

Strategic Spatial Planning Revisited Experiences from Europe

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1. Introduction: setting the planning context

Europe is finding itself confronted with major developments and challenges: the growing complexity of global issues (rise of new technologies, changes in production processes, crisis of representative democracy, diversity, inequality, migration and the globalization of culture and the economy), increasing concern about the rapid and apparently random course of (uneven) development, the problems of fragmentation, the rising cost of energy, the ageing of the population, the increasing awareness (on all scales, from local to global) of environmental issues (climate change...), the longstanding quest for better coordination (both horizontal and vertical), and the re-emphasis on the need for long-term thinking (Albrechts, 2001; 2004; 2006). Moreover, the need felt by many governments to adopt a more entrepreneurial style of planning in order to enhance regional, city-region and city competitiveness, the growing awareness that a number of planning concepts (learning regions, knowledge communities, industrial districts, compact cities, liveable cities, sustainable cities, creative cities, multi-cultural cities, fair cities) cannot be achieved solely through physical hard planning and the fact that (in addition to traditional land use regulation, urban maintenance, production and management of services) governments are being called upon to respond to new demands. These developments and challenges imply the abandonment of bureaucratic approaches and the involvement of skills and resources that are external to the traditional administrative apparatus. They all serve to expand the planning agenda.

We may consider four different types of reaction to these developments and challenges: reactive (the rear-view mirror), inactive (going with the flow), pre-active (preparing for the future) and proactive (designing the future and making it happen) (see Ackoff, 1981). There is ample evidence that the problems and challenges that regions, city-regions and cities are confronted with cannot be tackled and managed neither adequately with a neo-conservative perspective nor with the intellectual, technical-legal apparatus and mind-set of traditional land-use planning.

My thesis is that only the proactive reaction is appropriate as it calls for the transformative practices that are needed to cope with the continuing and unabated pace of change driven by the (structural) developments and challenges. Transformative practices focus on the structural problems in society; they construct images/visions of a preferred outcome and how to implement them (see Friedmann, 1987). So a shift is needed from a more regulative, bureaucratic approach towards a more strategic, implementation-led and development-led approach. My focus on transformative practices does not

imply that day-to-day problems are not important for me. They are important! But there is evidence that, for whatever reasons, spatial planners are often left out (or leave themselves out) or are reduced to mere providers of space when major decisions are at stake.

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on some selected European experiences recognizing that its approaches, visions, purposes are diverse and inevitably strongly related to specific local contexts (see also Albrechts and al., 2003, Sartorio, 2005; Balducci, 2008). The paper reexamines strategic (spatial) planning by highlighting differences with traditional land use planning. It aims to add a new dimension in terms of values, approach and process by introducing a 'new' strategic spatial planning. It reflects on the type of governance needed to back up this 'new' strategic planning. It introduces projects as a key to a more implementation oriented planning. Finally it reflects on lessons that could be drawn from European experiences. All this is done by combining theory with analysis of cases and with (my own) practical experience.

1. Land use planning

Aims

Land use planning is basically concerned -in an integrated and qualitative way - with the location, intensity, form, amount and harmonization of land development required for the various space-using functions: housing, industry, recreation, transport, education, nature, agriculture, cultural activities (see also Chapin, 1965; Cullingworth, 1972). In this way a land use plan embodies a proposal as to how land should be used – in accordance with a considered policy – as expansion and restructuring proceed in the future.

A classification of EU land use planning systems

The emergence of land use planning systems across Europe has some common roots. In many EU member states the first planning legislation was produced early 20th Century as a response to an increasing development pressure and the consequent problems that arose from dense and disorganized development. Cultural, institutional, legal differences but also the specificity of the purposes for which formal spatial planning systems were originally introduced, produced a wide variety of planning systems and traditions in the EU.

The EU Compendium of Planning Systems and Policies (CEC, 1997) draws a line between strategic planning at the regional/national level and land use planning at the level of the municipality and the functional urban region. Recent practice (Healey et al., 1997; Pascual & Esteve, 1997; Salet & Faludi, 2000; Albrechts et al., 2001; Pugliese & Spaziante, 2003; Albrechts et al., 2003; Salet, Thornley & Kreukels, 2003; Martinelli, 2005; Healey, 2007) however illustrates that a lot of strategic planning is going on at the level of the city and the urban region.

Land use planning at EU level¹ clearly focuses on the municipality or functional urban region (mainly Greece, France, Italy, and Sweden) with framework (master plan) instruments and on specific areas within the municipality with regulatory instruments. The framework plans cover at least the whole of the area of the local authority and set out the broad land use and infrastructure patterns across the area through zoning or land allocation maps. The regulatory plan covers the whole or part of the local authority's area and indicates detailed site specific zonings for building, land use and infrastructure. EU Member States, except the UK and the Republic of Ireland, use detailed planning instruments (regulatory zoning instruments, building control instruments and implementation instruments) which play a determining role in guiding the location of development and physical infrastructure, the form and size development takes.

The framework plans and the regulatory plans are mostly legally binding documents - with implied legal certainty and rigidity- once approved (major exception is the UK); they are generally of no fixed duration and can only be replaced by new plans.

A key distinction relates to the extent to which a system is binding or discretionary (see CEC, 1997). In a binding system the relationship between policy and control is expected to be determined through a binding detailed land use plan. Effects are compared with intentions like a blueprint for a house. This is the 'conformance view' (Barrett & Fudge, 1981). In a discretionary system each decision is subject to administrative and political discretion with the plan providing general guidance. This relates to the 'performance view' (see Mastop & Faludi, 1997). The UK is the primary example of a discretionary system. Where in the former system the focus is on legal certainty there is a notable absence of certainty in the latter system.

Local governments are generally responsible for the production of these plans and for most EU countries (Greece is an exception) the responsibility for approval is also delegated to this level. Sometimes the local plans have to be formally approved by another tier (regional or central) of government.

Consultation with other tiers of government, administrations and official agencies are everywhere an essential part of the daily routine in plan-making. There is also a general commitment to consultation with the public (in the broadest sense). The method and depth of public involvement varies considerably. The Scandinavian countries have a long standing tradition, for others it remains very formal and restricted (Greece, Italy, Portugal).

Criticism on traditional land use planning

¹ The major research project I rely upon was carried out in the 1990's and deals with planning in 15 EU countries. It does not take into account the enlargements on May 1st 2004 (10 countries) and 2007 (additional 2 countries).

Traditional land use planning, as more passive, pragmatic and localized planning, aims at controlling land use through a zoning system. Land use regulation, which in Europe has been typically plan-led (Davies et al., 1989), helps to steer developments in a certain direction. Indeed building permits are granted (or refused) if a project or development proposal is in line (or not) with the approved land use plan and regulations. In this way the land use plan controls that undesirable developments do not occur but it is not able to ensure that desirable developments actually take place where and when they are needed. Cullingworth (1993) contrasts this European tradition with US local zoning systems, which are driven by concern for the specification of land rights rather than for managing the location of development (see also Healey, 1997a).

The approach to planning via a single policy field (i.e. spatial planning) met fierce opposition from other and usually more powerful policy fields. Although land use plans had formal status and served as official guidelines for implementation, when it came down to the actual implementation, other policy fields – which, because of their budgetary and technical resources, were needed for the implementation – were easily able to sabotage the spatial plans if they wanted (Scharpf & Schnabel, 1978; Kreukels, 2000). Moreover it became increasingly clear that a number of different planning concepts – such as the coherent, convenient and compact city long advocated by planners – cannot be achieved solely through physical hard planning (see Hart, 1976).

A major emphasis on the legal binding nature of most EU land use plans provides legal certainty but makes the plans far more rigid and inflexible and less responsive to changing circumstances. The mainly comprehensive nature of land use plans is at odds with increasingly limited resources. Moreover most land use plans have a predominant focus on ‘physical’ aspects, providing ‘physical’ solutions to social-economic problems. In this way they often abstract from real historically determinate parameters of human activity and gratuitously assume the existence of transcendent operational norms. Co-production of plans with the major stakeholders and the involvement of ‘weak’ groups in the land use planning process are (with the exception of some experiments such as in Finland) non-existent. The whole apparatus of adverse bargaining, negotiation, compromise and deadlock, which normally surround the planning process, must be questioned.

In all EU systems there is evidence (CEC, 1997) to suggest that systems should become more open, less prescriptive in determining precise land uses in favour of a more flexible system to respond more quickly and adequately to changing social and economic circumstances and to the agenda of government reorganization.

Traditional and positivist views of planning

Traditional spatial planning is basically concerned with the location, intensity, form, amount, and harmonization of land development required for the various space-using functions (see Chapin, 1965; Cullingworth, 1972; CEC, 1997). In a number of Western countries spatial planning evolved in the

1960s and 1970s towards a system of comprehensive planning – the integration of nearly everything (see Perloff, 1989) – at different administrative levels. In the 1980s, when the neo-liberal paradigm replaced the Keynesian-Fordist paradigm and when public intervention retrenched in all domains (Martinelli, 2005), Europe witnessed a retreat from planning fuelled not only by the neo-conservative disdain for planning, but also by postmodernist skepticism, both of which tend to view progress as something which, if it happens, cannot be planned (Healey, 1997b). Accordingly, the focus of urban and regional planning practices shifted to projects (Secchi, 1986; Motte, 1994; Rodriguez & Martinez, 2003), especially involving the revival of rundown sections of cities and regions, and to the development of land use regulations.

A traditional positivist view of planning assumes that the one best future follows automatically if the analytical and forecasting techniques are rigorously applied. The same reasoning made modernist planners believe that the future could be predicted and controlled (see Ogilvy, 2002).

There is ample evidence, however, that the problems and challenges that places are confronted with cannot be tackled and managed adequately with this intellectual apparatus and mind-set of traditional planning. Consequently, we have to reflect creatively and innovatively on the approaches (both in terms of process and substance), the concepts and the techniques that we use and the logics we apply in tackling these problems and challenges. We have to think afresh and, as it were, reinvent our places in order to secure a better future and to improve the quality of life for all citizens. Therefore, planning must involve a creative effort to imagine (structurally) different futures, and to bring this creative imagination to bear on political decisions and the implementation of these decisions. The challenge is to find a systematic approach that provides a critical interpretation of existing reality and that thinks creatively about possible futures and how to get there.

2. Strategic planning

Historical roots

The word 'strategy' originated within a military context (see Sun Tzu,). 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. The current paper is not about the military sense of strategy.

According to Kaufman and Jacobs (1987), the roots of strategic planning in the private sector (in the 1950s) were tied to the need for rapidly changing and growing corporations to plan effectively for and manage their futures when the future itself seemed to be increasingly uncertain (that is, strategic planning carried out by an organization for its own activities). In the early 1970s, government leaders in the USA became increasingly interested in strategic planning as a result of wrenching changes oil crisis, demographic shifts, changing values, volatile economy, etc. (Eadie, 1983; cited in Bryson and Roering, 1988; 995). In the early 1980s, a series of articles in the USA called on state and local

governments to use the strategic planning approach developed in the corporate world (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1987).

For Mastop (1998), the first traces of strategic spatial planning in North-western Europe date back to the 1920s and 1930s. He links strategic spatial planning closely to the idea of the modern nation-state. Strategic planning is used here to direct the activities of others (different authorities, different sectors, private actors). The differences in origin and tradition between US and European traditions reflect the historical 'statist' traditions of many post-war European states, which are linked to a battery of welfare state policies (Batley and Stoker, 1991; Esping-Anderson, 1990; cited by Healey, 1997a).

Revival of Strategic Spatial Planning

From the 1980's onwards, the introduction of strategic planning happened across all the very different traditions of planning in Europe. The motivations for constructing a 'new' type of strategic spatial planning vary, but the objectives have typically been: to construct challenging, coherent and coordinated visions, to frame an integrated long-term spatial logic (for land use regulation, for resource protection, for sustainable development, for spatial quality...), to enhance action-orientation beyond the idea of planning as control and for a more open multi-level type of governance. Barcelona started a strategic planning process in 1988 to enhance the cooperation between the public and private sector in order to strengthen the position of the city as a candidate for the Olympic Games (see Garcia, 2003). Turin, inspired by Barcelona, started a strategic planning process in the mid-1990's, which formed the basis for rethinking the potential of a former 'one-company town' that had been hit by the crisis in the automobile industry (Ave, 2005). The aim was to transform Turin into a European Metropolis: a city of activities and know-how. For Bilbao the purpose was to transform the city into the economic, financial and cultural capital of Atlantic Arc. For Prague the focus was on integrating the city into European structures.

In many European practices strategic planning seems to become a mere economic development tool very often initiated by departments other than spatial planning. Bringing in economic, social and cultural dimensions, as such, is very positive but it may not happen at the expense of the spatial dimension.

As in 'traditional' planning there are different types of strategic spatial planning in Europe. In this paper I focus on what I call 'new' strategic spatial planning. New strategic spatial planning provides a critical interpretation of the structural challenges and problems and thinks creatively about possible answers and how to get there. I deal with new strategic planning by elaborating three interrelated components: a *what*, a *how* and a *why* (see also Healey, 1997; Albrechts, 2001; 2004; 2006; Albrechts et al, 2001, Albrechts et al, 2003; Motte, 2006; Healey, 2007).

New' Strategic Spatial Planning

What?

'New' strategic spatial planning is a transformative and integrative, public sector led socio-spatial process through which visions/frames of reference, justification for coherent actions and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and what it might become (Albrechts, 2001; 2004; 2006; Motte, 2006). The term 'spatial' brings into focus the 'where of things', whether static or dynamic; the creation and management of special 'places' and sites; the interrelations between different activities and networks in an area; and significant intersections and nodes in an area which are physically co-located (Healey, 2004b: 46). Cities, city-regions and regions possess a distinctive spatiality as agglomerations of heterogeneity locked into a multitude of relational networks of varying geographical reach (Amin, 2004:43; see also the practices in most European strategic plans). Strategic spatial planning processes with an appreciation of 'relational complexity' demand a capacity to 'hear', 'see', 'feel' and 'read' the multiple dynamics of a place in a way that can identify just those key issues that require collective attention through a focus on place qualities (see Healey, 2005;2006). As a consequence strategic spatial planning evolves continuously in formulation (see Healey, 2007). The focus on the spatial relations of territories allows for a more effective way of integrating different agendas (economic, environmental, cultural, social and policy agendas). As these agendas have a variable reach they also carry a potential for a 'rescaling' of issue agendas down from the national or state level and up from the municipal level. The search for new scales of policy articulation and new policy concepts is also linked to attempts to widen the range of actors involved in policy processes, with new alliances, actor partnerships and consultative processes (Healey et al, 1997; Albrechts et al, 2001; Albrechts, Healey et al, 2003). Moreover, a territorial focus seems to provide a promising basis for encouraging levels of government to work together (multi-level governance) and in partnership with actors in diverse positions in the economy and civil society (Albrechts, 1999; Furst, 2001; Kunzmann, 2001).

How?

'New' strategic spatial planning focuses on a limited number of strategic key issues; it takes a 'collective' critical view of the environment in terms of determining strengths and weaknesses in the context of opportunities and threats. Strategic spatial planning focuses on place-specific qualities and assets (social, cultural, intellectual, qualities of the urban/regional tissue -physical and social-) in a global context. It is indeed impossible to understand material places and social nodes as 'the city', 'the city-region' 'the region' positioned in a one-dimensional hierarchy of scales (Healey, 2007: 267). What territory do we have to consider in order to tackle issues at an adequate scale (see also Balducci, 2008)? Strategic spatial planning studies the external trends, forces and resources available. Strategic

spatial planning identifies and gathers major actors (public and private). One can find a very wide variety of actors in European strategic planning: city-, regional-, national governments, sector departments, agencies, banks, universities, chambers of commerce, trade unions, associations of entrepreneurs, cultural organizations, civic associations, consumer organizations etc.. Strategic planning allows for a broad (multi-level governance) and diverse (public, economic, civil society) involvement during the planning-, decision-making and implementation processes, it creates solid, workable long-term visions/frames of reference (a geography of the unknown) and strategies at different levels, taking into account the power structures (political, economic, gender, cultural), uncertainties and competing values. Strategic spatial planning designs plan-making structures and develops content, images and decision frameworks for influencing and managing spatial change. It provides a frame of reference that gives direction and justifies specific action. It is about building new ideas and processes that can carry them forward, thus generating ways of understanding, ways of building agreements, and ways of organizing and mobilizing for the purpose of exerting influence in different arenas. Finally, strategic spatial planning, both in the short and the long term, focuses on results and implementation by framing decisions, actions, projects, and it incorporates monitoring, evaluation, feedback, adjustment and revision.

Why?

The why question deals with values and meanings, with 'what ought to be'. Without the normative, we risk adopting a pernicious relativism where anything goes (see Ogilvy, 2002). In a conscious, purposive, contextual, creative and continuous process new strategic planning, aims to enable a transformative shift, where necessary, to develop openness to new ideas, and to understand and accept the need and opportunity for change. Values and images are not generated in isolation but are socially constructed and given meaning and validated by the traditions of belief and practice; they are reviewed, reconstructed and invented through collective experience (see Ozbekhan, 1969, but also Foucault, 1980:11; Hillier, 1999 and Elchardus et al., 2000: 24).

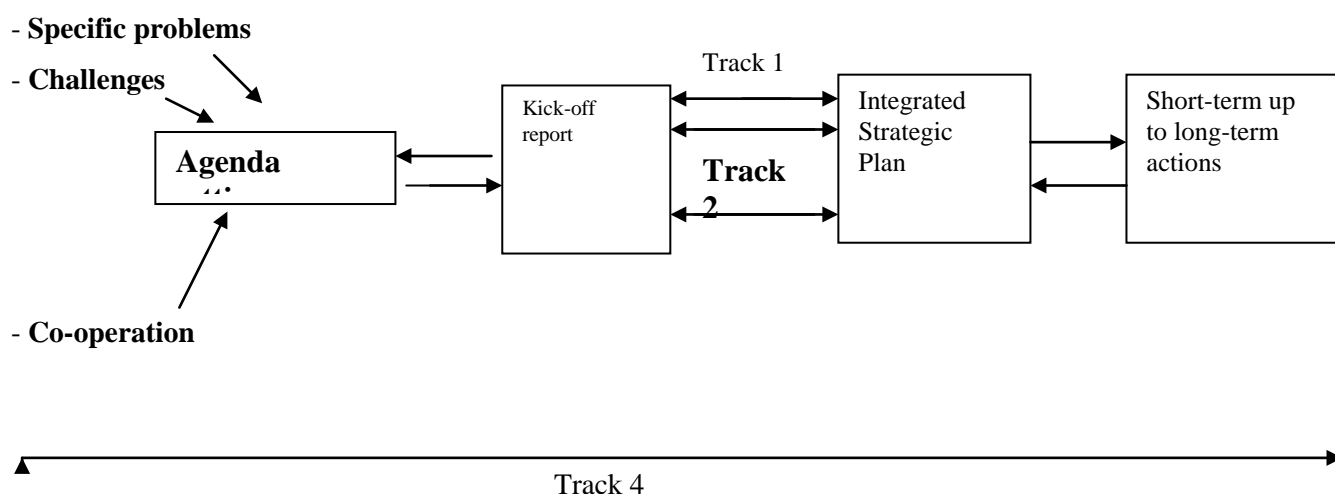
Transformative practices oppose a blind operation of the market forces and involve constructing 'desired' answers to the structural problems of our society. Normativity indicates the relations with place-specific values, desires, wishes or needs for the future that transcend mere feasibility and that results from judgments and choices formed, in the first place, with reference to the idea of 'desirability', to the idea of 'betterment' (Ozbekhan, 1969) and to the practice of the good society (Friedmann, 1982). To will particular future states is an act of choice involving valuation, judgment and the making of decisions that relates to human-determined ends and to the selection of the most appropriate means for coping with such ends. This is contrary to futures as extensions of the here and now. 'Futures' must symbolize some good, some qualities and some virtues that the present lacks (diversity, sustainability, equity, spatial quality, inclusiveness, accountability). Speaking of

sustainability, spatial quality, virtues and values is a way of describing the sort of place we want to live in, or think we should live in.

Four Track Approach

The ‘new’ strategic (spatial) planning approach is operationalized in a four-track approach. The four tracks -see fig. 1- (Albrechts et al, 1999; see also Van den Broeck, 1987 for the three track approach) can be seen as working tracks: one for the vision, one for the short-term and long-term actions, a third for the involvement of the key actors and, finally, a fourth track for a more permanent process (mainly at the local level) involving the broader public in major decisions. The proposed tracks may not be viewed in a purely linear way.

Figure 1. Possible macro-structure for the overall strategic planning process.



The context forms the setting of the planning process but also takes form and undergoes changes in the process -see fig. 2- (see also Dyrberg, 1997). The four track approach emphasizes transformation and action. It opens up multiple potentialities immanent in space (see Hillier, 2005). However, not every potentiality can be actualized. The selection of strategic issues, the construction of visions, decisions on specific actions are done within a context of structural constraints.

The four track approach is based on interrelating four types of rationality (see fig. 2): value rationality (the design of alternative futures), communicative rationality (involving a growing number of actors – private and public– in the process), instrumental rationality (looking for the best way to solve the problems and achieve the desired future) and strategic rationality (a clear and explicit strategy for dealing with power relationships) (see Albrechts, 2003a).

In the first track, the emphasis is on long-term visions. In this sense, the long term constitutes the time span one needs to construct/realize the vision. The envisioning process translates complex interrelations between place qualities and multiple space-time relational dynamics into multiplex, relational spatial imaginations (see also Healey, 2006). The vision (the product of envisioning) is constructed in relation to the social values to which particular places are historically committed (see Ozbekhan, 1969). By introducing envisioning, 'new' strategic planning transcends mere contingency planning.

In track 2, the focus is on solving problems through short-term actions. It concerns acting in such a way as to frame the future according to the visions constructed in track 1 and to tackle problems in view of these visions. Tackling concrete problems during the planning process is a means to create trust between the actors.

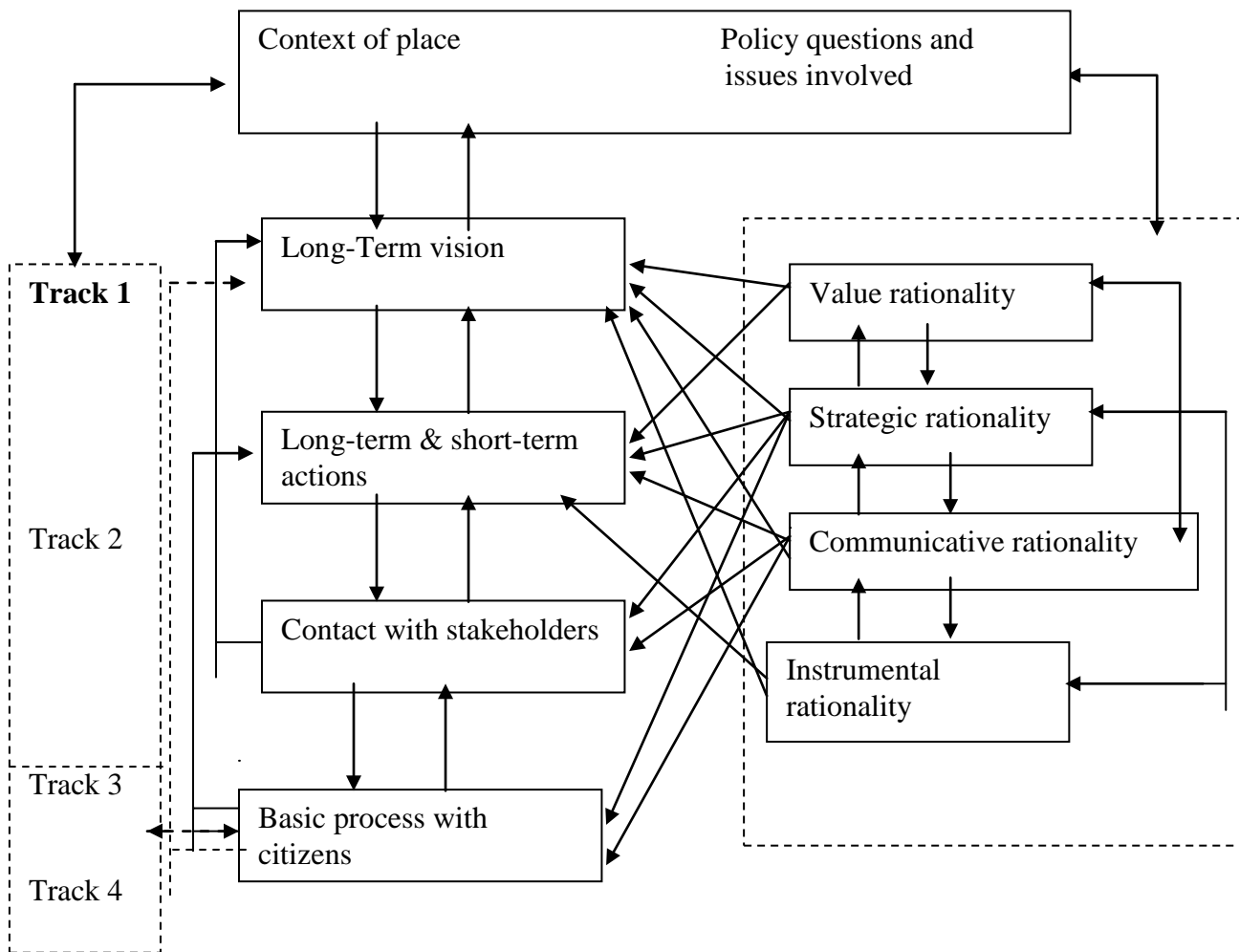
Spatial planning has almost no potential for concretizing strategies. Both the technical skills and the power to allocate sufficient means to implement proposed actions are usually spread over a number of diverse sectors, actors, policy levels and departments. Integration in its three dimensions – substantive, organizational and instrumental (legal, budget) – is at stake here. So track 3 involves relevant actors that are needed for their substantive contribution, their procedural competences and the role they might play in acceptance, in getting basic support and in providing legitimacy. This stresses the need to find effective connections between political authorities and implementation actors (officers, individual citizens, community organizations, private corporations and public departments) (see Hillier, 2002; Albrechts, 2003b).

The fourth track is about an inclusive and more permanent empowerment process (Forester, 1989; Friedmann, 1992) involving citizens in major decisions. In this process, citizens learn about one another and about different points of view, and they come to reflect on their own points of view. In this way a store of mutual understanding can be built up, sorts of 'social and intellectual capital' (see Innes, 1996; but see also the more critical view of Mayer, 2003). To make formal decision-making and implementation more responsive to the context and to the agreements reached during the plan-making process, the four-track approach invites politicians, citizens, sector experts and the arenas in which they meet to be active from start to finish in the entire process, including the agenda setting, the design of plans, the political ratification and the practical implementation (see also Flyvbjerg, 2002). In this way, the arenas are used not as locations devoid of power, but rather as vehicles that acknowledge and account for the working of power and for the passionate commitment of planners and other actors who care deeply about the issues at hand (Flyvbjerg, 2002) The proposed four-track approach cannot change the power relations, but I am confident (see also Forester, 1989; Sager, 1994; Innes et al., 1994; Healey, 1997a) that empowerment, as developed in track 4, supports wider, collective efforts to change such relations (see European experiences Pascual & Esteve, 1997; Albrechts, 1999; Garcia, 2003; Pugliese & Spaziante, 2003; .Martinelli, 2005; Motte, 2006; Healey, 2007; Balducci, 2008).

The end product may consist of a critical analysis of the main processes and structural constraints shaping our places, which amounts to a realistic, dynamic, integrated and indicative long-term vision (frame), a plan for short-term and long-term actions, a budget, and a flexible strategy for implementation. It constitutes a commitment or (partial) (dis)agreement between the key actors. For the implementation, credible commitments to action engagement (commitment package), and a clear and explicit link to the budget are needed where citizens, the private sector, different levels of governance and planners enter moral, administrative and financial agreements to realize these actions (collective spatial agreement).

Strategic spatial planning is not a single concept, procedure or tool. In fact, it 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 (see also Zeng, 2007). The voluntary character of most European experiences seems to act as a structural antidote against marked standardization (see Sartorio, 2005; Balducci, 2008).

Figure 2. Four-track approach with tentative integration of different concepts of rationality



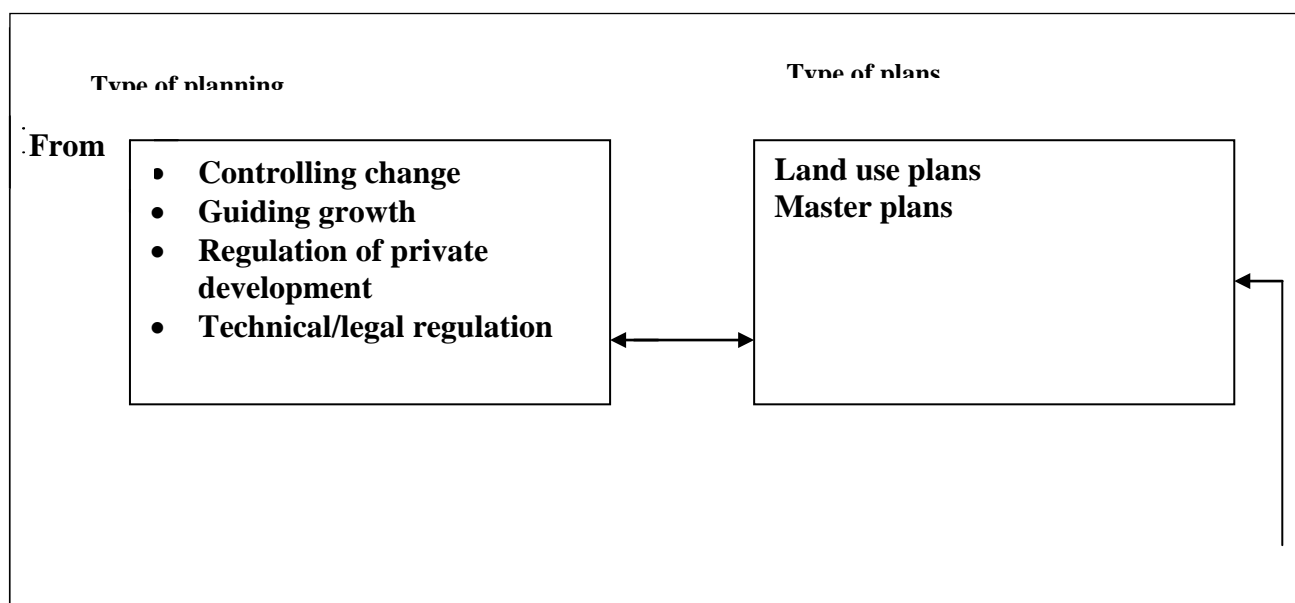
Strategic spatial planning is as much about process, institutional design and mobilization as it is about the development of substantive theories. Content relates to the strategic issues selected in the process. The capacity of a strategic spatial planning system to deliver the desired outcomes is dependent not only on the system itself, but also on the conditions underlying it. These conditions – including structural constraints, as well as political, cultural and professional attitudes towards spatial planning (in terms of planning content and process) and the political will on the part of the institutions involved in setting the process in motion and to keep it going– affect the ability of planning systems to implement the chosen strategies.

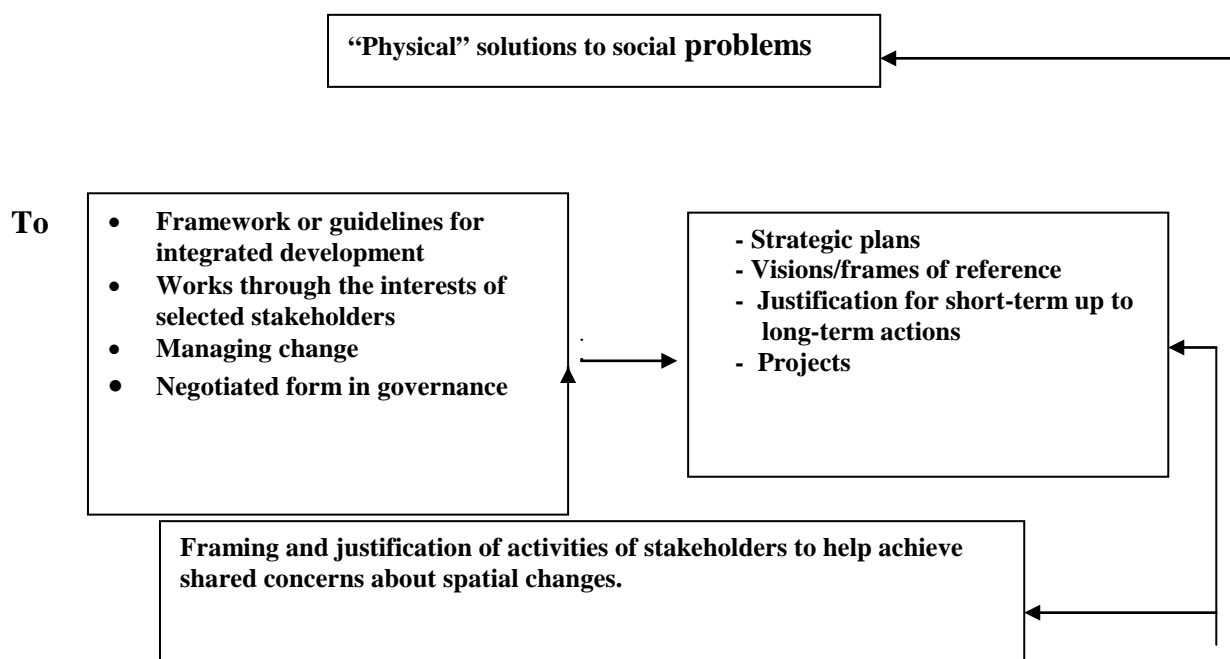
Strategic planning is selective and oriented to issues that really matter. Strategic spatial planning is not just a contingent response to wider forces, but is also an active force in enabling change. This strategic planning cannot be theorized as though its approaches and practices were neutral with respect to class, gender, age, race and ethnicity (Sandercock, 1998; Albrechts, 2002).

Strategic planning does not flow smoothly from one phase to the next. It is a dynamic and creative process. New points of view and facts that become known today might very well alter certain decisions made yesterday.

This 'new' strategic spatial planning is presented not as a new ideology preaching a new world order but as a method for creating and steering a (range of) better future(s) for a place based on shared values (see also Ogilvy, 2002). Its normative viewpoint produces quite a different picture than traditional planning in terms of plans (strategic plans versus master plans or land use plans), type of planning (providing a framework and a justification for specific actions versus technical/legal regulation), type of governance (government-led versus government-led but negotiated form of governance) and content (vision and concrete actions that accept the full complexity of a place while focusing on local assets and networks in a global context, social-spatial quality, a fair distribution of the joys and burdens). Figure 3 pictures a shift from traditional land-use planning to strategic planning. The normative point of view may seem to some people (see Mintzberg, 1994) too broad a view of strategic spatial planning. However, the many European experiences documented in the planning literature (Healey et al, 1997; Pasqual & Esteve, 1997; Albrechts et al, 2001; Albrechts et al, 2003; Pugliese & Spaziante, 2003; Martinelli, 2005; Healey, 2007) back up this broader view.

Figure 3. From traditional land use planning to strategic planning





3. Embedding transformative practices into strategic spatial planning

Transformative practices simply refuse to accept that the current way of doing things is necessarily the best way; they break free from concepts, structures and ideas that only persist because of the process of continuity. It is precisely the discontinuity that forces us outside the usual boundaries of 'reasonableness' (see de Bono, 1992).

Transformative practices focus on new concepts and new ways of thinking that change the way resources are used, (re)distributed and allocated, and the way the regulatory powers are exercised. They mobilize all necessary resources, they develop the power to 'travel' and 'translate' into an array of practice arenas, and they transform these arenas, rather than merely being absorbed within them. Those concepts and ways of thinking that accumulate sufficient power to become routinized may then 'sediment' down into the cultural ground, which sustains ongoing processes and feeds into new strategic spatial processes (Hajer, 1995; Albrechts & Liévois, 2004; Healey, 2005: 147-148; Healey, 2006: 532). Transformative change rarely occurs in instant revolutions. Changes evolve in many small

ways, building a ground of understanding and experiences which, over time, eventually come together in what history may then describe as ‘a transformative moment’ (Healey, 2005: 158; Healey, 2006,; 541).

The spectrum for transformative practices cannot be so open that anything is possible, as if we could achieve anything we wanted to achieve (see Ozbekhan, 1969; Berger, 1964; Ogilvy, 2002). Conditions and structural constraints on ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’ possible are placed by the past and the present. These conditions and constraints have to be questioned and challenged in the process, given the specific context of place and time. So, in order to imagine the conditions and constraints differently, we need to deal with history and to overcome history. This defines the boundaries of a fairly large space between openness and fixity. Thus transformative practices become the activity whereby (within certain boundaries) that which can be *willed* is ‘imposed’ on that which *is*, and it is ‘imposed’¹² for the purpose of changing what *is* into what is *willed*. It differs from the established or traditional way of thinking, in which there is no choice and we are not even aware of other possibilities. The normative approach invents, or creates, practices – in relation to the context, the social and cultural values to which a particular place/society is historically committed – as something new rather than as a solution arrived at as a result of existing trends. It is only by working backwards (‘reverse thinking’, ‘back casting’) that we are able to open up and use other directions.

Change is the sum of a great number of acts (individual, group, institutional) of re-perception and behavior change at every level. This takes decision-makers, planners, institutions and citizens out of their comfort zones and compels them to confront the key beliefs, to challenge conventional wisdom, and to look at the prospects of ‘breaking-out-of-the-box’. Not every one (individual planners, groups, institutions, citizens) wants to give up power associated with the status quo. The creative challenge should balance freedom and discipline, unite all stakeholders behind the creative effort, and evince empathy for the difficulties of the creative process.

Planning needs a fine-grained analysis of what actually takes place in formal decision-making and implementation, in the transition from plan to formal adoption of the plan and in its actual implementation, as opposed to what they normatively would like to see happen (see Friedmann, 1998). Research by Flyvbjerg (1998) makes it clear that critical analysis of cases is needed to discover the ‘whys and wherefores’ of how elected representatives or preferential actors change the plan and why and how executive officers depart from the formally approved plan.

Focus on structural problems/issues

² Although ‘imposed’ may refer to a top down jargon, I use the term very deliberately. As soon as directions based on an emancipatory practice are agreed upon, they must be imposed for action.

Transformative practices involve choice, valuation, judgment, decisions that relate to human-determined ends and to the selection of the most appropriate means for coping with and implementing such ends. This is contrary to practices as extensions of the here and now. Transformative practices must be imagined as differing radically and structurally from the present reality. Transformative practices result from judgments and choices formed with reference to the ideas of desirability and betterment. For spatial planners both sustainable development and spatial quality (both in broad sense) provide lenses through which we can provide substance to desirability, the good society and betterment. These are potentially rich concepts that may help to drive policy integration of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural objectives in their spatial manifestation. Our concepts of sustainable development and spatial quality imply that a clear statement must be made against any notion of a purely quantitative approach to growth (see Hamilton, 2004) and in favor of the need for a 'just' use of resources and social cohabitation. If we look at plans today, most, if not all of them embrace some unspecified notions of sustainability and spatial quality, though almost none of them questions growth as such.

From envisioning as a learning process to transformative practices

As futures are not just 'out there', waiting to be discovered, we have to construct them. This is not a linear, but rather a dialectic (back casting and forecasting) process.

Envisioning is the process by which individuals – or preferably groups – develop visions of future states for themselves, their organization, their city or their region that are sufficiently clear and powerful to arouse and sustain the actions necessary for (parts of) these vision to become a reality (see Goodstein et al, 1993). Visions themselves may not be seen as static descriptions of futures. They have to understand and portray the dynamic nature of development, changing challenges and contexts. We cannot confront complex dynamic realities with a language designed for simple static problems (Senge, 1990). Hence the need for ways of thinking and for tools that help planners to cope with change in a dynamic environment (see also Winch, 1998).

A vision must be placed within a specific context (economic, social, cultural, political, and power), place, time and scale regarding specific issues that are of interest and within a particular combination of actors. The context provides the setting for the process but also takes form, undergoes changes in the process. To avoid naïve utopian thinking and to avoid that visions are just exercises in 'banalization', 'woolly thought', pseudo-legitimation for a number of measures and projects connected only on paper (see Borja & Castells, 1997), visions must be rooted in an understanding of the basic processes and constraints that shape places. This must be done recognizing conditions of power, inequality and diversity. Whose vision is created remains a basic question to be asked.

Envisioning does not claim to eliminate uncertainty with predictions; instead, it seeks to work with uncertainty as well as possible, and to enable actors to make decisions in view of desired futures.

According to Godet (2001, 8), envisioning is above all a state of mind (imagination and anticipation) that leads to behavior (hope and will). In the final analysis, we must come back to what 'is' if we want to present ideas and concepts that are solid, workable and of testable value. To get to these ideas, we need both the solidity of the analysis and the creativity of the design of alternative futures. To avoid naïve thinking, all of this must be rooted in an understanding of the basic processes and structural constraints that shape places.

Since the envisioning of discontinuous futures involves change, all the usual forms of resistance to change (and definitely to structural change) are present.

Envisioning is so central to the strategic planning process and so all inclusive that it cannot be confined to a single actor or institution in the process. In Milan they used strategic visioning through awareness scenario workshops (Gualini, 2003:281). This allows to consider envisioning being a collective process that concerns futures for which actors are themselves responsible. Their vision, then, is more than a wish list: it involves commitment to the realization of the vision through practice (Friedmann, 1987). A vision provides actors with views of the future that can be shared; a clear sense of direction, a mobilization of energy, and a sense of being engaged in something important (see Goodstein et al, 1993). A vision is 'communicatively rational' to the degree that it is reached consensually through deliberations involving all relevant actors, where all are equally empowered and fully informed, and where the conditions of ideal speech are met (see Innes, 1996). The images provided in a vision involve a dynamic interaction between the relevant actors in the process rather than a unidirectional flow. The reiterative process occurs at the moment of creating the vision, as well as throughout the process of its implementation. The values and images of what a society wants to achieve must be discussed in the envisioning process. These values and images are not generated in isolation but are socially constructed and given meaning and validated by the traditions of belief and practice; they are reviewed, reconstructed and invented through collective experience (see Ozbekhan, 1969, but also Foucault, 1980:11; Hillier, 1999 and Elchardus et al., 2000: 24). We must be aware of the impact on the social and psychological milieu of the consumer society, which teaches citizens how to think about themselves and their goals. Citizens' tastes, priorities and value systems are, to a large degree, manipulated by the very markets that are supposed to serve them (Hamilton, 2004: 66). Within (and constrained by) this established framework of the market society, places and communities face the challenge of constructing (or rejecting) and implementing the discourses of development, cultural diversity, sustainability and place quality and, hence, of creatively transforming their own functioning and practice.

Envisioning reveals how things can be different, how things could be truly better, how people can be innovative, how we can unlock the natural creativity of the citizens to improve our cities and regions, how we can legitimize these natural tendencies that are typically inhibited or suppressed by the daily demands of our governance systems. The construction of different futures, which lies at the very heart of the transformative practices, requires creativity and original synthesis (Ozbekhan, 1969: 87).

The process helps the participants to think more broadly about the future and its driving forces and to realize that their own actions may move a place towards a particular kind of future. The process allows participants to step away from entrenched positions and identify positive futures that they can work at creating. It allows for a high degree of ownership of the final product and illustrates that citizens do have a responsibility for the(ir) future. So the real test is not whether anyone has fully achieved the 'conceived' future, but rather whether anyone has changed his or her behavior because he or she saw the future differently (see also Schwartz, 1991).

'Creative transformation' refers to changes in governance relating to current and historical relations of dominance and oppression (Young, 1990). Since planning and governance cannot be looked upon as separate, autonomous spheres within society, in the following section I look for a type of governance that will interlink with the transformative approach outlined above.

4. Governance

Just as there are many traditions and collective practices, there are also many images of what regions, city-regions, cities want to achieve (see Weeks, 1993). The power constellation in a place determines what the problems and challenges of a place are and how they should/could be addressed. The opportunities for conceiving/implementing images are not equal. Some actors (individuals, groups, institutions) have more resources and power, a fact which allows them to pursue their images. Therefore power relations must be built into the conceptual framework of planning (Forester, 1989; Sager, 1994; Healey, 1997a; Friedmann & Douglas, 1998) and must be looked at in a given context of place, time and scale regarding specific issues and particular combinations of actors.

Strategic spatial planning processes challenge established divisions of government and the cultures embedded in them. They also bring different models of governance and governance change into encounter with one another (Healey, 2006). I argue that a feasible and efficient planning process should be centred on the elaboration of a mutual beneficial dialectic between top-down structural policies and bottom-up local uniqueness. Besides a bottom up approach, rooted in conditions and potentialities of diversity (interpreted in their broadest sense) a complementary multi level top-down policy aimed at introducing fundamental and structural changes is indispensable. Indeed, a mere top-down and centrally organized approach runs the danger to overshoot the local, historically evolved and accumulated knowledge and qualification potential, while a one-dimensional emphasis on a bottom-up approach tends to deny - at least to underestimate - the importance of linking local differences to structural macro tendencies (Albrechts & Swyngedouw, 1989). This dialectic constitutes the bare essence of multi-level governance. The communicative/collaborative model being promoted in many examples of strategic spatial planning emphasizes the social learning and invention that can occur in these encounters (Albrechts & Liévois, 2004).

Place policy making is embedded in multiple institutional domains and interaction arenas. This blurs the meaning of traditional administrative boundaries and hierarchical settings in the development and implementation of policies (see European practices). Initiatives to overcome fragmentation due to entrenched tiers of government and sectoral policy communities typically require a major institutional effort to achieve long-term effects (Albrechts et al, 2003). Moreover, the demand to transform the state in ways that will serve all relevant actors, especially the least powerful, and the emerging partnerships between governments and the private sector are provoking a shift towards more hybrid forms of democracy in a number of places in Europe.

Pluralist and inter-culturalist places

Some politicians as well as planners seem reluctant to involve the public in decision-making, because it involves giving up some control, and people who hold power are usually not inclined to give it up or share it. In other places there is a tendency to involve major actors in the process. But planning, potentially, has an impact on and links to a very wide range of issues (from all kinds of actors with interests in a place to nature). These interests are potentially very diverse and conflicting. Increasingly it is argued that to overcome a commodified representation, nature must get a voice to reveal its intrinsic values (natural stability in ecosystems, biodiversity) as well as the more intangible cultural (aesthetic, symbolic) values (see also Sachs & Esteva, 2003; Hillier, 1999). European experiences clearly show that actors claim a role in the political system (see also Mathews, 1994). Creating futures must be done under conditions of inequality and diversity. Any change has to deal with structural constraints, with issues of power and resistance, with the irreconcilability of certain forms of interests. This requires a democratic polity that can encompass the realities of difference, inequality, etc., (Huxley, 2000). The core is a democratic struggle for inclusiveness in democratic procedures, for transparency in government transactions, for accountability of the state and planners to the citizens for whom they work, for the right of citizens to be heard and to have a creative input in matters affecting their interests and concerns at different scale levels and for reducing or eliminating unequal power structures between social groups and classes (see also Friedman & Douglas, 1998). In several places in Europe there is a call for the development of pluralist democratic tendencies in the wake of a crisis of representative democracy and a demand to transform the state in ways that will serve all of its citizens and especially the least powerful. Out of a shift towards a more hybrid democracy in some places a type of governance has emerged that expands practical democratic deliberations rather than restricts them, that encourages diverse citizens' voices rather than stifles them; that directs resources to basic needs rather than to narrow private gain. This type of approach uses public involvement to present real political opportunities, learning from action not only what works but also what matters. Through the involvement of citizens (and especially weak groups) in socially and politically relevant actions some

degree of empowerment, ownership or acceptance is sought for these citizens (see Friedmann 1992 but also our fourth track).

Increased personal mobility has made places more mixed. This can be seen as a threat or an opportunity. On the one hand it can destabilize a place as migrants bring in habits, attitudes and skills alien to the original society, on the other it can enrich and stimulate possibilities by creating hybrids, crossovers and boundary blurring (Landry, 2000 p. 264). Places must be creative with mutual understanding between cultures and ideas of equity (this is nothing less than a claim to full citizenship – see Sandercock, 2003 p.98). Inter-culturalism (Landry, 2000) builds bridges, helps foster cohesion and conciliation and produces something new out of the multi-cultural patchwork of places (Landry, 2000). It takes views of a place of minority groups or otherwise socially excluded into account and their ideas are brought to change planning, political decision-making and implementation.

Learning Processes

Society as a whole (as well citizens as politicians) feels uneasy to think beyond the short term, to reflect on multiple futures, and it takes an unconsciously deterministic view of events. How to convince a wide variety of actors (citizens, investors, politicians, planners) that they can have meaningful choices and will not have to be a complete prisoner of circumstances? How to make different actors aware that they are interdependent, -they share the same physical space, they may face similar problems- and that they cannot solve some problems on their own? How to convince them to consider the alternative to what they felt in their heart? Yet when development, sustainability, quality and equity of places is at stake that is exactly what we may need to do: to imagine alternative futures to master change. Visioning can become a learning process if it looks in an open way to the future, if it integrates knowledge of what might happen with an understanding of the driving forces and a sense of what it means to a place and its citizens. The active participation in a collective action of visioning may generate trust as participants in the process are likely to find -and why that is the case- that some visions present a future that certain would like to inhabit while others are considered highly undesirable. The process helps the participants to think more broadly about the future and its driving forces and to realize that their own actions may move a place towards a particular kind of future. The process allows participants to step away from entrenched positions and identify positive futures that they can work at creating. It allows for a high degree of ownership of the final product and illustrates that citizens do have a responsibility for the(ir) future.

Institutionalisation

Government systems for the development, control and regulation have often been fixed for a long time, yet are not fundamentally reviewed and adapted to changing circumstances. There are many examples to illustrate how difficult it is for an institution to change. The life of the institutions seems often to be more important than what it does. Hence the need to view governance institutions not as a set of formal organizations and procedures established in law and 'followed through', but as referring to norms, standards and mores of a society or social group, which shape both formal and informal ways of thinking and ways of acting (see Healey, 2004a:92). In some places the process of 'discourse structuration' and its subsequent 'institutionalisation' become perhaps more important than the plan as such (see Hajer, 1995; Albrechts, 1999; 2003a, b; Albrechts & Van den Broeck, 2004;). In this way new discourses may become institutionalised, embedded in norms, ways of doing things, attitudes and practices and provide a basis for structural change. From there a shared stock of values, knowledge, information, sensitivity, mutual understanding may spread and travel through an array of regional, provincial and local government arenas, sector departments and consultants. New approaches and new concepts can be sustainably embedded via institutionalization (see Healey, 1997, Gualini, 2001). But this takes time and dedication. Government may call upon this intellectual capital (Innes et al, 1994) when using its control function to re- frame ways of thinking.

Multi-level governance

A multi-level governance approach would offer the potential to tease out causal linkages between global, national, regional, metropolitan and local change, while also taking account of the highly diverse outcomes of such interactions. The dialectic between shifts in institutional sovereignty towards supranational regulatory systems (e.g. the possible impact of European directives for deregulation of public transport) and the principle of subsidiarity, which entails the rooting of policy action in local initiatives and abilities, illustrates the embeddedness of place policy-making in multiple institutional domains and interaction arenas which blur the meaning of hierarchical settings in the development of policies (see Gualini, 2001). Tensions may occur between the well-known scale and related government structure of a nested hierarchy from large to small or from top to bottom and scale in terms of the reach of relationships in time and space (see Healey, 2004b; Albrechts & Liévois, 2004).

In a new governance culture the construction of arenas (who has to be involved, and what issues must be discussed), their timing (links to the strategic momentum), the definition of which arenas seem fixed and what issues in arenas seem fixed, the awareness that fixed may be relative in some contexts all need careful reflection and full attention.

I linked envisioning to transformative practices. Transformative practices involve constructing 'desired' answers - images/visions and strategies for action - to the structural problems of our society. My hypothesis is that strategic projects could provide a key to an action oriented approach.

5. Strategic Projects as a key to a more 'strategic' planning

Strategic projects are projects, (preferably) coordinated by public actors in close cooperation with the private sector, and other semi-public actors. These projects are strategic to achieve visions, policy objectives and goals embedded in strategic planning processes at different policy levels. They aim at transforming the spatial, economic and socio-cultural fabric of a larger area through a timely intervention. Strategic projects aim to integrate the visions, goals and objectives from different policy sectors, as well as the ambitions and goals of the private sector. They also aim to integrate the inhabitants and users of the area. In this way these projects may become transformative.

They are strategic in the sense that they deal with specific key issues in an area. All European strategic plans focus on projects. Some strategic plans deal in a very creative way with projects. The strategic plan for the province of Milan initiated a call for projects and good practice which could contribute in the improvement of habitability. The idea of competition was borrowed from IBA Emscher park. In Milan they got 259 proposals which portrayed a local community that was not only rich and lively but also keen to enter into a relationship with institutions in order to contribute to the development of relevant public programmes (Balducci, 2008:94).

Possible types of projects

Urban projects aim to selectively regenerate urban areas as qualitative milieus for economic development, housing and cultural activities. Contemporary strategic urban projects are no longer driven by defensive strategies (combating poverty in deprived areas, social housing) like urban reconstruction (1950s), urban revitalization (1960s) or urban renewal (1970s). Rather, they are being driven more and more by offensive strategies within the context of growing international intercity competition. An effort on the part of the public government, however, is needed in response to the significant market failures on the real estate markets in urban areas and the need for more integrated and sustainable approaches. The market failure is the result of a lack of transparency (hidden costs, polluted areas, deadlocked physical developments) in the urban real estate market and the technical and institutional complexity of urban projects which impose considerable transaction costs on real estate operations. Given

the growing scarcity of urban land and development price levels, redevelopment will become inevitable. Strategic urban projects aim to consolidate, to transform, to restructure or to reuse the urban areas/places for new and emerging demands from public and private (individuals, economic and cultural) actors. Within the context of the challenges cities are facing— fierce international competition, inequality, decay, unbalanced demands—the quality of life for all citizens is becoming a crucial asset for keeping and attracting a whole range of households and businesses, and maintaining a sound basis for social, economic and cultural life. Strategic urban projects play an important role in the regeneration and transformation of urban areas. Urban projects embody an important paradigmatic shift in urban planning from master planning/regulatory planning to strategic planning with a clear emphasis on implementation.

Rural projects aim to transform rural and suburban dynamics into a more sustainable and qualitative form of development and to give cultural meaning to a new form of hybrid rurality (neo-rurality, see Gullinck & Dortmans, 1997). Spatial dynamics have led to a highly fragmented, scattered landscape, with a juxtaposition of former urban functions (retail, business parks and entertainment) and the remaining spatial print of a mainly agrarian society. The search for integration and binding elements within this conglomerate of fragments and the creation of culturally meaningful spaces is the core challenge. Institutions from the public sphere are needed to integrate and adjust new functional needs in coherent spatial entities. Moreover, an effort must also be made to provide an alternative to the current market mechanisms, which induce considerable externalities. Detached housing, suburban retail centres, business parks, and scattered developments result in indirect environmental and social costs in terms of the increasing need for individual mobility, the splintering of the rural area, the degradation of the landscape and nature systems, and the need to provide public services (mail delivery, electricity, sewer system, etc.). If we take a realistic approach and assume that the demand for the suburban lifestyle will continue then ‘smart’ alternatives should be looked for.

Strategic rural projects aim to cope with new emerging functions in ‘neo-rural areas’. In post-World War II development in Western Europe, the agrarian production function gradually decreased, while new functions, such as nature, recreation, landscape conservation, water management, housing and new types of business activities became more prevalent. This development occurred in a more or less unplanned way in parallel with the processes of suburbanization of economic activities and households. The result is often a scattered and fragmented landscape, which is neither urban, nor rural. In this hybrid spatial context, strategic projects provide a new approach and new concepts for

creatively and proactively dealing with and giving meaning and content to these 'rurban'(rural/urban) places.

New innovative employment at strategic locations is an important part of the effort to keep up international economic competitiveness. The old concept of business parks needs a serious re-engineering in terms of spatial concepts and management. The new spatial requirements of firms need to be translated into specifically designed employment locations on specific places. Strategic economic projects question traditional industrial estates and traditional location policy. The worn-out concept of the industrial park no longer meets the current demands of an increasingly service oriented and flexible economy. Strategic economic projects attempt to reinvent and spatially redesign the concept of the business park and to reconsider the location of economic activities. A balanced supply policy provides an answer to the question of the availability and suitability of land for specific economic activities.

Network-like projects are important within the European Spatial Development Perspective (CEC, 1999). If we go back to the idea of a network the main reason for actors (cities, institutions, investors) to enter into such a network is that they pursue some goal that is common to all of them and that they can obtain this goal in a better and easier way through co-operation than if they would act individually. To increase the likelihood that a network project, like any other project, will be realized a close dialogue is needed with those whose cooperation is necessary for its implementation and those needed to win over the public (see Flyvbjerg, 1998). Such a dialogue is a dynamic endeavour, which evolves in interaction with local, regional, national contingencies and external forces in order to address the agendas of those responsible for the implementation of a project and to build a broad social support. Such a dialogue could enlarge the small 'epistemic community' (Haas, 1992; Faludi, 1999) initially supporting the concept of a spatial network. Whatever could be done at the level of the network needs to involve progressively multilevel and interjurisdictional dimensions. Network concepts require the development of a complex governance setting throughout various institutional, political, territorial and socio-economic contexts:

Network concepts articulate a spatial narrative based on a discursive process of 're-imagining' territory and urban space within a country or across countries (see the interreg programs in Europe). In this discursive process of social spatialization the driving rationale is one of competitiveness as the precondition for a possible wider acceptance of the concept.

Many of the European networks (in the making) are examples of polynucleated urban systems (see special issue European Planning Studies,1998). Their qualities are said not to be merely physical but also functional, in that the cities within the complex perform different functions.

In order to (re) activate networks-in-the-making, a basic challenge seems to find out what kind of strategic project could attract the interest and sympathy of politicians, the business community,

ordinary citizens, local communities and municipalities, without being too antagonistic right from the initial formulation of the project and to design institutions, arenas/forums needed to successfully conceive, plan and implement the project. Such a project must reflect the specific politics (Healey, 1997b) and context of the area (see also Zeng, 2007). The latter includes the history and geography. The selection of a strategic project is not a neutral or a random selection. From an analytical point of view strategic issues may be considered fairly obvious but from a policy point of view they are definitely not. This phenomenon is common to most so-called urban networks (see special issue European Planning Studies, 1998).

The spatial networks are dependent on a plethora of planning systems, planning control and building regulations pursuing separate and exclusive objectives. This challenges the possibility of constructing a common discourse or a project within which conflicting objectives can be pursued equitably.

What could we learn out of this? It is only too obvious that there is a wide gap between the socio-economic reality in polynuclear areas and the normative concept of urban networks. It is abundantly clear (see special issue European Planning Studies, 1998) that the concept of any urban network will never automatically become part of the frame of reference for justifying decisions. First the concept must succeed in penetrating this frame. Here there is stiff competition with other plans/projects and the (secret) agenda of a variety of actors (see in this respect also Faludi & Korthals Altes, 1994). Moreover it is obvious that the concept is read in different ways (see also Mandelbaum, 1990).

Need for socio-spatial innovation

The institutionalisation of a new discourse is likely to prove difficult. The challenge is that of co-production, of the pursuit of joint results with other sectoral, social, economic actors' activities and initiatives. In this respect governance opens up a new potential field of collective action (see Gualini, 2001). Governance suggests an understanding of the linkage of different types of regulation in a territory in terms of political, social, institutional and cultural integration and at the same time in terms of capacity to conceive and implement a vision or a specific project (see also Le Galès, 1998). According to Healey (1997a, p. 290) the need to design institutional arrangements, which enmesh formal government structures and processes within the wider relational webs of economic and social life becomes a key dimension of modern governance

For all types of strategic projects there is a need for socio-spatial innovation. Therefore, we need to develop innovative, implementation oriented approaches with a focus on spatial concepts, policy instruments, process architecture and quality management.

Innovation is sought in: ways in which new development dynamics can be introduced in a hybrid spatial setting and a complex context; ways to develop new challenging spatial concepts; ways these concepts are implemented in multi-actor and multi-level government

settings. Specific knowledge (sustainability, spatial quality, set of -legal and financial- instruments) of specific aspects related to strategic projects must be deepened. A more operational framework for sustainability and quality management in spatial and spatial-economic planning is needed. Sustainable development and spatial quality are clearly considered to be a main goal of spatial planning. However, a clear understanding of the meaning of sustainability and quality in spatial development and in planning approaches, as well as of how to make them operational, and the search for criteria and indicators for evaluating and implementing them, remain weak. The operational framework must be applied and tested back and forth in the construction of the approach for strategic projects.

Contemporary policy settings nearly always imply a complex mutual dependency of actors. The capacity to achieve an agreement and to implement decisions is increasingly being challenged by a growing and difficult to manage institutional and spatial complexity. As a reaction different institutions are developing ever more bureaucratic rules and instruments as an outgrowth of their own sector logic. The result is a growing fragmentation and separation between different policy fields and levels. In this context, traditional policy tools and instruments based on control and regulation, such as land use plans and rigid master plans, seem unfit to meet the current challenges. A broadening of the arsenal of instruments and tools available for constructing agreements, conflict resolution and implementation-oriented projects seems necessary.

There is also a need to identify and to critically analyse all technical, legal, financial, organizational and property factors influencing the concrete realization of strategic projects and to creatively search for proper instruments, tools and means for project development. By exploring the current technical tools and instruments applied in strategic projects and by identifying foreign learning experiences, instruments better fitting the specific conditions must be looked for.

6. Epilogue

In Europe planning moves away from the idea of government as the sole provider of solutions to problems, towards an idea of governance as the capacity to substantiate the search for creative and territorially differentiated solutions to problems, challenges, opportunities and for a more desirable future situation through the mobilisation of a plurality of actors with different and even competing interests, goals and strategies (see also Balducci & Fareri, 1996). I have applied the 'lenses' of a reflective practitioner and of the (strategic) planning literature in an effort to broaden the concept and provide an alternative to address the structural challenges of our postmodern world in a constructive and progressive way. The 'new' strategic spatial planning presented in this paper is conceived of as a democratic, open, selective and dynamic process. It produces a vision to frame problems, challenges and provides justification to short-term actions within a revised democratic tradition. A dissection of the process reveals the key elements that underlie this strategic planning: it involves content and

process, static and dynamics, constraint and aspiration, the cognitive and the collective, the planned and the learned, the socio-economic and the political, the public and the private, the vision and the action, the local and the global, legitimacy and a revised democratic tradition, values and facts, selectivity and integrativity, equality and power, long term and short term.

Strategic planning case studies (Healey et al, 1997b; Pascual & Esteve, 1997; Albrechts, 1999; Albrechts et al, 2003; Salet et al, 2003; Pugliese & Spaziante, 2003; Sartorio, 2005; Salet et al, 2003; Healey, 2007; Balducci, 2008) illustrate innovative practices. I see a need for inquiring into the epistemology of these practices, for making sense of what has been learned in action in relation to a wider context, and for testing the depth and comprehensiveness of these practices (see also D. Schön, 1984). This would help efforts to evaluate and make sense of these practices in relation to a wider (theoretical) context. Abstract conceptualization and generalization of the accumulated knowledge of learning in action may help theorists to see some of what can be learned from practice. Strategic spatial planners, on the other hand, can be inspired and guided by new emerging theories.

The critical question of the leverage that these strategic spatial planning exercises will achieve over time must be raised. Do they have the persuasive power to shift territorial development trajectories or, as some argue (Kunzmann 2001a, b, c), are they little more than a cosmetic veil to hide the growing disparities evolving within Europe? The European experiences (Healey et al, 1997; Pasqual & Esteve, 1997; CEC, 1999; Albrechts et al, 2002; Albrechts et al, 2003; Salet et al, 2003; Pugliese & Spaziante, 2003, Sartorio, 2005; Salet et al, 2003; Motte, 2006; Healey, 2007; Balducci, 2008) provide a fertile laboratory for advancing the understanding of the nature and potential of strategic spatial frameworks and strategies for 21st century conditions.

We could draw some lessons from the current European experiences (Albrechts et al, 2003:126-128). First, there is no single European way to do strategic spatial planning. Strategic spatial planning initiatives may look similar in broad outlines, but they take many different forms, performing different kinds of governance work in different contexts. Second, initiatives in strategic spatial planning can liberate innovative creative forces, but they can also become exercises in holding onto the status quo. Third, developing the spatial dimensions of such strategic plans is not just a matter of technical analysis, but the development of spatial logic and metaphors that can command attention and carry persuasive power in complex political contexts. Fourth, creating appropriate institutional arenas (formal or informal) for spatial development initiatives is crucial. Fifth, strategic planning benefits from the existence and acceptance of a strong role for the state and a strong political consciousness of place identity. The European experiences illustrate that the potential power of strategic plans and frameworks to affect the future lie in:

- + their capacity to frame concepts and images to mobilize and fix attention;
- + their creation of policy discourses through which specific decisions and practices are focused;
- + their impact on statutory tools and procedures;

- + their creation of expert policy communities that carry new ideas from place to place and enrich local learning capacity;
- + their capacity to shift governance cultures

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