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STRATEGIC PLANNING AND TERRITORIAL SUBJECTIVITY IN THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE

Abstract - Relying on the concept of «territorial subjectivity», this paper briefly analyzes the Italian experience of strategic planning: it aims at showing the role territorial subjectivity played in determining the success or failure of this planning practice. Too often, the effectiveness of the plan is supposed to depend on its quality and on its territorial coherence, but also the nature and the quality of the (political) subject who designs and implements it has by no means a crucial role. It seems clear that a reciprocal relationship exists between territorial subjectivity and strategic planning. The former fosters the active involvement of local stakeholders and the process of convergence previous to the definition of the objectives of the plan; partnership mechanisms, in turn, being embedded in collective memory and materialized into acts of territorialization of the physical space, concur to the strengthening of territorial subjectivity and of its capability of shaping space and guiding collective action.

Introduction. Relying on the concept of “territorial subjectivity”, this paper briefly analyzes the Italian experience of strategic planning: it aims at showing the role this played in determining the success or failure of this planning practice. The effectiveness of the plan is often supposed to depend on its quality and territorial coherence, but also the nature of the (political) subject who designs and implements it has by no means a crucial role. The analysis of the practices put in place shows how the effectiveness of urban/territorial governance largely depends on the level of subjectivity that territory can express. It is precisely this quality which fosters local actors’ active involvement and their strategic convergence prior to the definition of both objectives and lines of action. In general, any form of local social gathering seems to be facilitated by the presence of a strong subjectivity, as this, being grounded on the sharing of a common system of values and a common identity, is at the base of the processes of social capital accumulation. It

seems clear that a reciprocal relationship exists between territorial subjectivity and strategic planning. The former fosters local stakeholders' active involvement and convergence; partnership mechanisms, in turn, being embedded in collective memory and materialized into acts of territorialization of the physical space, concur to the strengthening of territorial subjectivity and of its capability of shaping place and guiding collective action.

It thus becomes an essential prerequisite so as endogenous, self-reliant development processes at the local scale may trigger and the vision around which the plan is built may actually have a performative function on the territorial reality. The main risks related to strategic planning found in this research relate to the auto-referential character of plans and actors; the inconsistency of strategic options, the "overdimension" of the vision and its related objectives; and, above all, the lack of an effective involvement of the local actors. The conclusion is that local governance is directly connected to a subjectivity which is capable of promoting the convergence among different local actors and the community's active participation in the strategic plan implementation.

1. Territorial subjectivity and strategic planning: a reciprocal relationship. "Territorial subjectivity" (Pollice, 2008) is the ability of a region to represent itself, act and be recognized as a unique, collective subject. It is, therefore, a particular form of collective subjectivity where the adjective "territorial" refers to the geographic characterization (a given space), to the "clotting factor" of the collective dimension (since the cohesion on which it is based derives from the sense of belonging to the same place), and, lastly, the final target (territory). As can be seen from this first conceptualisation, the relationship between territorial subjectivity and territorial identity, which is a reciprocal rather than a dependent one, is very close: if, on the one hand, representation as a collective actor – this being a fundamental condition of subjectivity – primarily implies its recognition as such, on the other hand, only a strong territorial identity can produce an active subjectivity. The higher the sense of belonging, the greater the cohesion and the strategic convergence among the members of the community and, therefore, the commitment to express oneself as a social entity. Representing oneself and acting as a local community tends, in turn, to strengthen the cohesion and the emotional bond with place and its inhabitants, and this is because of both the performative power which is inherent in the representations produced by collective action and the "coagulating" effect of actions *per se* when they are accompanied by partnership practices. Unlike political subjectivity, which can be conferred top-down, the territorial one has an endogenous nature as it manifests

itself as the product of collective self-recognition and sense of belonging. This is why the level of participation of community in the local political and social life is so crucial in this discourse: «[the] opportunity to participate enhances a sense of belonging and enables citizens to be active agents of change» (García, 2006, p. 747). Empowerment processes on a local scale represent shared experiences that strengthen community relationships and, by accumulating in the *milieu* as successful practices, contribute to the formation of further gatherings aimed at achieving territorial objectives: «the empowerment of civil society in a context of interactions – a context where actors and groups discover common interests, structured by their common belonging to the territory – is leading to a renewed capacity for government. Thus, a mode of regulation of behaviour is being constructed around a revalidated institution: the territory-community» (Pinson, 2002, p. 482).

On the basis of these brief introductory remarks, we explore the relationship between territorial subjectivity and strategic planning, which seems to be quite clear from the definition of the latter. Strategic spatial planning is the result of a collective effort («refers to self-conscious collective efforts to re-imagine a city, urban region or wider territory», Healey, 2004, p. 46) whose “strategic” approach contributes to the «formation of active coalitions among an array of small municipalities, or mobilize active stakeholder groups important to an area’s development who can move perceptions (and hence actions) from just “being in an area” to a recognition of an area as having an identity (a city or region “in itself”), and beyond this, to having the capacity to act “for itself” (Beauregard, 1995; Healey, 2002)» (*Ivi*, p. 45). The governance model underlying strategic planning, based on a comprehensive and integrated approach to economic, social and environmental development of urban and more generally territorial contexts (Healey *et al.*, 1997, Healey, 2007), establishes oneself after that the limits and contradictions of purely sectoral approaches to the city government arose: planning practices were uniquely focused on the micro scale and didn’t pursue objectives of cross-consistency within the set of measures foreseen for punctual transformations of space. In the mid-nineties, the third generation of strategic planning practices took hold in Italy, too. It is defined by Gibelli (1996) as “reticular and visionary” as it is aimed at creating synergies among policy makers, also through mechanisms of activation of consensus, around a shared image of the desirable future for the city, commonly identified with the “vision” (Breheny, Rookwood, 1993; Hall, Ward, 1999). As a consequence of the “institutional turn” (Amin, 1999; 2004) that affected social sciences, and geography with them, with its emphasis on the role of local actors and institutions (Storper, 1997) and on the interaction between development processes and localised thickening of relations (Amin, Thrift, 1995), the new urban “institutionalist” governance, is seen as «a set of complex institutional relationships facing issues of

economic, social and environmental arrangement; as a coordination problem between the policies pursued at different scales (supranational, national, metropolitan and local), as opposed to administrative fragmentation; as an opportunity to make both formal and informal public/private partnerships in which transparency and a clear leadership in the public decision-making process must be ensured, and to enhance citizens' involvement at every stage of the elaboration and implementation of the plan» (Gibelli, 2003, p. 58). The new planning instrument is characterized, firstly, by an extension of the spatial boundaries (which don't necessarily correspond to the administrative ones anymore) and of the time period of political action, with a rescaling (Albrechts, 2004) in favour of a regional/metropolitan planning – this showing the growing awareness about the importance of the interdependent relationships between an urban center and its surrounding areas – and the undertaking of a long term view. Local community's active participation in the planning process is inherent in the building of a shared vision and is a backbone of these governance models (García, 2006); local community is legitimized by transparent and inclusive interactive procedures and stimulated by a promotional activity for the enhancement of local relationality: «it is a model of decision-making that emphasises consensus and output and that claims to be participatory» (García, 2006, p. 745). In this regard, Camagni stresses that «it is possible to state that urban strategic planning – by enhancing and promoting social networks, by leveraging shared values and identity elements and by organizing tables for debate, discussion and coordination – leads to the creation of a community governance» (Camagni, 2003, p. 79). In essence, then, the main distinguishing factor of this planning model compared to the previous ones lies in the fact that the outcome of governance does no longer depends on the quality of the project itself, but on that of the underway interactions (Donolo, 2003), which are built and strengthened during its implementation: the primacy is therefore no longer given to the final product but to the process (Celata, 2005; Albrechts, 2006) and to how «significant stakeholders can be mobilized to develop strategic agendas in a “diffused power” context, and become cohesive enough to develop “collective actor” power» (Healey, 2004, p. 46). Governance indeed refers to a «broader range of processes which contribute to the aggregation of interests and demands and to the coordination of social activities» (Pinson, 2002, p. 478).

In this framework, territorial subjectivity is an unavoidable prerequisite for the activation of any endogenous and self-centered process of spatial transformation which can reflect, by incorporating and integrating all proposals coming from the bottom, the collective will representing the more diverse interests. In theory, the best example of such an approach is precisely strategic planning. More specifically, the vision, that is the central element of the plan which selects and orders priorities in terms of lines of

action and which «visualizes – in words and pictures – what a place could be or should be in the future» (Albrechts, 2006, p. 1160), is the aspect that is most intimately connected to subjectivity, both because this last is its premise, and because it can be interpreted as the product of a broad convergence and as the result of its manifest or latent presence. It is, indeed, in this phase that subjectivity comes up as a collective actor able to express its own idea of development and to influence political decisions. For this to happen, the pre-existence of gathering phenomena on territorial basis, i.e. where territory is the unifying factor as well as the constant target of all objectives, is a favorable condition.

Governance rests, in fact, on territorialized actions, which are identifiable by three characteristics: «they refer to the territory as a common good; they are concerned with the identification and valorisation of territorial capital; and the territory itself is defined during the action (government actions apply to an administrative territory while governance actions do not necessarily do so)» (Davoudi *et. al*, 2008, p. 44).

Consensus, collective contribution to the achievement of results and sharing of a vision are the fundamental assumptions of governance, which is defined as «the capacity of public and private actors to: - build an organisational consensus involving different actors in order to define common objectives and tasks; - agree on the contribution by each partner to attain the objectives previously defined; - agree on a common vision for the future of their territory» (Ivi, p. 35). A strong territorial subjectivity would be, on the one hand, a precondition of propensity for agreed solutions of local problems, on the other hand, would activate an implicit control on political action. The social control over the plan and its implementation is probably one of the most interesting and significant aspect of the interaction strategic planning - territorial subjectivity: even when this last doesn't directly express itself politically, it can bring pressure on policy makers influencing their choices. In the light of the foregoing considerations, subjectivity seems to be intimately related to governance, both because it expresses itself through it, and because it is essentially through it that it is able to guide a city or region management. As many have pointed out, in fact, governance «is a concern with governing, achieving collective action in the realm of public affairs» (Stoker, 2000, p. 93) and has to do with the way in which a collective actor emerges from a diverse group of interests (Le Galès, 1998). It has been defined as a form of collective action in which «urban elites endeavour to make the city into a collective actor, a social and political actor possessing autonomy and strategies» (Bagnasco, Le Galès, 2000, p. 25). The Italian case study, observed relying on the explanatory power of the above concepts, contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of subjectivity in planning processes.

2. *The specificity of Italian planning.* Besides the broader processes that led to the development of strategic planning in Europe, there are some peculiar elements of the Italian adoption of this model of governance that worth noting. These characters are indeed more clear if you read them in relation to the phase of radical change of local policy which Italy has experienced over the past two decades. Strategic planning appears indeed in the moment of most acute crisis of the traditional approach to political and administrative management of urban space. In the second half of the Nineties, a drastic transformation invests Italian cities which were hit by Tangentopoli and the resulting decline of the traditional system of political parties (Pinson, 2002; Healey, 2004; Jouve, 2005). This change didn't affect only big cities (Bolocan Goldstein, 1997; Dente *et al.*, 2005), but also involved medium cities, which are generally considered as the true driving force for the development of the country. There are at least three hallmarks of this transformation (Pasqui, Armondi, Fedeli, 2010). Firstly, the disappearance (though sometimes only temporary) of the local ruling class linked to the so-called First Republic, overwhelmed by the collapse of legitimacy and credibility that hit, on a local scale, too, the whole Italian political system. The second element, which is closely related to the first one and to the political vacuum resulting from it, is the appearance of new local elites, often coming not from traditional parties or networks, but rather from environments (university, liberal professions, business community, associations) which are in part far from historically established political groups. Thirdly, there are some important institutional changes in the field of local self-government following the reform introduced by Law 142/90, with mayors' direct election and the attempt to overcome a purely bureaucratic logic of administrative activities. In this tricky phase of transition, some "political entrepreneurs", out-and-out "Schumpeterian entrepreneurs" (Armondi, 2008) started promoting strategic plans. These innovators, therefore, experience government action in contexts where the crisis of political parties weakened the bond between these last and local communities, undermining their trust in institutions: «these new administrators, doubly displaced by both the crisis of legitimacy and the legislative changes that confer them a much wider and discretionary power [...], find some different ways of dialogue allowing them to re-legitimate government action and to build new forms of dialogue with local societies» (Pasqui, Armondi, Fedeli, 2010, p. 103), and they did it by "voluntarily" taking the risk for it. In this regard, it is essential to take into account that, in Italy, strategic planning is not formalized, in that it doesn't derive from laws constraining local authorities to engage in processes of that kind: it comes from willful acts of local government institutions which, individually or in association, develop non-prescriptive objectives (Gastaldi, 2003). The Italian strategic plan is therefore a narrative and

spontaneous tool proposing policy guidelines and recommendations which are continually subject to rescheduling due to the participatory nature of the definition of its objectives. Against the delay of the implementation of the new governance practices in Italy ('90s), around forty cities (large, medium, small towns and associations of municipalities) have adopted a strategic plan till now. Besides the underlying reasons mentioned above, they did it for more contingent reasons, too, such as: a crisis of their territorial identity and the need for the reaffirmation of a new one (Turin, La Spezia and Lamezia Terme); the management of the challenges of economic globalization and of international competitiveness (as in the case of historically rich medium cities with a high quality of life, see Trento, Bolzano and Ferrara); the enhancement of the traditional vocation through innovation in the elements of excellence (think of cultural cities, i.e. Florence and Venice); the reconstruction of the social fabric and of a sense of belonging to the territory in contexts characterized by a highly dispersed relational capital (Bari and Naples); the control of complex decision making processes and the access to financing for the construction of major (mostly infrastructural) public works, as in most of southern cities (Florio, 2010). Relying on the classification proposed by Ave and Ceccarelli (2006, p. 88), urban planning experiences made so far can be grouped on the basis of the idea of development they pursue into three distinct categories:

1. cities focusing their plan on rediscovering and enhancing their origins (Florence, Trento, La Spezia, Copparo);
2. cities reinterpreting their own future through the plan (Turin, Venice, Pesaro, Sesto San Giovanni);
3. cities looking for a rationalization of their resources and an ongoing research of their vision (Rome, Genoa, Perugia, Piacenza, Verona and Varese).

Despite the heterogeneity of these experiences, it is possible to mark three moments in the path of adoption of the new model of urban governance by the Italian local authorities:

- the pioneering experimental phase, with the first voluntary plans activated during the Nineties, when some Italian cities, driven by the economic recession and the restructuring of their production system (think for instance of the ex-industrial city of Turin), are forced to rethink their growth strategies (La Spezia, Piacenza, Florence);
- the phase of spread in central northern Italy, when mostly medium-sized cities, in an attempt to increase their national and international visibility, introduce improvements and innovations in planning methods on the basis of what they have been learning from experiences that were underway (from Trento to Perugia, from Verona to Jesi);

- the peak phase (2006-2008) with the proliferation of strategic planning initiatives in southern cities, stimulated by the national funds allocated by the CIPE resolution No. 20/04 and aimed at strengthening urban planning by gaining additional resources also from 2007-2013 Structural Funds (CENSIS, 2006).

The evaluations about this last stage and the governmental initiative are very discordant (see Pasqui, 2011): if, on the one hand, this is positively welcomed as a stimulus to the convergence of Southern Italy to a governance model which is considered to be innovative, on the other hand, it is supposed to produce a potential negative effect causing a distortion/denaturalization of its main features, first and foremost the voluntary and endogenous nature of the strategic planning process. Another weakness concerns a crucial dimension of this kind of urban governance, namely the structured participation of a plurality of actors. From this point of view, the forms of citizen involvement put in place in Italy, although diverse, seem to make use of rather traditional practices, designed following formalized interactive methodologies, which do not totally correspond to the demands of communication and cooperation of each single context, sometimes running the typical risks of hetero-referential, exogenous strategies. Think of Piacenza, where the thematic round tables during the initial phase (interpreted as ritualized practices instead of co-working activities), couldn't mobilize inactive actors and thicken the relationships among them, due to their low cooperative capacity and propensity to vertical and horizontal coordination (see Florio, 2010). It has been noted that «there exists a connection between the openness to citizen participation grounded in previous experiences of social citizenship practices and an extension of the public sphere to new groups [...] Alternatively, when such ground has not been consolidated, as is the case in southern European countries, opportunity structures for participation in cities are guided by local policies, ad hoc projects or depend on specific leadership» (García, 2006, p. 762). Italian experimentations seem therefore to be successful only if they are the final outcome of a process of collective learning (of both local authority and all involved actors) and of a step-by-step innovation in the methods of urban governance which can rest on a past, valuable experience in shared planning.

3. Territorial subjectivity as a determinant of the effectiveness of strategic planning. The vast set of strategic planning experiences in Italy has been largely studied and assessed. Literature on the topic expresses a number of doubts about the results of the implementations: some authors highlight that «the new codifications propose again policy devices based on a linear sequence between knowledge and action and a comprehensive approach as well as a top-down and single-actor pattern in governance» (Pasqui, Armondi,

Fedeli, 2010, p. 13). In other words, traditional governance models would have been resubmitted in a new rhetoric and narrative guise, with little or no difference – «everything is changed (in the discourse) in order that everything remains unchanged in the hierarchy of positions and roles» (Jouve, 2005, p. 291) – following a “normative isomorphism” with the emulation of other experiences without a self reflection based on the local context. Trying to go beyond the mere criterion of effectiveness meant as the ability to achieve the stated objectives, we intend here to evaluate whether the Italian implementation of strategic planning produced some breakpoints against past or not (in terms of process, product or agenda innovations in the selected area), focusing on the identification of the “sediment” the new practice delivered to the territory rather than on the actual fulfillment of the measures declared in the plan. It is widely accepted indeed that one of the major outcomes of strategic planning is the growth of the intangible resources of place in terms of social (more relationships and greater trust among people), intellectual (greater shared knowledge) (Albrechts, 2004) and political (new alliances) capital (Ave Ceccarelli, 2006). Although the analysis of the planning experiences of Italian cities does not allow an easy generalization, it is however possible to make a reflection on the results of the collective learning which took different form from place to place. They range from the birth of a “community of practice” which has started and diffused a process of administrative innovation, to the extension of design, management, monitoring and assessment methodologies of public policies also to the ordinary activities of government with a greater aptitude for transparency in procedures, and what is more, to a cultural step forward in citizens’ awareness, which were involved in group discussion. There is, however, a number of crucial issues that limited the full production of such positive effects. A preliminary analysis of the Italian approach to strategic planning already shows some distinctive weaknesses which made plans ineffective.

The first essential point in evaluating Italian experiences is the remark that in almost all of them plan is at the beginning an “entrepreneurial” initiative by an innovator who, only in a second time, makes an effort to aggregate around himself all other political parties and the community. This implies that strategic planning is strongly intertwined with the strength of the policy-maker’s/entrepreneur’s leadership (Pasqui, Armondi, Fedeli, 2010), this making implementation too dependent on the political cycle: the plan tends to enter into crisis or even to fail when their promoters are replaced or end their administrative mandate. This is the case, for instance, for the strategic plan of Copparo Municipalities, which was developed in 2002 on the initiative of the mayor of Copparo and, just two years after as soon as it was approved, was suspended for his resignation (see Florio, 2010); the same happened in Prato, Verona, and in a series of other cities. Ultimately, «the success of strategic plans, in addition to the already mentioned presence of a strong

political leadership, seems to be closely related to their ability to bring up competences and rootedness strategies, i.e. to design an institutionalization flexible enough not to coerce the necessary experimental dimension of these processes, but at the same time strong enough to protect them from the erratic trend of political cycles» (*Ivi*, p. 112). Policy cycle, which is necessarily punctuated and often characterized by a strong instability, and strategic planning cycle, which is more extensive and less defined, only rarely correspond because of their different timeline: this is short or very short for political mandates and for the realization of interventions, and long for strategic plans (10-15 years) (CENSIS, 2006). One of the main cause of the interruptions of Italian projects is therefore the strong personalization of the construction process of strategic plan, which is not the expression of a well-recognized and recognizable territorial subjectivity, but rather of narrower interests. After a promising start-up phase, in fact, some Italian plans got stuck because they are unable to have a significant impact on the entrenched institutional mechanisms and to root the new forms of participation in local government within the community.

Another recurrent weakness in many Italian experiences is the emerging of political-territorial conflicts about contingent intrusion of planning action within the competences of other concerned authorities (Ave Ceccarelli, 2006), namely between the body which was the promoter of the plan, typically a municipality, and other involved municipalities and/or the province. In other words, «the local Italian political system fell back into the same old battles between different interests, and this for a very simple reason: neither the provinces nor the regions, which are the other sub-national levels of government in Italy, had the least interest in seeing a strong level of urban government develop (Jouve and Lefèvre, 1997)» (Jouve, 2005, p. 288). This is the case, for example, in Florence, where competing projects with the plan, concerning the same areas (the one carried out by the Region for a metropolitan area Prato-Firenze-Pistoia and the Pact for Territorial Development by the Province) weaken the effectiveness of the strategic plan (See Florio, 2010), or in Trento, where the plan included neither the municipalities falling within the area of the city, nor an institution such as the Autonomous Province. This type of cooperation, on the other hand, can produce an added value only if it is based on the ability to reproduce «cooperative relations» among local authorities with a certain stability over time (Davoudi *et al.*, 2008). Italian planning experience, especially if it goes beyond the urban area and implies, therefore, in addition to the difficulties of combining different needs co-existing within the same space, even political (agreements between municipalities with different weight and role) and organizational (integration of the government activity of all administrative and management structures) complications, is strongly conditioned by the non clearing of the traditional issues of political representation and the inability to make a solid coalition for local development converge

around the plan. In our interpretation, this is a clue of a lack of coincidence between political subjectivity, which is fragmented in its municipalities, and territorial subjectivity, that policy makers try to make unnaturally coincide though they don't match. The city of Prato and more generally the parochialism of the Tuscan cities are a good example for this, but it is what happened also in Venice, where the political agenda of every single municipality still has a municipal spatial perspective and where the creation of a common feeling of belonging to a wider metropolitan area is still not a reality. In such circumstances, a strong territorial subjectivity would probably ensure a shared and oriented reaction through a proper dialectic among divergent interests which would tend to converge, making lived space the unifying element. A collective subjectivity has, in fact, a territorial nature if it represents local community (subjective condition) and contributes, albeit potentially, to the construction of place (territorializing effect and objective condition). It can then take a political form and thus being the expression of the collective leadership capacity of a local territorial system (Boggio, Memoli, Rossi, 2010). It is ultimately territorial governance that «makes it possible for territories, at different levels [...], to behave and act as “collective actors”». In this context, governance is seen both as the capacity to integrate and shape organisations, social groups and different territorial interests in order to represent them to external actors, and to develop more or less unified (and unifying) strategies» (Davoudi *et al.*, 2008, p. 35). The two levels, however, are not to be confused: political subjectivity of a territory is a different dimension, which usually depends on exogenous factors such as the level of institutional autonomy of the area, while territorial subjectivity is endogenous and results from specific local conditions. The two dimensions seem to be linked by a clear interdependence (Pollice, Urso, 2013). A strong territorial subjectivity can firstly generate and then strengthen more or less structured (on the political level) autonomist movements, which can lead to the recognition of higher levels of independence of the area, increasing its political subjectivity. Similarly, the latter tends to reinforce the pre-existing territorial subjectivity or to foster its development in those places where it was still latent if it represents the whole territory, namely all forces that act and identify themselves in it. Otherwise, deterritorializing processes would trigger, weakening or canceling territorial subjectivity, especially where it is weak or not endowed with a strong performative power. We can make similar critical remarks about the participatory processes put in place during the start-up phase of conception of the plan, which are often unable to entrench over time. Citizen participation is mostly “encoded” and/or “orientated”, being a moment of preliminary mediation between the community and the project which is not followed in practice by its effective inclusion in political decisions, this resulting in a de-legitimization of the plan that doesn't reflect the common sentiment of the whole society in its priorities. In Trento, this

was a political choice since some promoters believed that a plan necessarily implies some skills and languages that are a structured interlocutors' prerogative (see Florio, 2010).

In light of the above, an evaluation of Italian strategic planning based on the analysis of the introduction of innovative elements and breaking points in territorial governance shows its limits in significantly changing policy practices, revealing a certain resistance to change, or even a real inertia, of institutions. This obviously depends on several factors, which are specific to each context but in this case seem to be ascribable to a single cause, namely a low level of territorial subjectivity in the areas proposing the plan. This is demonstrated by the great difficulty in reaching a widely shared vision, by the inability to overcome parochial, narrow interests, by the failure of the mechanisms of active involvement of local community, this showing a low level of social capital.

The relevance of these assumptions for the success of these governance experiments seems to be confirmed by a more accurate analysis of the Italian approach to strategic planning. If, on the one hand, there are few large cities that have quite successfully adopted a plan (these are the well-known examples of Turin, Venice and Florence) against some important cases such as Milan, Rome, Genoa and Bologna which have still not really tried to confront themselves with the application of the latest planning tools, most positive outcomes, in terms of both dissemination and quality, have been achieved by medium-sized cities in central-northern Italy, which proved to be more able to manage the urban transition from well established development models to a completely new one and which signed a memorandum of understanding (La Spezia, Pesaro, Perugia, Trento) to reflect on their role, by creating the Strategic Cities Network. They are mostly contexts characterized by strong territorial identities (Dente, 2010) which, by guiding collective action and relying on a shared value system, are likely to have facilitated the convergence on a common vision of the future of the city. The most successful cases occurred where local authorities had already experienced the evolution from government to governance (Painter, Goodwin, 1995; Pierre, 1999; 2000; Peters, 2000; Le Galès, 2002; Jouve, 2005; Davoudi *et al.*, 2008), that is «from a direct and exclusive implementation of local government functions to the method of coordination and shared planning among several public and private actors» (Gioioso, 2006, p. 13). This is the case in Perugia, one of the first cities to promote, already in the '60s, the establishment of joint-stock companies with public-private partnerships for the management of local services and, most recently, an Agenda 21 including a series of municipalities, and in Turin also, where mixed public-private agencies were active long before the plan, as well as in Florence and in the municipalities of Copparo. More frequently, however, within partnerships involving private sector, «we [...] see the multiplication of ad hoc organisations that are

created to manage large-scale infrastructure and urban development projects. 'This is, for example, the case in Naples where Bagnoli Futura is in charge of the urban renewal of an important part of the downtown» (Jouve, 2005, p. 292). The close correlation observed between institutions' ability of adopting managerial criteria in urban governance (Granados Cabezas, 1995; Albrechts, 2004) – among other things, involvement of both public and private actors and overcoming of administrative boundaries for the resolution of collective problems – and their propensity to promote strategic plans foreshadow the existence of path-dependence phenomena (see above, García, 2006, p. 762). These are most easily observable in the framework of institutional change which is more naturally accomplished through continuous, incremental changes rather than through sudden and radical innovations. The non-development of any form of territorial subjectivity in particular spatial contexts would be interpreted as the effect of a kind of «territorial impedance» (Pollice, 2012), a concept that refers to the theory of path dependency and then to all (tangible and intangible) local conditions impeding change. These are the outcome of the history of place; they are those factors, which are accumulated in the local *milieu* and introjected by the community, influencing and constraining individual and collective action. The planning experience in the South of Italy supports this argument. As mentioned, in this region, which is characterized by significant weaknesses and crisis in many areas, the national government tried to stimulate institutional inertia through public incentives that partially misled the spontaneous mechanism of adoption of a strategic approach. The experience of Barletta, where the plan has been reinterpreted as a device for the implementation of regional policies and, therefore, inserted in regional programming, shows how a top-down institutionalization can limit the potential for learning which is a distinctive feature of the new governance without even increasing the efficiency of public action (see Pasqui, 2001).

A first distortion we can find in southern Italy is that the implementation of the plan becomes a goal with an end in itself (Camagni, 2010), a means to access external funding, which thus didn't make the path of maturation and awareness that goes from the recognition of its value and its usefulness to the consensus creation around it and to the identification of shared objectives. The opportunity then to access European funding to finance projects compromised normal partnership mechanisms that are instead likely to strengthen territorial subjectivity and its ability to guide collective action. If, on the one hand, this facilitated the establishment of partnerships (by virtue of the benefit derived from each actor participating in the project), on the other hand, this was not informed by a logic of overall consistency of the vision, but was subjected to that of the competition in funding access in «a kind of zero-sum game in which the

problem for each partner is like attracting existing resources rather than realizing a good planning, strong integration and synergies among projects» (*Ivi*, p. 206).

After the end of public financing, the planning process slows down or even stops because necessary funds for the progression of the project have now to be found within the local system, the creative tension decreases and, above all, motivation to action runs out since, evidently, it was not linked to a collective interest for local development. External financing and an inconsistent, distorted presence of private actors in the “artificial” planning implementations in the South of Italy led to actors’ low responsibility, nullifying the basic idea of strategic planning according to which «all subjects from local society must become creators and key players of the development of their territory and feel responsible for achieving expected results» (Gastaldi, 2003, p. 126). Two peculiarities found in southern Italian cities best show this aspect: the inconsistency of projects, which seem apparently based on place specificity, but don’t really have any concrete reference to the local context (Governa, Pasqui, 2007), and the realization of a “dream book” with plenty of unlikely feasible actions which don’t respect eligibility criteria for funding, i.e. projects pragmatism and sustainability, and are instead characterized by a marked non-affordability (Camagni, 2010). As for the first aspect, a significant example is Naples, where, quite paradoxically, in a metropolitan area with high density, extensive urbanization, population growth, the plan foresees an «urban densification» (Frallicciardi, Delle Donne, Palmentieri, 2010, p. 180). The case of Bari clearly shows the strong disconnect between reality and urban visioning, with little attention to the consistency of planned activities: «the Plan [...] is excessively complex from a strictly programming perspective, with actions which are not always consistent and coordinated and, most importantly, with little attention to the various problems affecting the metropolitan area; these issues, if not properly faced and solved, are likely to undermine the whole planning action. What is emblematic in this sense is the distance between what the city aspires to become and what it actually is» (Pollice, Zacheo, 2010, p. 122).

Conclusions. More than any other model of urban/place governance, strategic planning seems to be effective only if it responds to a territorial interest, which is then locally built and shared. In other words, identification of the vision and planning actions related to it (voluntary moment) have a territorial effect if they imply the actual involvement of a broad group of stakeholders representing diverse interests. The future of a city, as any other local context, cannot in fact be redesigned disregarding the local *milieu* and the specific factors that led its development; this could compromise the whole planning process and produce

detritorializing effects on the concerned geographic area. Italian experimentation of strategic planning, though multiple, different as for forms and outcomes, in many cases shows the incomplete maturation of local authorities in the field of institutional innovation, which is a crucial prerequisite for the adoption and proper implementation of these models of governance; the absence of a strong relational capital which, after its formation during the enthusiastic construction and sharing of the vision is capable of accumulating within the community, strengthening its ties during the subsequent phases of the project; a weak or absent territorial subjectivity, which seldom expresses the plural interests and multiple expectations of local community.

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