverio Muratori or by Aldo Rossi in the 1950s and 1960s. Or they are positions of religion-inspired radicalism, as in the communitarian movement of Adriano Olivetti or on Fiorentino Sullo's provocations. Or they are reformist positions inspired by a socialism interested in the historical problems of the Italian economic and social (and cultural) "dualism", as occurred in Giacomo Mancini.

A new framework emerges, in the light of political clashes carried out for the purposes and the ways of urban and regional government during the economic boom in Italy. It is a framework also relevant for the analysis of European problems, of the segmentation of cultural realities and of development, in a highly structured context with long lasting national and regional stories.

¹ Following the regional model declared by the 1948 Constitutional Act, the only regions that could start were the 'special statute' ones, that is the five regions that always had in Italy a certain level of autonomy: the two islands of Sicily and Sardinia and the three Alpine regions of Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and Valle d'Aosta at the northern borders

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