Strategic Spatial Planning

A Historical Review of Approaches, its Recent Revival,
and an Overview of the State of the Art in Italy

Francesca S. Sartorio

Dr. Francesca S. Sartorio is a lecturer at Cardiff School of City and Regional Planning. She teaches planning theory, comparative planning studies and urban design.

Abstract: The last century left us with various definitions and interpretations of strategic spatial planning. What seems clear today is that strategic planning could be considered a set of concepts, procedures and tools (Albrechts 2004), usefully adaptable to fit the current planning needs of modern states and local societies in Europe. At the beginning of the 1990s, many experiences from all over the continent caught the interest of theorists and practitioners and started a long debate on the revival of strategic spatial planning (Salet and Faludi, eds., 2000). If we look at the practices though, it is evident that the approaches and goals are diverse and inevitably strongly related to specific local contexts. During the last decade, a particularly significant one for Italy due to the many social and institutional changes, several metropolitan areas and city-regions have been experimenting with strategic plans. These plans are aimed at encouraging local actors to get together and develop shared visions for the future. Even if a few common features are recognizable in all these plans, each of these tools is context-specific and develops particular procedures aimed at specific goals. An evaluation of this fruitful endeavour is not yet unequivocally possible, but the creative potential of these informal tools is already evident in the discovery of new actors and forms of local action, the development of local governance at variable geometries and in fostering local endogenous seeds of development.

Introduction

This essay consists of three parts. It starts with a synthetic review of the different meanings of strategy and of strategic planning used in past decades in discourses related to both planning theory and practice. Once the general inheritance and discontinuities have been presented, the particular features of strategic planning in Italy during the last decade will be pointed out, against the background of recent social and institutional changes, and through a synthetic description of eleven strategic plans which have been currently adopted, discussed or simply presented. The article concludes by highlighting the creative potential of these tools both for spatial planning dimensions and for governance agreements.

1 The Many Meanings of the Terms Strategy and Strategic Planning

1.1 A General Framework

Generally, we could see the wider sphere (or field, in Bourdieu's meaning of the term[1]) of planning as a weakly structured whole of different practices. Because of its weak structure, the boundaries of the wider sphere (or field) of planning are not clearly defined (Pasqui 1998). Consequently, planning practice could be seen as an interactive social construct (Pasqui 1998), dynamic in nature and, because of this, its subject is not ontologically given and "univocally determinable." However, changing in space and time within different practices and processes does belong to the wider sphere of planning (Pasqui 1998). Seen from this perspective, some of the reasons for what Klaus Kunzmann has called the "avoidability" of the core (assumed as existing) of planning become clearer (Kunzmann 2002).

Following Pasqui's path, we could then see the institutionalized system of planning as a system inscribed within the wider sphere of planning. It is a structured entity of actors, tools and regulations that allows the legitimate activity of planning (in its three dimensions of structure, design and regulation (Mazza 1994)) within a certain society. Pasqui states: "The wider sphere (field) of planning is the place of social experimentation and, in a wider sense, of regulation, while the institutionalized system of planning is the place of the ruled (not necessary normed) relationships, roles and functions." (Pasqui 1998: 334)[2]

Statutory modes of planning, as with most "hard" institutionalized modes of dealing with territory, constitute a part of the institutionalized system of planning.

We have already said that the more external boundary generally does not have a clear definition. The same could be said about the fine line

that marks the boundary between the two entities: it is permeable and mobile. Its permeability and mobility are not constant and depend as much on local characteristics as on global contingencies, on voluntary efforts and spontaneous dynamics. The fine line around institutionalization is the main site of social invention. We could say that as the global and local conditions change, each local society changes its assets, either in a reactive or in a proactive way. Planning has to change (and in fact does change) accordingly in order to respond to new questions posed by new assets. Practices (usually) respond first and some of the practices then enter processes of more or less directed institutionalization, which could be characterized by shorter or longer temporal phases and more or less hard stages of institutionalization.
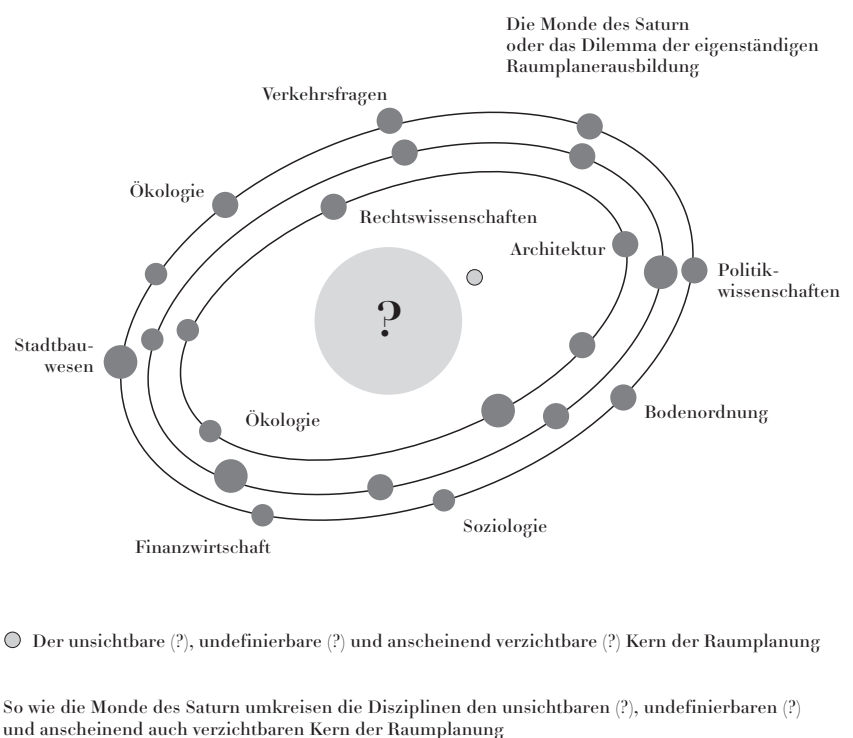
1.2 Theory

Strategic spatial planning and, even more generally, the use of strategy in planning are highly ambiguous concepts. Claudio Calvaresi argues that strategic planning cannot be assumed to be an autonomous and recognizable object within planning theory (Calvaresi 1997). Looking deeper, in fact, it clearly appears that strategy within planning has, and has had in the past, several different meanings. Some were developed within the discipline while others were absorbed from other disciplines. In addition, the (multifaceted) field of planning has been using the various available features of the term strategic in numerous ways over the last fifty years. Calvaresi adds something more: he writes that reconnecting the different meanings used within the discipline in a linear and unifying interpretation would produce a fake process, one that never really took place. He suggests as a convenient approach one that prefers reconstruction to exegesis (Calvaresi 1997); such an approach could be of some help in foreseeing possible useful applications of the word strategic in practice. I fully agree with this position and would add one point to the argument. Historicizing and contextualizing each meaning of the terms strategy and strategic, which have been developed within planning theory or absorbed by it, could help in understanding what these could mean for the field of planning today, and what its role could be in the development of planning theory and practice for contemporary social, economic and cultural changes.

As many researchers point out (Salet and Faludi 2000; Lacaze 1996; Piroddi 1996), the term strategy had its origins in the science of warfare.[3] Even if this particular origin was never directly translated into the theories of spatial planning, this meaning is important for my argumentation because it sums up two different 'souls' that seem to emerge alternatively in planning theory and practice. The first soul deals with pursuing a long-range vision of a desirable and feasible idea of a potential future. The second relates to the presence of one or more actors pursuing, in actions, various divergent and often clashing objectives that follow different rationales. Uncertainty as a constant background for action is an additional feature, common to these two souls.

Strategy as mode of achievement for a general or specific goal has probably always been present in planning. Strategy as a response to external stimuli and as part of a complex process only enters the sphere of planning later. From this point of view, probably the first (systematic) use of the terms strategy and strategic planning in our discipline took place during the debates about structural planning, which has interested planners in Britain, the Netherlands, France and Germany (with different origins, implications and outcomes) since the beginning of the 1960s.[4] Within this framework, strategy is not only meant as the development of long-range visions, but also related to a process and to inter-institutional interaction. It is important to note that the theories developed in those

Figure 1: The different specialities of planning revolving like Saturn's moons around the missing core of the discipline. (Kunzmann 2002: 331, redrawn)

Die Monde des Saturn
oder das Dilemma der eigenständigen
Raumplanerausbildung

Verkehrsfragen

Ökologie

Rechtswissenschaften

Architektur

Politik-
wissenschaften

?

Stadtbau-
wesen

Ökologie

Bodenordnung

Soziologie

Finanzwirtschaft

○ Der unsichtbare (?), undefinierbare (?) und anscheinend verzichtbare (?) Kern der Raumplanung

So wie die Monde des Saturn umkreisen die Disziplinen den unsichtbaren (?), undefinierbaren (?) und anscheinend auch verzichtbaren Kern der Raumplanung

years were deeply marked by a rapid economic and demographic development that demanded some framework for spatial transformation. In those years, the debate about structural planning (and strategic planning) contributed to the expansion of the wider sphere of planning.[5]

In the mid-1970s, and even more in the 1980s, after the sudden interruption of the growth conditions, which had been assumed to be the norm, and the general crisis of the discipline, planning needed the development of new theories and methods for action. The discipline had not been capable of facing the problems of quick urbanization in practice and had to deal with theoretical questions posed by the development of critical theories within other disciplines (i.e., Lindblom, March and Olsen, Simon, etc.) as well as internally. Parallel to the already existing definitions of strategy and strategic planning practices, another meaning of the term developed. The years of economic crisis marked the entrance of the market (together with its rationality and its jargon) in planning. On one side, tools used by private enterprises seemed adequate to respond and stop the decline of cities, and, a new type of strategic planning entered the scene.[6] On the other side, and in parallel, the rhetoric of competition started among cities. Those years see not only the beginning of a phase when the state got involved as a private actor with its own interests and stakes in the process, but also witnesses the official entrance of private investors as the first non-governmental actors within the planning process. This time, strategy and strategic planning worked to include new dimensions in the sphere of planning.[7]

During the 1990s, the context changed again. There was a general crisis in which powerful actors and the representation structures, on which modern society had been based, slowly lost their importance (authoritativeness) and efficiency. Answers coming from the planning side used the tools developed in the previous decades, but at the same time a new horizon was emerging. Within the theories, policy analysis had developed awareness among planners of an enlarged sphere for planning, including several actors who were linked in interactive and informal modes. And in practice, the real demand from society required planning action. This last type of strategic planning was the beginning of civil society being included in the sphere of planning.
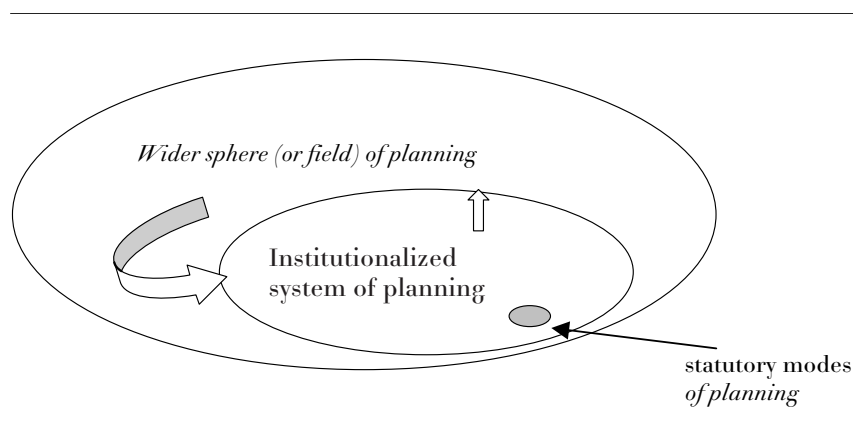
All these different types of strategic planning partially coexist today, even in their divergent dimensions. The understanding and use of the term deals much more with personal experience and the approach of each single practitioner or researcher (or a group thereof) than with a generally codified attitude within the discipline. Accordingly, the practice of strategic planning varies consistently. Willem Salet and Andreas Faludi (Salet and Faludi 2000) identify three main approaches to strategic spatial planning at the beginning of the new century:
• An institutional approach, which favors two main directions: one oriented at legitimizing planning activity, the other seeing institutionalization processes mainly as an opportunity for the implementation of plans and projects.
• A communicative and discursive approach that favors framing and sense-giving activity; an interactive approach, suspended in a technocratic tension, oriented to building up connections between public and private organizations in order to improve performance in planning.
• A sociocratic tendency, focused on the inclusion of society and emergent citizenship.

1.3 Practice

If we look directly at practices, even if a wide use of the term has been made in the past decade, general definitions are preferred to specific ones and probably the most appropriate description is: A set of concepts, procedures and tools that must be tailored carefully to whatever situation is at hand if desirable outcomes are to be achieved (Bryson and Roering 1996 as in Albrechts 2004). In fact, the many types of strategic planning actually applied involve, in different ways and with different focuses, various aspects of practice absorbed at different times in planning history. Such an interpretation is in line with the understanding of planning as a discipline that is shaping itself in and through practice and, in doing so, mirrors an image of the culture and environment that produced it.

Figure 2: The wider sphere of planning and the institutionalized system of planning. (Pasqui 1998: 334, redrawn and reinterpreted)

Wider sphere (or field) of planning

Institutionalized system of planning

statutory modes *of planning*

	Discourses	Main concepts	External influences
Origin of the term	Goal-oriented action and game	Assumption of both a *static* and a *dynamic environment*	Warfare sciences
1950s–1960s	Structural planning	Introduces the *process*	IOR Theories of decision making
1970s–1980s	Competition among cities Organizational planning	Introduces *uncertainty* and *performance* of the city as a system	Enterprise and organizational planning Policy analysis
1990s	Strategic planning Strategic behaviors	Introduces *interaction*	Governance

Table 1: The terms strategy in planning and strategic planning: contextualized interpretations.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the debate on strategic planning gained momentum again and since then several strategic plans have been produced at the city and city-regional levels. The reasons to return to strategic planning were similar to those of the previous decade, a lack of public money and entrepreneurial approaches to urban management, but the necessity of a wider acceptance for action emerged as a consequence of the deep crisis of representation, which had affected the European social and political context during the previous decade. Patsy Healey (Healey 1997; Healey 1998; Healey 2003a; Healey 2003b) has widely studied strategic planning tools all across Europe, following an institutionalist approach. She describes strategic spatial planning as a social process through which local communities answer to endogenous and exogenous challenges relating to territorial governance. If this definition fits most recent experiences, then the distinction made by Salet and Faludi (Salet and Faludi 2000) is also useful for examining practices.

Generally, what they argue in the introductory chapter of their jointly edited book seems true: the second of the three approaches to strategic planning described above, the interactive one, suspended between sociocratic and technocratic attitudes, prevails today. It usually takes the form of a list of major objectives to achieve, not necessarily physical, which are each articulated in several specific goals. The main strategic plans of the 1990s have this form (Lyon, Barcelona, Glasgow, Turin, etc.). The generating process usually followed to produce the document and the strategy is voluntary and generally open and participative, although the actors included and the openness of the process depends on the different local situations and the promoters. Even though each plan seems to favor different action areas and different specific aspects, for the sake of synthesis and based on their form and generating process, we could call them a family of strategic plans.

In parallel to this family of strategic plans, the concept of a strategy is also appearing with constantly growing frequency in very traditional procedures, tools and routines. The use of the term differs widely, from referring to what is called or seen as strategic, e.g., dimensions of plan-making (not necessarily explicit); levels of planning; typical features of projects and specific interventions, policies and actions (Riganti 1996) to when strategy has to do with the process and the reason why there is a need for strategy, e.g., efficiency of public action, democracy, etc.; to the participants, e.g., which actors and groups or types thereof enter the process, etc., and in many cases where it is perhaps not strictly appropriate. A very useful schematic distinction of strategy in planning practice today comes from Luigi Mazza.[8] He makes a distinction between urban strategies (strategie urbane) and planning strategies (strategie urbanistiche). The former relate to the activation and maintenance of a proactive and efficient decision-making system, and because of this are mainly connecting with the political dimensions of planning. The latter is more related to the traditional fields of spatial planning and connected to the achievement of physical/spatial goals through a selective process.

In an extreme synthesis, all the various implemented strategies related to planning in this last decade fall into one of these two strategy types. It is interesting to note that somehow they also relate to the two different "souls" of planning in Europe mentioned earlier: one as part of social sciences, the other born of architecture-related disciplines.

1.4 Strategy as a Pressure Element

The synthetic résumé of the previous section shows how difficult it is to assess the continuity within the different discourses that deal with strategic planning and strategy in planning and partially explains the initial assumption about the impossibility of identifying strategic planning as an autonomous and recognizable object. There are, of course, a few recurrent topics, placed against a background of a generally unstable and risky environment, within these discourses:
• The necessity of planning for a generic (even if differently defined) longer range
• Comprehensiveness, i.e., seeing the progressive replacement of a comprehensive entity achieved by a few specialists with expert knowledge collecting as much information as possible, with a comprehensive entity produced by the interaction of as many actors as possible, each contributing different types of common knowledge
• The presence of several actors and rationales
• Interactivity
• Process orientation
• Interconnectivity

But, what appears more significant is that it seems that the use of the term strategy has been employed mainly in phases of wider openness of the discipline and it has contributed to expanding the field of spatial planning and the absorption of new concepts and practices. It has welcomed new actors (and different rationales) and new procedures into the process. To go back to the scheme representing the wider sphere of planning and the institutionalized system of planning, somehow "strategy," whatever the type, lies on the fine line of the institutionalization of planning practices that marks the boundaries between the wider sphere of planning and the institutionalized system of planning.

So, I think that what Patsy Healey says concerning strategic planning is absolutely true: "Finally, the experiences of episodes of strategic spatial planning show that, in certain contexts and with intellectually shrewd and energetic political effort, strategies can accumulate sufficient power to change discourses and to transfer these discourses into the arenas of investment and regulatory practices." (Healey 2003a: 26)

Furthermore, I suspect that it could also be considered true even in episodes where strategic spatial planning does not necessarily refer "[…] to self-conscious collective efforts to re-imagine a city, urban region or wider territory and to translate the results into the priorities for area investment, conservation measures, strategic infrastructure investments and land use regulations," (Healey 2003c) and where strategic plan-making does not necessarily constitute "[…] a social process through which a range of people in diverse institutional relations and positions come together to design plan-making processes and develop contents and strategies for the management of spatial change." (Healey 1997: 5).

The impression is, in the end, that in the last few decades the term has been mainly used as some sort of pressure element within the discipline, acting on the fine line dividing the institutionalized system from the wider field of planning. Strategic planning has been progressively driving new dimensions relating to the actual context into our discipline, which could help in responding to needs coming from the territories and, more specifically, from the new governance demands for territories. The general hypothesis is that strategy and strategic planning in general are more important for the concentrated charge of innovative elements that move within local contexts than for the nature and content of what is understood under the term strategic. And, that territories where some sort of strategic experiment has been taking place could be more likely than others to develop innovative and creative capacities in the field of planning and beyond.

2 Strategic Planning in Italy in the 1990s

After synthesizing the various meanings of strategic spatial planning, this section will focus on Italy. The first part gives a general outline of the changes that occurred in the country during the 1990s, a period of deep transition due to various social, political and economic events. The second part focuses specifically on the first Italian strategic planning session. Even if, given their different nature and goals, each case could be presented and discussed on its own, there are some common features that could be recognized in the eleven tools[9] defined as strategic plans by their promoters and presented or at various stages of development. In this article, we do not consider the urban planning tools that make use of strategy in connection with the development of simple spatial planning goals. Borrowing Mazza's definition, we focus here on tools related to strategie urbane (urban strategies) rather than on strategie urbanistiche (planning strategies).

In the years between 1993 and 2000, Italy started three different medium- and long-term reform programs: the first in representation, the second on planning, the third on public competitions and contracts. All of them are, for different reasons, of some importance here in order to understand the context within which this particular session for planning in Italy took place.

With regard to the reform on representation, the first outcome is particularly relevant for urban planning: the direct election of city mayors by the citizens. Since 25 March 1993, in accordance with State Law No. 81, candidate mayors from different coalitions present themselves and their programs (Programma del Sindaco) directly to the people.[10] This change produced three main consequences: more power, at least in local politics, given to good candidates and a consecutive lessening of importance of the party structures; a consequent change of strategy from the parties in preparing for local elections; and a relevant role given to the Programma del Sindaco. This latter document in particular constitutes an important step for local politics and planning. It consists of a list of things to do within four years, upon which the yearly economic programs will be drawn up. Being the main document on which the activity of the mayor will be evaluated after the completion of the mandate, it usually contains short-to medium-term projects with as big an impact as possible. In these new conditions, the need for a longer term framework soon appeared in the debates.

The second reform, concerning planning laws, has been in demand in Italy since shortly after World War II. At that time, the entire reconstruction and urban regeneration had been achieved through a 1942 law designed for a very different scope, a nation suddenly pursuing very quick development. Even though the debate on new planning regulations started several times, only recently had the matter found a solution, driven by the transformation of the central state into a federalist state, rather than by the debate on planning itself. Nevertheless, the planning reform proposal presented by the National Planning Institute (INU – Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica) in 1995 produced not only the formation of a parliamentary commission but also the development of a lively debate on planning issues and innovation within scientific as well as professional institutions.[11]

In 1993, the reform process on rules concerning public competitions and public con-

tracts also started. The series of laws giving a transparent and strict basis to public procedures ended in 2000 with the so-called Merloni ter. This reform process started after the great national scandal commonly known as Tangentopoli, an inquiry into corruption in planning in Milan which showed connections with powerful networks operating at the national level, which was not just a call for transparency within institutions but also a call from the market. Before then, public contracts were substantially closed to international investments, sometimes also to national investors based in other cities. This produced a lack of quality in the implementations and a very stagnant market. The newly introduced procedures assured clarity and opened the way to a more fruitful and transparent collaboration of public and private forces, particularly needed in a decade characterized by the scarcity of public funds.

As a consequence of these changes, urban policies and planning modes changed visibly during the 1990s. Both the election reform of mayors and the federalist project modified the time-frame that local authorities had taken for considering projects, a shift from a 10/15 year period to a mere four years, and produced a growing concern for planning issues in bodies previously not having any role in the planning process. These were due to the debate on planning reform, which stayed lively for the entire decade, and the subsidiarity principle, which moved many duties[12] a step downwards in the political and administrative hierarchy. Of particular relevance in this regard was the introduction of a further intermediate level within big cities, having not just an elected council but also planning duties, which produced a further fragmentation of the local arenas. Civil society emerged in all its powerful dimensions during this time and the national scandal on corruption fed into and gave weight to this phenomenon. Altogether, during the 1990s, cities were the territorial entity at the forefront of many changes and had to find ways to effectively develop a new planning culture, while still managing to reduce conflict and build consensus in their arenas; to find a balance between elected and demonstrative public participation to decision making processes; and finally to face the decrease in public funding.

2.2 The Italian Road to Strategic Planning

One of the solutions tried was the production of so-called Piani strategici. During the 1990s, even if it was not a legal requirement, as are land use plans and other planning regulations,

several large and medium-sized cities in Italy produced a strategic plan. Those plans, started completely on a voluntary basis, take different forms according to the different situations where they were produced. Given the different character of the territories and local areas, summarized along with the various rationales and goals behind each plan, it is very difficult to sketch a synthetic picture of strategic planning in Italy. Highlighting the differences might have been more fruitful than trying to find similarities, nevertheless, what follows is an analysis of the common features in Italian spatial plans, which could be helpful in understanding the Italian peculiarities of the phenomenon, particularly for a foreign audience.

Generally, the central element of Italian strategic plans consists of a (most often written) document with a vision for the city and its surrounding territory. This document usually develops strategic topic areas, articulated into several thematic threads, each of which has one or more projects. The document does not usually present a mere physical leitbild; it tries to connect the social, economic and physical dimensions into a single, pragmatic vision (Bobbio and Gastaldi 2000) and to find a general agreement on its choices from the different actors (social, economic and public) active in the local arena. In a pragmatic and goal-oriented perspective, these strategic plans start from the acknowledgement that neither the City Council nor the whole of the public actors have all the elements (competences, money, etc.) to make an exhaustive decision on the best solution.

Some critics argue that strategic plans are primarily economic development tools (they are remarkably often initiated and/or fostered by local departments responsible for economic development, rather than by the planning departments), even if they call, in more or less rhetorical fashion, for participation and involvement. If it is in principle true that most Italian strategic plans respond to general calls to competition and globalization (Bobbio and Gastaldi 2000; Pugliese and Spaziante 2003), attention must be paid to the ways those tools are produced and to the processes they start locally.

The tools are always initiated at the local level and comprise actors from public bodies, civil society and the market. Usually the city council plays the role of promoter (but not always: exceptions are Torino Internazionale initiated by Forum per lo sviluppo, a group chaired by the local Chamber of Commerce and made up of the most active economic and social actors, and Progettare Firenze, promoted by a committee where the city, the Chamber of Commerce and the University all play an important role). The processes start in different ways. In some cases, large forums (variously called: forum, stati generali, audizioni, etc.) constitute the first act in order to identify needs and start a framing action, as was done in Turin, Genoa, Piacenza, La Spezia, Trento, and Milano North. In other situations, the activities move from a series of reports by experts officially presented to the public and discussed (in the case of Pesaro, Roma, Trieste, Florence and Varese). After the first phase, once strategic areas of interest have been identified, work is usually organized around different themes in working groups or round tables, where interested actors meet regularly to move the discussion and action forward. In some cases, after a first general acknowledgement of priorities among the parties involved, the work is taken up by technical offices within the city or by founding and funding an ad hoc technical/mediating body (this happened in Rome and Trieste where the Risorse per Roma s.p.a. and Creta s.r.l. work on the plans; in Trento, the university takes charge of the studies for the strategic plan). Final choices and decisions are publicly presented and ratified by an agreement (Patto, Protocollo di intesa, etc.) among all parties. After the agreement, monitoring activity starts in order to evaluate the implementation of the projects and the general situation and to have a role in the definition and re-definition of priorities and of further thematic areas for action. The monitoring process also has various interpretations. In some cases, it takes the form of an evaluation made by experts with technical knowledge (e.g., Trento), whereas in most places the decision of taking the plan further and implementing projects is simply jointly discussed and a shared decision is taken.

Participating actors come from the public sector, the market and civil society within the metropolitan area: The interest in strategic plans usually exceeds communal boundaries and one of the focuses is inter-institutional work, particularly in dense and dynamic friction areas between bigger cities and their surrounding areas (in this regard, the case of the Agenzia di sviluppo Milano nord is topical, this acts on behalf of the territories of four cities in the northern area of Milan, with delegates from their mayors). At the same time, no strict boundary is defined and it usually keeps variable geometries. This is possible because strategic plans do not have any legal powers whatsoever, their power relies on collaborative work and understanding. Also, strategic plans are usually not drawn up and
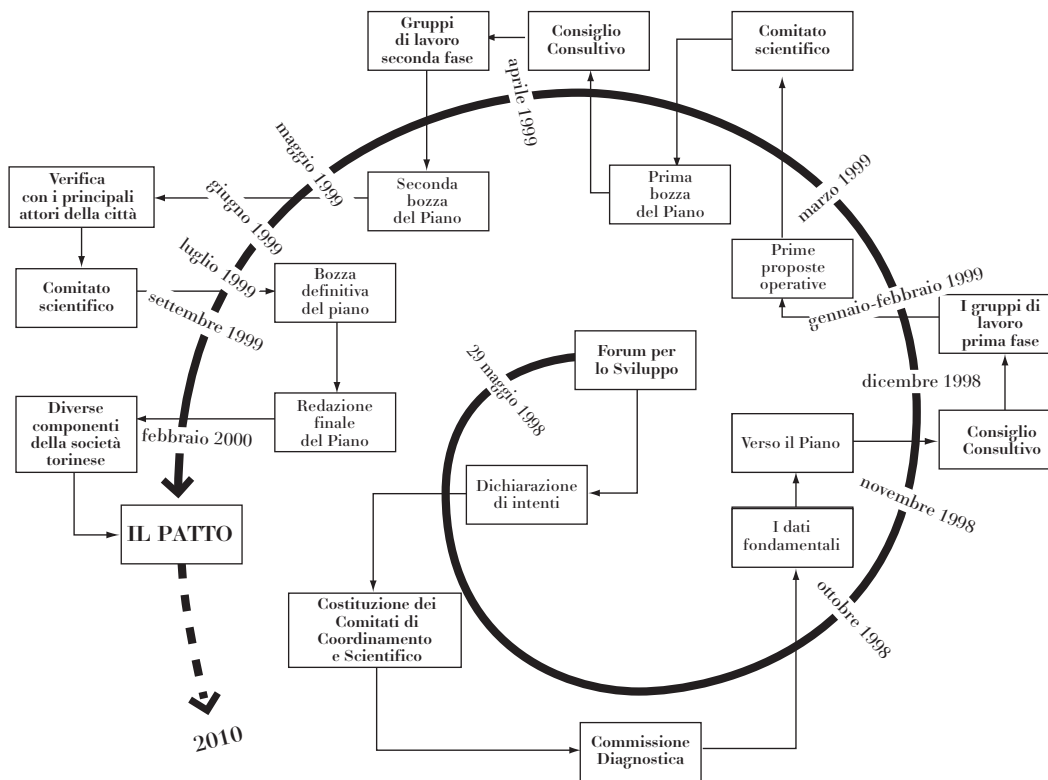
Figure 3: The scheme of the strategic planning process in Turin.
(Torino Internazionale, http://www.notavtorin.org/documenti/spunti1.jpg)
(Reprinted by courtesy of Milano Metropoli Agenzia di Sviluppo)

when they are, their style is usually schematic and allusive rather than specific. Strategic areas identified obviously vary in each situation, but some of the most common and recurrent fields are international and European integration, institutional cooperation, urban quality, local welfare, technological innovation, culture and tourism. The temporal horizon they consider is usually around 10–15 years. This is made potentially possible because strategic plans are not the product of a specific administration (bound to a 4 or 8 year life span) but of a city as a whole (which in principle, remains).

The relationship between strategic plans and ordinary spatial planning tools is, again, very different from one situation to the other (Bobbio and Gastaldi 2000). In most cases, the strategic plan is formed just after the adoption of a new land use plan, the latter then forming the frame and basis upon which choices, principally those having physical dimension, are taken and on which priorities are defined (as in the case of Turin). In some other cases, the formulation of a land use plan and of a strategic plan take place at the same time (as in Pesaro, Genoa, Trento, Rome and Varese); these are complementary in their contents and keep a certain synergy in action as well. Occasionally, strategic plans occur in transition periods, where an old spatial plan is in place but visions for the future are needed in order to define new priorities (La Spezia, Trieste, Florence). Generally, strategic plans have proved to be more effective than ordinary planning tools in framing visions, because their goal is much more straightforward than land use plans, which in Italy have at least a double role in setting a vision for the future and in zoning areas to achieve its foreseen assets.

The results of this first Italian strategic planning session are not completely clear and defined yet. Some projects have been realized and some are on their way. Probably most of what has already been implemented refers to ideas already present locally and taken on board when the drafting of the strategic plan started. As in the case of Turin, where the land use plan had been carefully prepared and agreed and its projects prepared the way for the interventions focused on by the strategic plan; or in La Spezia, where the strategic plan included important interventions founded by the previously funded PRUSST.[13] But, the field of efficiency of such tools has to be looked for elsewhere, particularly within soft-wares and org-wares rather than hard-wares: urban marketing first and, perhaps more interestingly, decision-making modes and local redefinition and rescaling in second and third place.
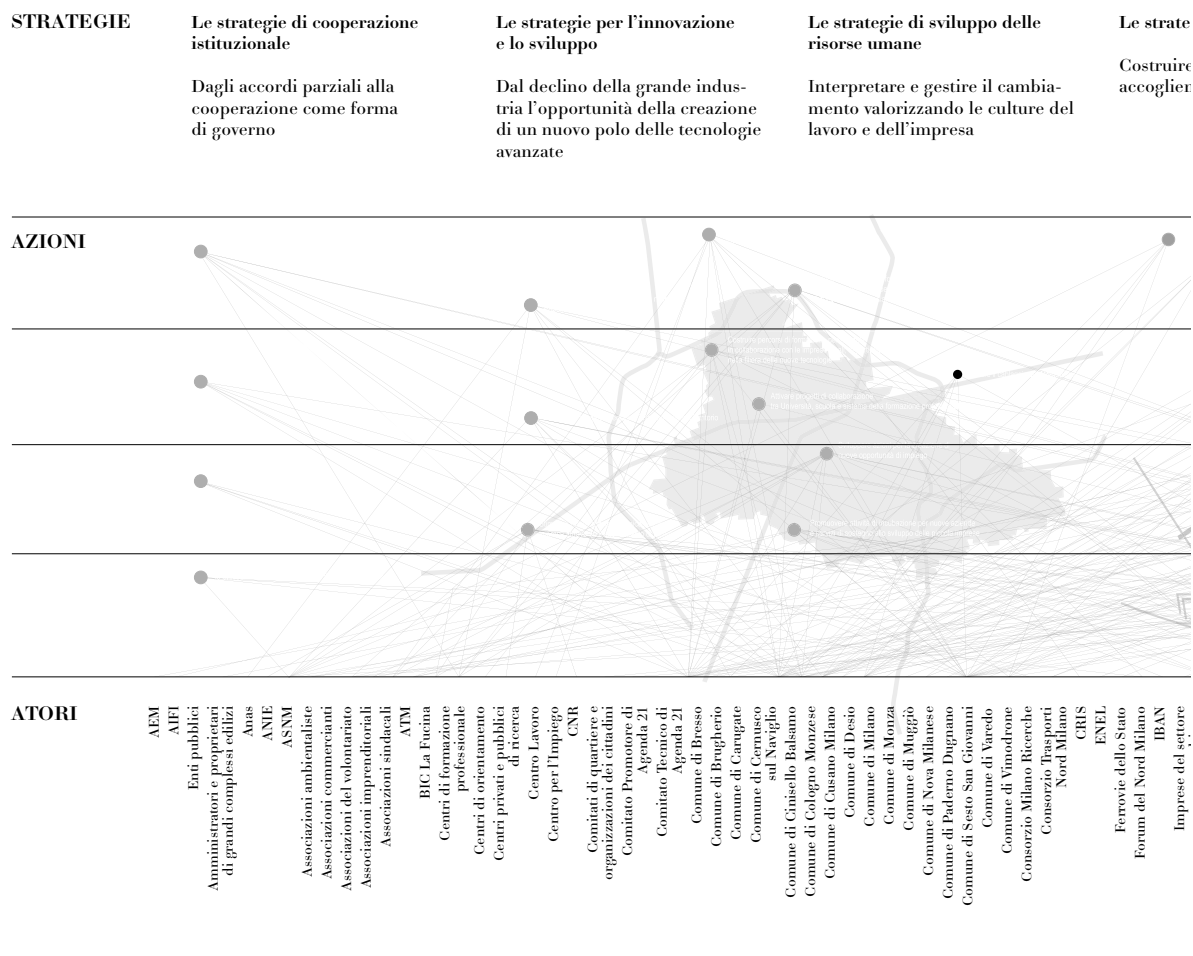
Figure 4: Associazione Sviluppo Milano nord: the vision.
(ASNM – http://www.asnm.com/documenti/piano/ildocumento/cartina.pdf)
(Reprinted by courtesy of Associazione Torino Internazionale)

The figure contains the following labels:

STRATEGIE

Le strategie di cooperazione istituzionale

Dagli accordi parziali alla cooperazione come forma di governo

Le strategie per l'innovazione e lo sviluppo

Dal declino della grande industria l'opportunità della creazione di un nuovo polo delle tecnologie avanzate

Le strategie di sviluppo delle risorse umane

Interpretare e gestire il cambiamento valorizzando le culture del lavoro e dell'impresa

Le strate

Costruire accoglier

AZIONI

ATORI

AEM, AIFI, Enti pubblici, Amministratori e proprietari di grandi complessi edilizi, Anas, ANIE, ASNM, Associazioni ambientaliste, Associazioni commercianti, Associazioni del volontariato, Associazioni imprenditoriali, Associazioni sindacali, ATM, BIC La Fucina, Centri di formazione professionale, Centri di orientamento, Centri privati e pubblici di ricerca, Centro Lavoro, Centro per l'Impiego, CNR, Comitati di quartiere e organizzazioni dei cittadini, Comitato Promotore di Agenda 21, Comitato Tecnico di Agenda 21, Comune di Bresso, Comune di Brugherio, Comune di Carugate, Comune di Cernusco sul Naviglio, Comune di Cinisello Balsamo, Comune di Cologno Monzese, Comune di Cusano Milano, Comune di Desio, Comune di Milano, Comune di Monza, Comune di Muggiò, Comune di Nova Milanese, Comune di Paderno Dugnano, Comune di Sesto San Giovanni, Comune di Varedo, Comune di Vimodrone, Consorzio Milano Ricerche, Consorzio Trasporti Nord Milano, CRIS, ENEL, Ferrovie dello Stato, Forum del Nord Milano, IBAN, Imprese del settore

If, as we assumed, strategic plans come as an answer within a growing competition-led urban policy, their success is not yet unequivocally sure. In any case, what already seems clear, is that cities which have initiated a strategic planning process gain national and international recognition. This is true both for big cities as well as medium-sized ones. Whereas for the former, strategic plans help directly in urban marketing on a global scale, for the latter, those processes help to discover endogenous potential and build local collaborative arenas within their hinterlands and beyond. Turin's bid for the winter Olympic Games 2006 was strongly supported by Torino Internazionale, and some medium-sized cities involved in strategic planning processes (Pesaro, La Spezia, Trento) have founded a network in order to circulate experiences, exchange ideas and disseminate good practices.

That said, probably the main result of this first decade is the formation of more or less strongly structured local networks interested in the future of their city and in the identification of common goals. Italian strategic plans undoubtedly make a contribution to opening decision-making processes at the local level to a more interactive approach, slowly abandoning traditional, entirely politically and technically driven, decision-making modes. Even if the definition of common interests and specific themes has generally been very slow in this first session, we have to acknowledge that it takes place within a culture where collective thinking and action are very new entrants to decision-making discourses and actual processes, which were traditionally dominated by a clear top-down approach and often spoiled by strong locally powerful networks acting behind the scenes. Strategic plans try to pull local actors together around a table and structure discourses within a framework that focuses on collective achievements. In the most successful cases, like Turin,
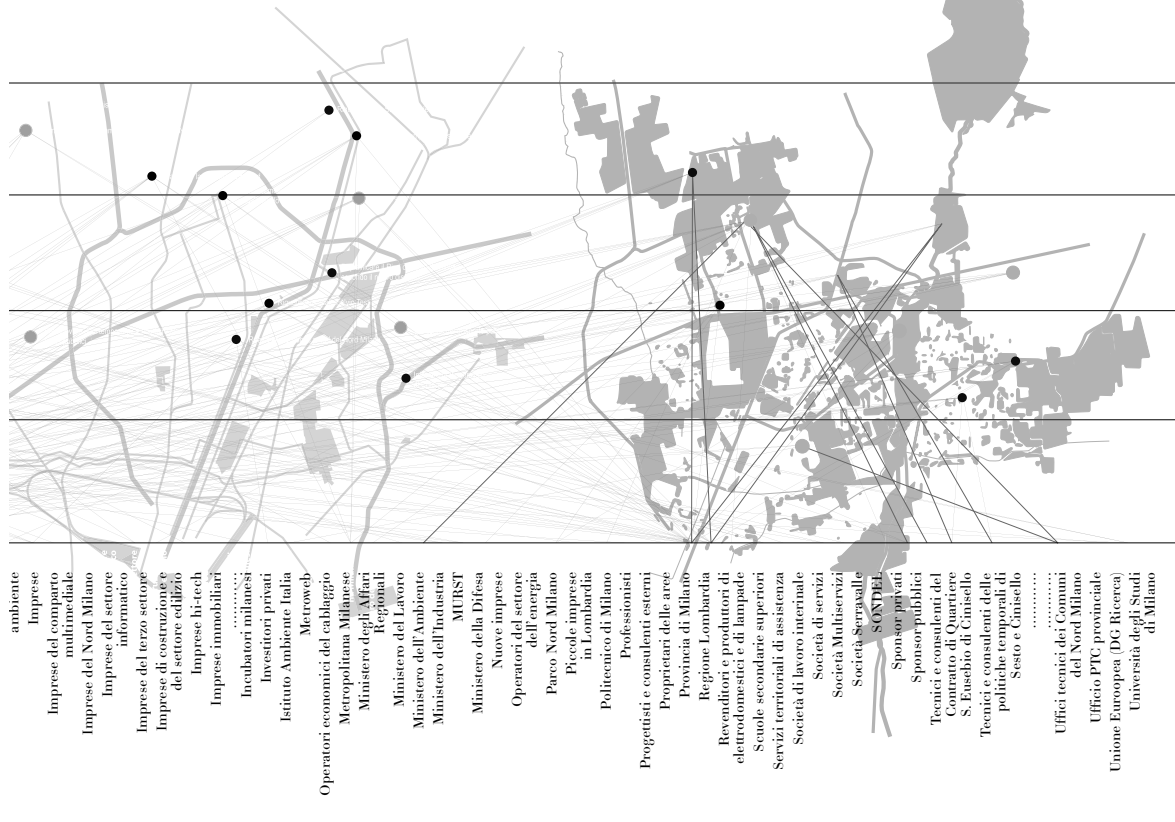
gie territoriali

e una città polcentrica
te e vitale

Le infrastrutture come
occasione di riqualificazione
urbana

Le strategie ambientali

Il nuovo paesaggio della
qualità urbana

La cura dell'ambiente come strategia
di sviluppo

ambiente · Imprese · Imprese del comparto multimediale · Imprese del Nord Milano · Imprese del settore informatico · Imprese del terzo settore · Imprese di costruzione e del settore edilizio · Imprese hi-tech · Imprese immobiliari · Incubatori milanesi · Investitori privati · Istituto Ambiente Italia · Metroweb · Operatori economici del cablaggio · Metropolitana Milanese · Ministero degli Affari Regionali · Ministero del Lavoro · Ministero dell'Ambiente · Ministero dell'Industria · MURST · Ministero della Difesa · Nuove imprese · Operatori del settore dell'energia · Parco Nord Milano · Piccole imprese in Lombardia · Politecnico di Milano · Professionisti · Progettisti e consulenti esterni · Proprietari delle aree · Provincia di Milano · Regione Lombardia · Rivenditori e produttori di elettrodomestici e di lampade · Scuole secondarie superiori · Servizi territoriali di assistenza · Società di lavoro interinale · Società di servizi · Società Multiservizi · Società Serravalle · SONDEL · Sponsor privati · Sponsor pubblici · Tecnici e consulenti del Contratto di Quartiere S. Eusebio di Cinisello · Tecnici e consulenti delle politiche temporali di Sesto e Cinisello · Uffici tecnici dei Comuni del Nord Milano · Ufficio PTC provinciale · Unione Europea (DG Ricerca) · Università degli Studi di Milano

they manage to (at least partially) redefine local arenas and mobilize local resources (economic, institutional, social and human) towards agreed-upon goals. Even if it is clear that good results come not just from these plans, but are also the product of a fertile local milieu and the result of positive events, it is evident that they provide a platform that is actually not available elsewhere. In this respect, the initial input and their promoting body (in particular, its composition), added to their completely voluntary formation, are all fundamental elements. In any case, a lot will be defined at the local level according to what economic, social and political phenomena will occur in the coming years, at the moment, those results being (in all the cases examined) very soft and fragile and in need of continuous fostering and care from all interested parties.

Last but not least, the third result consists of strategic spatial planning experiences producing a redefinition and rescaling process for ter-

ritories, starting from the local level. Whatever the initial input for all the cases examined, they do not concentrate on communal boundaries and do explore, at different stages, collaborations with innovative bases with neighboring communes, by opening discussions and starting completely new (not only regarding contents, but also the form they take) discourses with other public authorities at various levels. In a way, they factually shift the attention from cities as defined by their administrative boundaries to one or more operative definitions of a city as both working and living spaces, which sometimes overlap, and other times follow parallel paths. Strategic plans have proven to be altogether powerful instruments, for the rediscovery and redefinition of local potential and new synergies, and for finding new ways forward together and to defining new local scales of analysis and action. In doing so, they find a (non-technical) answer to a problem that spatial

planning in Italy has had since the 1980s: the (technical) dysfunction of political and administrative boundaries with respect to the growth in the size of cities.

Considering strictly current Italian planning debates, those experiments have produced one result not irrelevant for our discipline: that of opening a new phase of comprehensive planning, after the crisis of land use plans acknowledged in the 1970s–1980s and the concentration on single projects which characterized, with more or less local emphasis, urban policies of the 1980s and early 1990s. Altogether, we could say that strategic plans seem to be a way to answer a series of questions that statutory spatial planning and traditional modes of planning action have not yet been able to answer. At the same time, though, they propose several new and serious problems both at the political and the technical level which, if we want to try this new way, need urgent answers from society and also from the planning community in Italy – and elsewhere.

3 The Creative Potential of Italian Strategic Spatial Planning

Going through the various definitions that strategic planning got over the decades, in the opening section we could observe a selective sedimentation of meanings. Even if some threads were suddenly interrupted while others were taking the scene, and obvious discontinuities and problematic nodes appeared, we could clearly see a progressive movement within planning discourses from comprehensive to limited rationales, and towards the acknowledgement of different actors within planning processes. Parallel to that, strategy moved from being a set of given goals to an action mode informed by the context within which it takes place.

In the previous section, we saw that Italian strategic plans vary from case to case and that even single instruments do not follow a unique type of rationale throughout the entire process and follow multiple (and sometimes diverging) goals. As with most products of contemporary society, they are not pure fruits, but resemble instead complex hybrids. In their articulation, they seem though to follow the path that the definition of strategic planning has followed in the past ten years. Analyzing the debate relating to this last decade, it is apparent that it refers primarily to the process and that somehow the spatial dimension, even if indirectly present through images and cultural references, has

disappeared. Also, it is clear that the context assumed now consciously has multiple actors: the public and the private actor, state and market are now acknowledged as extremes of the same line, and that planners are losing their traditional identity as technical professionals and becoming more and more a mediator and interpreter of society within planning processes. All these elements were present in the Italian strategic planning cases examined.

We closed the discussion on the meaning and role of strategy in planning and strategic planning by saying that strategy could generally be understood as a pressure element in the debate, opening discourses to new and innovative dimensions in planning theory and practice. This last paragraph tries to define the innovative and creative dimensions of the first Italian strategic planning session (shortly outlined and superficially described).

The first creative dimension of strategic planning is that it creates new territories. New territories are continuously defined by on-going debates on existing potential and new synergies, but also by the critical discussion on boundaries. Visions and images for the future help in finding a way but at the same time produce new frameworks for action and redefine social and economic limits and political and administrative boundaries. The visionary and story-telling dimensions of planning are in this respect central. Focusing on the Italian debates, respectively on metropolitan cities and city-regions, we see clearly how the debates in the former, legal entities introduced from the center in the 1990s, have been sterile on a theoretical as well as a practical level. Whereas the debates on the city-regions are mostly connected with intercommunal approaches, were started locally and from the bottom up, have grown in importance and had practical effects. We cannot say that strategic planning in Italy produced the city-regions, but it is certainly true that strategic planning processes have locally raised the general level of attention on real limits and boundaries and contributed to the collective creation of specific city-regions (this is particularly evident in the case of Milano nord, but also in Turin, Florence and Genoa).

The second creative dimension relies on the creation of new continuities between market forces and the state. In the area of competition among cities, strategic plans contribute to a slow progression of public actors and economic actors towards each other. Also, different from previous situations when public and private actors within local arenas would have worked to-

Strategic spatial planning creates

already:

Territories	*Local governance*
– visions	– stable platform
– limits and boundaries	– continuity
– City regions	– state/market/civil society

potentially:

Rules	*Space and place*	*Planning*
– fair and democratic assess for different actors	– connect process, space and place	– new roles, goals and rationales
– reciprocal interaction between local governance and planning	– new technical dimensions	

Table 2: The creative potential of spatial planning.

gether on specific projects on specific occasions, strategic planning processes provide platforms which enable on-going contact and debate, and so provide stabilization of those relations as well as critical evaluation and development of shared experiences. This is probably one of the fields in which cities have to learn that initiating a platform is a good start, but developing a culture that keeps the access to this platform open and that fosters positive and balanced interaction between actors with different weights is a necessary step at this stage.

Another step that has to be developed in order to release a third creative potential for strategic planning relates to the definition of new rules for local governance. Statutory planning, and, more generally, institutionalized modes in planning, respond to a type of governance based principally on governmental action, as it has been in Italy and Europe throughout most of the last century. Some strategic planning experiences open the way to a more articulate relationship between new forms of local governance and planning processes. Whereas in the past century, planning was often reduced to the spatial technical dimension of governmental management and administrative activities, the landscape is changing dramatically today. We could nowadays imagine a reciprocal relationship between planning processes and local governance forms, which could positively balance and complement elected assemblies with direct democracy in decision-making processes. This perspective, which, in principle, opens the way to new developments in planning theory and practice, needs careful attention and evaluation in defining the rules of this (new) game, in order to keep it fair and democratic. Observing the Italian experience on strategic planning and the

role and power civil society has within it, this is a very critical point, in my view, not adequately examined as yet.

As stated at the beginning of this section, strategic planning has gained new economic and social dimensions but, at the same time, has lost its spatial focus. I believe we could still rely on statutory planning instruments and institutionalized planning tools, even if stretched and customized, for a very short period. The general framework for planning is changing so quickly that soon technical instruments will also have to develop and change as well. As societies and their rules change, the tools connecting societies with their territories also have to change. The last decade has seen a lively debate on shifting governance modes and their relationship with planning, losing somehow the technical dimension that characterized spatial planning of the early years. I believe that together with its political dimensions, the technical dimensions of planning also have to adapt to the new scenarios because they implicitly define the duties and rights citizens have towards their community. A question that remained in the shadows is how to (re)connect technical and political arenas and institutional and social design with the physical definition and design of urban spaces and places. This opens the way to the definition of a completely new toolbox for planners, not just technical, but also in terms of roles, goals and rationales for planning.

Strategic spatial planning is creative with respect to the development of new territories and scales, to the definition of new continuities between state, market and civil society, and to the interaction with and creation of innovative local governance forms. But, if the creative potential of strategic planning in shaping and developing

spaces and places could at this point be quietly accepted and even assumed as a potential start for the redefinition of spatial planning for the new century, there are two questions that all urban actors would still have to bear in mind. The first is how to guarantee space and place for creative action within urban planning processes, between emerging practices and institutionalization processes. The second, referring primarily to the planning community, is how to reconnect urban strategies with planning strategies, strategie urbane and strategie urbanistiche.

Notes

1   I refer to Bourdieu's concept of field, a whole of different elements, weakly structured or not structured at all. Different from a system, it constitutes an open and dynamic space for action, where limits are defined and redefined by the game played within its boundaries.

2   Citations not literally translated by the author.

3   Planners (Piroddi 1996; Lacaze 1996) have often referred to the well-known Sun Tzu Chinese handbook on the art of conducting war. Here, the focus is on four basic elements of strategy: the accurate understanding of the real situation, realistic goals, focused orientation of available strength in that direction, and persistence of the action until significant results have been achieved. Both the current understanding of the term and the military meaning highlight two recurrent elements: focusing on long-term goals and the presence of some sort of antagonist in the action. If the mere fixing of goals could imply a static understanding of what strategy is, the presence of a potential reaction, or counteraction, draws the attention immediately towards a more dynamic, iterative and interactive perspective.

4   The UK with the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act; the Netherlands following the 1965 Physical Planning Act; France with the 1967 Loi d'orientation foncière. It is generally acknowledged that up to that point in time the general understanding of planning was mainly as a zoning activity necessary in order to enhance the value of the offer in terms of real estate; the newly introduced context for planning sees it in its process dimension and introduces substantive rationality and a comprehensive perspective (Mazza 1987).

5   It is important to consider how, between the 1940s and the 1960s, the debate in the British context has been shaped by several theoretical contributions preparing the path for such big changes. Even if Geddes's and Abercrombie's seminal contributions on a systemic approach to planning did not have a specific resonance in the immediate situation, undoubtedly the series of handbooks produced by Chapin (Chapin 1965), McLoughlin (1968) and Chadwick (1971) within short time had a main relevance (Mazza 1987; Breheny and Batey 1984). Chapin describes planning activity as a cyclic, rational and comprehensive process and is the first author who draws public interest to justify specific choices. McLoughlin strengthens the paradigm by developing the systemic approach further into two directions of complexity relating both to scale and dimension, and exports its main features in the actual policy and political debates of the time. He draws widely from his professional experiences (focused on Teesside, Leicester and Leicestershire) and pays attention also to the North American situation. His Urban and Regional Planning: a Systems Approach has been translated and circulated its ideas in non-Anglophone countries. Finally, Chadwick goes on the path traced, describing planning as a hierarchical process, shaping the order in which a sequence of actions is implemented. Strategy is necessary, following this interpretation, in order to evaluate different operative hypothesis equally enabling one to reach the fixed goals, and he goes a step forward by highlighting the relation planning has with operational research. So, Chadwick prepares the field for the relevant contributions on the topic made by the Institute for Operational Research of the Tavistock Institute. During its famous study on Coventry (Friend and Jessop 1977), the IOR adopts the principles of policy analysis, producing a work that, even if embedded in a systemic approach, takes distance from it by discovering a new, incremental approach to planning based on the acknowledgement of an unstable, uncertain background characterized by multiple actors (and rationales) for any form of planning effort. Within this frame, the choice is defined as strategic and strategic planning is the form planning naturally takes in turbulent conditions.

6   The application of this sort of understanding of strategic planning, developed within the economic sciences for private enterprise and organizations, to the field of spatial planning has been done with some simplifications. This definition does in fact consider antagonists only outside the organization, and assumes internal cohesion among members of the organization on a mission, with its goals and preferred tools to achieve them. This could probably be true for organizations, but it is never true for cities, given the highly conflictory nature of urban arenas.

7   The economist who took the topic deeper is Henry Mintzberg (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg, Lampel, Quinn and Ghoshal 1996; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel 1999). It is interesting to note how puzzled he is by the many different understandings of strategic planning in his field too. Throughout his work, Mintzberg's main attempt is to structure the typologies of the mean-

ings of strategy according to their actual nature in practice. He defines five different typologies of the concept: as a plan, a conscious foreseen goal for action; as a ploy, a manoeuvre designed to beat an enemy; as a pattern, the particular form that the action takes, consciously or unconsciously (could be acknowledged right after the action); as a position, communicating the place and values of the organization to the outside world; and as a perspective, mainly looking inside the organization and mirroring its vision. Altogether, we could see some similarities with the definitions used in our field and could appreciate how much these thoughts have filtered into planning discourses. Henry Mintzberg also produced a matrix classifying different approaches from different schools of thought and their respective evolution from 1965 to 1995 (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel 1999).

8   The theoretical work of Luigi Mazza, relating to the Italian context, is singular and exemplary for its coherence and cultural breadth and technical precision (Mazza 1994; Mazza 1995a; Mazza 1995b; Mazza 1999a; Mazza 1999b; Mazza 1999c; Mazza 2000; Mazza 2001; Mazza (ed) 2002; Mazza 2002), and has recently been used in an innovative planning approach for the city of Milan (i.e. Documento di Inquadramento).

9   We took into consideration the plans for Florence, Genoa, La Spezia, Milan Nord, Pesaro, Piacenza, Rome, Trento, Trieste, Turin, Varese.

10 Before, the citizens had to vote for representatives of a party or coalition; the elected candidates of the winning coalition later voted for the mayor.

11 This indirectly produced a number of innovative experiments within the existing national planning laws and some new planning laws at the regional level.

12 Whereas, before the revision of Title V of the Constitution, legislative planning powers were allocated at state level, now regions in Italy all have legislative powers regarding planning. Other intermediate levels have been identified which have gained a role in the planning process.

13 PRUSST – Programma di riqualificazione urbana e sviluppo sostenibile del territorio, a competitive program launched and funded at the national level which fosters projects dealing with transport and sustainable development having an inter-communal dimension.

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Dr. Francesca S. Sartorio
Cardiff School of City and
Regional Planning
Cardiff University
Glamorgan Building
King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff, Wales, CF10 3WA
U.K.
SartorioF@cardiff.ac.uk

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