



Urban and regional planning

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Urban and regional planning

Urban and regional planning is a notion that encompasses the whole set of social activities aimed at anticipating, representing and regulating the development of an urban or a regional area. It thus articulates intellectual activities of study and prospective, of social and economic forecasting with more concrete activities such as infrastructure programming, land reservation and land use regulation. Planning operates at different scales: neighborhood, city or region. Generally speaking, the smaller the area addressed, the more precise and coercive planning regulations are.

Under the post-war Keynesian-Fordist compromise, a relatively static Capital required the intervention of the State and its public policies in order to stabilize the workforce and to constitute homogeneous national economic spaces where standardized products could be sold. During this post-war period and until the late 1970's, urban and regional planning policies were an element of these demand-side policies. They were aimed at stabilizing the workforce by providing a cheaper access to housing and enlarging the access to urban collective consumption goods to a larger part of the urban population. The principal tools of this Keynesian-Fordist version of planning were the mass production of social housing, the provision of collective infrastructures, the public acquisition of land and the regulation of estate speculation. From this prospective, elected officials and public planners were the dominant figures of planning and comprehensive land-use regulation plan was the most common tool used to enforce these redistributive objectives.

The concept of governance has subsequently been used to describe the devices through which urban and regional plans were elaborated and implemented following the end of the Keynesian-Fordist consensus and the new objectives set for these devices. According to neo-marxist and regulationists scholars, the 1970's economic crisis is the sign of the entrance of Western economies into a new era where competition between firms is no longer based on their proximity to raw material sources or their ability to build masses of standardized products but on their ability to diversify their production and to incessantly innovate. Thus, firms are less dependant on public demand-side policies. On the contrary the fiscal burden of these policies hinder the profitability of their business in the international competition. The same rupture occurred at the urban and regional level. In a new context where growth has been slowing, where State transfers have rarified and where firms have become increasingly

mobile, the objectives of urban and regional planning have been changing. Shifts from a demand-side policies to supply-side policies and from a redistributive stance to a competitive and marketing stance have taken place. The central aim of plans is not to regulate economic growth and its effects on urban and regional territories but rather to activate it.

As a consequence, planning practices and the very forms of plans have been changing. Rather than comprehensive land-use regulation plans, plans are taking the shape of marketing weapons. The vogue of strategic plans launched in the mid-1980's is the most obvious example of this. These plans do not intend to regulate growth and redistribute it throughout the territory through land-use regulations. Instead, they identify the strengths and the weaknesses of the city or the region, the opportunities which it can take advantage of and the threats to which it could be faced and, on this basis, try to define strategies in terms of economic development or urban renewal. In a context of governance, on one hand plans are less precise in that they do not intend to set up regulations for each space of the city. On the other hand, they are more precise in that they focus on strategic areas that can be valorised and on which specific policies should be implemented. The inspiration of these plans is more neo-liberal than reformist in that redistributive objectives are relegated to the background, whereas issues like competitiveness, economic attractiveness are much more pushed to the fore since the plan is not principally aimed at setting up obstacles to market dynamics. In terms of planning practices, these new plans give a much more important place to economic actors and social elites. The plan is not conceived as the mere outcome of the public planners expertise but as the result of bargains between public and private actors and between different levels of public authorities. The political effectiveness of the plan is no longer expected to stem from its regulatory status but rather from the consensus that the elaboration process of the plan has enabled to build up between a plurality of stakeholders.

This interpretation of the recent story of urban regional planning as a clear-cut example of the invasion of neoliberal recipes and the giving up of any public ambition to control territorial dynamics has been challenged by several scholars. Some of them doubt whether new forms of planning, such as strategic plans, can be interpreted as simply giving up of public ambitions on the evolution of cities and regions. For Healey (Healey *et al.*, 1997), the new forms of planning practices using networks, interactive, iterative and incremental decision-making processes are also aimed at producing institutional capital, i.e. a set of cognitive, relational and identity resources that will enable to create a common rationale for the interventions of

different actors on the territory. The rise of strategic plans is the sign of a communicative turn in planning. Planning is not only about elaborating the graphic representation of a substantive vision of the territorial common interest whose definition is set only by officials and public planners. Instead, it is about managing processes of political mediation, enabling mutual comprehension between different social interests, the outcome of which will be the sharing of a common vision of the future of a territory. Strategic planning may be a sign of a new form of territorial governance where public expertise and actors are not omnipotent but do not inevitably promote a neoliberal agenda.

If neo-marxists and regulationists defend a substantive definition of governance as a policy-content, other scholars (cf. Le Galès, 2002 ; Pinson, 2002) propose a definition of governance as a research agenda that can help understand the recent evolution of urban and regional planning. If recent evolutions like globalization, construction of regional ensemble like the EU or devolution trends have modified the way urban and regional development is steered, this does not necessarily mean that planning systems are promoting neoliberal agendas. Rather these evolutions have modified the way social and territorial change is organized, and, in particular, the division of labor between political/bureaucratic, market and civil society regulations in the governance of territorial development. However, in this approach, the term "governance" does not presume the neoliberal policy-content deriving from these new arrangements. Governance is rather presented as a new research agenda for the understanding of collective actions aimed at controlling and promoting urban and regional development.

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