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Planning Innovation and Regional Development:
the Spreading of Urban Strategic Planning in Southern Italy

Ignazio Vinci
University of Palermo
Department of Architecture
Via Cartari 19b – Palermo 90133 – Italy
Tel: +39 091 60790201
E-mail: ignazio.vinci@unipa.it

ABSTRACT

For decades the Italian system of planning has been strongly characterized by a regulatory approach and the question of cities' development had been taken into account within general land use plans. In the 1990s this approach has been considered a strong constraint on the regeneration of cities and the revitalization of their economic potential. Therefore, in the last decade the improvement of flexibility and participation within planning processes were considered primary objectives both at regional and local levels. In addition to spatial regulatory plans, large and medium sized cities became increasingly interested in developing urban strategic plans following the model of some European "success stories" of urban regeneration (such as Barcelona, Lyon, Glasgow).

In a first phase, these planning experiments were prevalently carried out by the cities of the Northern regions (such us Torino, Firenze, Venezia, Trento) and supported by strong voluntary public – private partnerships. In a second phase, after a financial programme by the Ministry of Economy, more then 150 cities in the Southern regions started strategic planning processes.

These latest strategic plans (at present under observation both from policy makers and urban – regional scientists) should be evaluated in a very different way in comparison with the strategic plans carried out in Northern Italy. That's for two main reasons:

- First, because the majority of Southern cities still lag behind from an economic point of view, in addiction to very problematic governance environments and fragmented local societies;
- Secondly, as a consequence of the financial support provided to municipalities, because the national and the regional authorities require Southern cities to improve, through strategic planning, their capacity to implement effective regeneration programmes and to increase their access to the EU structural funds.

Starting from these distinctive issues, this paper aims to critically discuss the spreading of strategic planning in Southern Italian regions, trying to analyse the ongoing process of innovation as regards the objectives undertaken at national level.

Key Words: strategic planning, public-private partnerships, southern Italian regions and EU cohesion policy

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, strategic planning has had a considerable number of experiments in European cities and metropolitan regions, so as to become an object of attention by planners, economists, sociologists and political scientists. The reasons for such interest are not easy to understand in unique terms. First, as cities have asked strategic planning to help them in pursuing very disparate objectives of territorial development: to provide answers to the crisis of competitiveness of their territories, increasing social cohesion, promoting environmental sustainability and quality of life, to adapt the forms of government to the new "institutional landscape" (Albrechts et al., 2001) offered by globalization and European integration. A second reason is that, as we shall see in the next section, the label "strategic" can be applied to a set of very diverse organizational and planning experiences: from physical planning practiced by the regional or sub-regional scale, to forms of cooperation between institutions in cities and metropolitan areas, or even to the urban renewal programs started by medium and small size municipalities. The result is the increasing difficulty to find unique definitions within the strategic planning literature, while affirming a belief that it is more appropriate to speak of a "strategic approach" to planning that can be practiced at different scales and territorial situations (Salet and Gualini, 2006; Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Oosterlynck et al., 2011). In Italy the picture does not appear less controversial than in the European context. The spread of strategic approaches within the territorial policies, in fact, can be traced to a set of highly structured activities developed – with different goals – at various levels of the institutional hierarchy. We can generally state that the strategic approaches in the practices of territorial planning is gradually becoming prevalent in Italy along three directions (Vinci, 2010b):

1) as an innovation process of physical planning at the regional and local scales, and as the adaptation of more traditional rational and regulatory approaches to the new economic, social and environmental challenges;

2) as a requisite of urban regeneration, local development and territorial cooperation policies promoted by the European Union and supported through the Structural Funds and EU Community Initiatives;

3) as voluntary practices promoted by municipalities, generally aimed to improve the convergence between local actors and policies integration, for responding to the growing fragmentation of decision-making processes at the urban or metropolitan scale.

This paper focuses in particular on the third process of innovation, a field of experimentation aimed at building "urban" strategic plans (in some cases inter-muncipal) which, in recent years, has expanded the focus for the planning of cities to a rather than extensive audience of social scientists and policy makers. In Italy, this process can be conventionally divided into two short historical phases, characterized by some significant differences that will be detailed later in this paper.

A first phase, which began in the late 90s, coinciding with the "discovery" of strategic planning for the Italian municipalities, which have been protagonists of significant experience in the field of area-based regeneration programs but historically lacking in terms of building organic vision of urban development (Palermo, 2006). These experiences involved dozens of Northern Italian cities during the 2000s, very different in terms of population size, institutional, socio-economic and spatial conditions (among them Turin, Florence, Venice, Pesaro, Trento). The aim of this work is not to get inside the processes of such experiences, which have been already

appropriately deepened by a significant number of scientific papers and case studies (Fedeli and Gastaldi, 2004; Bertuglia et al. 2004; Cavenago, 2004; Martinelli, 2005; Florio, 2010), but to place them as bases from which to understand the most recent developments of the strategic planning in recent years.

A second phase concerns the dissemination of strategic planning in the cities of the Southern Italy. Until the mid of the last decade, in fact, Southern cities were the place of widespread urban regeneration initiatives through national or EU's programs. But only a few municipalities have tried to develop integrated visions and plans to strategically control the effect of urban initiatives. The major contribution in opening this latest season of innovation in urban policies in the Southern cities was decisively a specific initiative of the national government, through which the municipalities have had access to public funding for the preparation of strategic plans. In this paper I critically examine the results, still largely incomplete and controversial, of this second phase through the following steps:

– the analysis of the expected results at national level;
– the interpretation of the role of strategic planning in different regional contexts;
– the built of a first geography of the territories covered by strategic plans;
– the identification of some crucial issues for the future of strategic planning practices.

2. Theoretical Framework

Strategic planning experienced in European cities can be understood as the result of a complex process of synthesis of concepts and techniques from different traditions and scientific disciplines. As a matter of fact, anticipating the future and formulating strategies through plans and programs are typical actions of a wide variety of individuals and both public and private organizations.

Generally, we could say that every rational choice aiming to project the future consequences of certain actions may be considered a strategic activity, and that the more complex are the actions contributing to this choice, the more you can approach the concept of strategy as planning (Vinci, 2010c). This work, rather than offer a comprehensive definition of strategic planning, focuses consequently in tracking a more useful conceptual path amongst some disciplinary strands which seem to be the most influential in terms of planning practices experienced in contemporary cities.

The first strand is linked to the management disciplines, from where the first applications of the strategic planning concepts to public organizations came out. Alan Mintzberg, in his book *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* (1994), identifies ten different schools of thought regarding the formation of strategies in organizations, three of which are of specific interest for the planning culture:

- the first one – called "design school" – considers the strategies formation as an informal process, usually based on the role of leadership and comparative analysis of internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors related to a specific organization;

- the second – called "planning school" – recognizes the conceptual foundations of the first one, but gives greater importance to the decision-making process and to the involvement of multiple actors within (and outside) the engaged organizations

- the third one – called "positioning school" – focuses more on the shaping-process of the strategies as means for acquiring competitive advantages regarding the organizations external environment.

According to Mintzberg, strategies formation is «a planning process, designed or supported by planners», which can be summed up as the synthesis of three main statements:
- planning means thinking about the future (and try to control it);
- planning is to produce decisions (possibly integrated ones);
- planning is seen as a formalized procedure oriented in producing results through an integrated decision system.

Mintzberg further stresses how the implementation of a plan is only partly attributable to the implementation of deliberate or fully intentional strategies of the key actors belonging to a certain organization. In fact, there exist several choices coming from "emerging strategies", namely options considered on the basis of variables occurring during the planning process. Mintzberg's assertion is particularly important for the city, whose policies are the result of the interactions amongst a large number of political, institutional, economic and social of actors. This makes strategic planning in the public sector particularly complex, as the municipalities – compared to the case of private companies – can ensure less control of the variables influencing their organizations.

About the variables influencing the strategic planning processes within the public sphere, John Bryson proposes an interesting distinction between the strategic planning as expression of an organization, and the strategic planning focused on a function (Bryson, 2004). Unlike a strategic plan focused on an organization, in a planning process built around a function it can happen that the key decision-makers are mostly outsiders to the organization promoting the plan. In such a situation it will be required to focus on the way to gather together both thinking and actions of a plurality of actors, groups and organizations, none of which are fully responsible for the success of the planning process. In this second decision-making context, the missing of an authority ensuring the control of all resources and significant variables involved in the planning process would affect the effectiveness of a purely rational strategic planning approach.

According to Bryson, Judith Innes (1996), therefore believes that a rational approach to strategic planning should be adjusted following a sort of "political intelligence" principle able of exploring the various issues (political, technical and legal) that hinder to build the consensus around the choises the plan must take.

Bryson and Innes underline the difficulty of a rational approach to decision-making in such highly fragmentedand complex contexts as cities. In this terms, Europe can be seen as an extraordinarily fertile environment for experimentation of the strategic approach in the public domain. Here, over time, the label of strategic planning has been applied to a variety of both organizational and design practices centred on territorial development issues.

Along the 80s and the 2000s, cities and regions in Europe have been at the center of momentous and highly interdependent events:
- the transition from the Fordist industrial model and the need, for many declining urban areas, to reinvent their economic profile;
- the emergence of more complex principles related to environmental sustainability, quality of life, mobility, energy balance;

- the re-shaping of the development policy architecture in many European countries, as a result of decentralization and as a consequence of the role played by the EU through its cohesion policies;
- the emergence of a neoliberal agenda aiming at improving the cooperation between the public and private sector.

The complexity in designing a desirable future for cities considering so many variables, have forced municipalities to overcome the hierarchical and regulatory approaches to planning prevalent until the 70s and 80s. It is just within this frame that a renewed interest in the strategic dimension of regional and metropolitan planning emerges and take different forms. In the literature of the last twenty years the spreading of strategic planning in Europe can be thus read as the result of a double movement:

- the trend in physical planning – particularly at the regional, sub-regional and metropolitan scale – to internalize strategic planning principles and approaches in light of the changing of the urban economy and institutional "landscape" (Healey et al. 1997; Salet and Faludi, 2000; Albrechts et al., 2003);
- urban development policies carried out by municipalities revisiting the strategic corporate planning to more relational formulas, designed to smooth over their competitive orientation (Gibelli, 1996; Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000; Perulli, 2004).

Mazza (2004) argues that the first kind of european strategic planning started in the second half of the 60s, when several European countries (the Netherlands in 1965, France in 1967, the United Kingdom in 1968) reformulated their own planning systems by introducing the more flexible "structure plans" as a replacement to a rigid requirements sequence which was ensuring the State control over the physical changes at the local scale. After the liberal shift and the "anti-planning" sentiments of the 80s, the debate on the strategic dimension in spatial planning takes a great relevance in the nineties, when regions, cities and metropolitan areas in Europe are forced to reformulate their development strategies taking into account new priorities, including: (a) to re-set the production conversion to a metropolitan or even regional scale; (b) to reduce the pressure on natural capital and introduce new coherent models of sustainable development; (c) to face emerging governance and cooperation scenarios where the European dimension plays a role comparable (if not a major one) to the national or regional ones (Salet and Faludi, 2000; Albrechts et al., 2003).

During the 90s, several European metropolitan areas developed planning experiences well expressing this progressive interest in the strategic dimension. These plans and planning processes, which refer both to contexts of strong institutional innovation – as French (Lyon and Lille) or Spanish (Barcelona) urban communities – and to contexts of great tradition in hierarchical and rational physical-planning models – as in the Netherlands (Amsterdam) and Denmark (Copenhagen). In Italy even though this process occurred more slowly – also due to the difficulties encountered in the establishment of "metropolitan areas" – we can say that in today's land use plans drawn by the regions and provinces both the strategic and structural orientations have a dominant role over the regulative and prescriptive ones.

The second kind of above mentioned innovation process – namely the adaptation of corporate strategic planning models to the needs of urban development – is the one taking on a greater relevance to the topic of this paper. As it is well known, the techniques coming from strategic corporate planning make their entry in the field of urban policies in the 70s and 80s, when many

European cities were suffering the social and economic consequences of the decline of the Fordist industrial model (Cheshire and Hay, 1989; Amin, 1994). The climate of distrust for the State's role in economics and public policies generally grows a larger legitimacy for liberal and market-oriented options (Savitch and Kantor, 2002) and so the typical business management concepts (such as "competitiveness" and "efficiency") enter into the public policy language.

An urban agenda – dominated by the need to revitalize urban areas in a strongly boosted and globalized context – underpins a "business" approach to the government of the city, together with some typical corporate planning methods (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). The fact that the revitalization of the city is not just related to the need for physical regeneration measures – which have also been practiced through a large recourse to private initiative – is widely recognized. Consequently, it emerges that cities also require a redefinition of their economic identity by promoting all those specific "competitive advantages" (Porter, 1985)

The British cities, where these processes began well in advance compared with the rest of Europe (Parkinson, 1996), are a very interesting field of observation to go back over the first applications of the strategic corporate approach to cities. As a matter of fact, many observers recognize the 1976 Glasgow Eastern Renewal Program (Wannop, 1990) as the first case of market-led strategic planning to a European city. In several other European cities as Barcelona, Bilbao and Lyon, the process of strategic planning and the plans succession can be read, in the long run, as a progressive adaptation of the original corporate approach to the demands arose to face the growing focus on social and environmental sustainability issues.

The limits of translation of a purely business-related vision to urban policies have been well focused in recent years by various observers. Perulli (2004), for instance, argues that the city can not be assimilated to an enterprise essentially for to two reasons:

- first, because people are not stakeholers in the strict sense, as instead of happens in companies, and thus the social actors behave according to very articulated cultural, cognitive, and organizational processes, as well as the representative and recognitional ones;
- secondly, the city is a highly complex artifact that can not be attributed to the rational patterns of business/enterprise, so it is extremely difficult to recompose interests and projects towards shared and rationally verifiable objectives.

The argument upheld by Perulli – and by several other observers of the political economy of European cities (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2001; Le Galès, 2002) – is that the city is an open social system: a multide of actors that feel more encouraged to submit their design strategies, while lacking the traditionally State-guaranteed balance, and under a highest exposure to market and globalization forces. What potentially makes cities "cooperative environments" – in which different actors (not just economic ones) can orient each other «with long – term strategies, investing their resources in a coordinated way, increasing the wealth of organizational and social capital» (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2001, p. 29). This is the reason why in several European countries the recent experiences of urban strategic planning – while drawing inspiration from the performative culture of the typical corporative model – assign greater importance to a contractual approach, making flexible and broadening the partnerships in order to support the urban regeneration processes. Gibelli (1996) has defined this strategic planning model as "reticular", referring «either to the decision-making model configuring as a network – where multiple public actors entertain mediation and negotiation relations of various nature – or

to the growing interpretive importance of organizational networks of urban centers, that can provide interesting insights for planning practices»[1] (Gibelli, 1996, p. 33-34). According to Perulli «the network approach is based on the choice to start systematic inter-organizational and inter-institutional cooperations, conducted by a network of actors, each of which is interested to participate while no one can claim a full autonomy of action» (Perulli, 2004, p. 76). It is very important to emphasize the voluntary planning nature characterizing these experiences, the genesis of which is not born by the presence of specific regulatory obligations, rather by the occurrence of specific local conditions, such as the presence of a charismatic mayor or the dynamism of certain stakeholders.

3. Strategic Planning in Southern Italy

In Italy, the strategic approach to planning outlined by Perulli have become to be experimented since the late 90s in a variety of territorial and governance configurations. After the first Strategic plan of Turin (2000), considered the leading Italian experience in terms of resources investment and effectiveness, various strategic planning processes started in other large and medium sized cities (Fedeli and Gastaldi, 2004; Bertuglia et al., 2004; Martinelli, 2005).

The political interest generated by the first strategic planning experiences in Italian cities, and at the same time their low diffusion in the South, have lead the national government to enact a special funding program in 2004, in order to solicit the municipalities in this direction. The decision to commit public resources to the creation of urban strategic plans – seemingly a contradiction to the nature of these voluntary experiences – primarily comes from the need to increase planning capacity of Southern municipalities in facing new development challenges at the urban scale. In the case of Southern cities, such challenges were made even more complex both by the structural municipalities weakness in promoting effective policies for sustainable development, and by the difficulty of establishing stable cooperation forms with the private sector and civil society. Once the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (MIT) has decided about the budget to be allocated to different regions, it releases special *Guidelines* to define the general objectives and characters of the strategic plans to be prepared in the Southern cities (MIT, 2004).

The outline of strategic plan emerging from this document is particularly wide, and moves along a double register. On the one hand, strategic plans are asked to prepare the cities to better focus the challenges proposed by the EU 2007-2013 programming cycle. Given the uncertainty about the future national policy for the South, and the progressive reduction of structural funds (as a result of the enlargement of EU's borders) strategic plans should have been better for selecting the city's priorities within highly integrated frameworks able to touch the multiplicity of policy areas as requested by the Structural Funds.

It seems to be clear that, with the introduction of strategic plans, the municipalities were asked to return to work on some of the unsolved problems of the previous EU's programming cycle, such us the mobilization of the private capital in the regeneration policy, the linkage between spatial priority and development priority, etc. The *Guidelines* recognizes the last disappointing results in these fields due to the problematic convergence between the programming tools and planning instruments, asking the strategic planning process to create most favorable institutional environments for the coordination of those territorial government dimensions.

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[1] All quotations from Italian texts in this paper have been translated by the author.

Guidelines for the set up of Strategic Plans of Cities (Ministry of Infrastructures and Transport, 2004)

§ 3.1 – The founding characters of the Strategic Plan (points 1 – 6)

1. City's Strategic Plan defines the political design of sustainable development in the medium to long term, at least ten years, and directs, in accordance with social and environmental capital, the search for conditions of coexistence with the municipal urban plans, provincial coordination plans and programming tools of public investment;

2. The Strategic Plan is promoted by the town council of the leader municipality, who prepares the strategic guidelines proposals for the city and the referential territorial area, identified on the basis of the objectives of overcoming the dichotomies of the urban and regional borders, building urban and regional infrastructural armor and its connections with the trans-regional, national and European infrastructure systems;

3. The Strategic Plan identifies the mechanisms of reconciliation with the provincial and municipal planning instruments, based on a guiding vision projected on the territory;

4. In order to promote effective results at local level, strategic plans elements to be considered are: the density, the quality and the complementarity of proximity services and those of urban and regional scale, the urban welfare policies, the levels of social security and the spread of urban areas characterized by physical and social degradation, the environmental quality, urban and regional competitive positioning in terms of investment attraction and innovation capacity, the efficiency and effectiveness of urban and regional management in terms of physical, administrative and institutional organization (…);

5. The strategic plan is built through an extensive communication process aimed to involve the multiplicity of institutional, social, economic and cultural actors, constituting the urban and territorial system of reference, contributing to the elaboration of strategic development outlines proposed by the Administration (…);

6. The partnerships construction and articulation – as well as the assumption of responsibility by each involved subject – is based on a complex and articulated programming document, which defines the relations of the city with:

   a. its pertaining territorial surrounding, expliciting policies and interventions aimed, among other things, at: (i) the improvement of home/work/leisure; the commuting conditions, the quality of life conditions, the social security and the urban welfare policies, (ii) the strengthening of economic development conditions, (iii) the strengthening of infrastructure systems in order to support the proximity development and equal territorial opportunities at the local level and the connections with the trans-regional, national and European networks;

   b. the belonging region for extending and enhancing the inter-institutional reference system and for participating, in a structured and conscious manner, to the construction of the operational programs for the 2007-2013 period;

   c. other national and European cities and regions, in a broadened process of communicative attention, in order to build interaction networks and economic and cultural exchanges;

Guidelines for the set up of Strategic Plans of Cities (Ministry of Infrastructures and Transport, 2004)

§ 3.2 – The possible structure of the Strategic Plan

In terms of guidance, the Plan provides strategic action lines, interactive and mutually reinforcing, dedicated to:

a) the city and region inhabitants, foreseeing policies and interventions, both physical and immaterial, able to increase the quality of life, fostering:
   – a sustainable and socially inclusive development, in favor, first of all, of most vulnerable and marginalized population groups;
   – the creation of opportunities designed to preserve and enhance human capital;

b) the strengthening of urban and territorial interventions through the best setting of physical, functional and environmental of the city and territory, exploiting the strengths and breaking down the weakness factors so as:
   – to cease the conditions decreeing peripherality;
   – to invert the development trends within the city and territory, acting on the rehabilitation of physically and socially degraded areas to develop, starting from the local system, processes of rebalancing and cohesion;
   – to increase the local system attractiveness towards investments oriented to support innovation and sustainable development;

c) The improvement and strengthening of organizational and management capacity of the public administration as a condition for:
   – ruling the participatory and partnership process at the local level;
   – improving the communication capacity in order to build alliances and networks of exchange, interaction and complementarity at European, national and regional level.

In addition to these instrumental goals, the MIT charges the strategic plans of more complex and structural expectations. Within the *Guidelines*, in fact, the Strategic Plan is «preminently the political design of medium to long-term development for urban and metropolitan areas, seeking the competitiveness within a supra-local prospect through the construction of arrangements amongst social and institutional actors in the city and in its territory, and through the promotion of national and transnational networks of alliances between cities and between regions» (MIT, 2004, p. 2). Aiming to overcome the administrative boundaries barriers, the Strategic Plan should provide the city for «the opportunity to address the dichotomy between the areas of development and of attractiveness concentration, and the areas of urban decay and social marginality, resetting their prospects for physical, economic and social regeneration, within a large regional scale» (MIT, 2004, p. 3). Consequently, the preferred areas for the activation of strategic planning processes are the metropolitan areas or those territorial systems were the goal of polycentric development may be pursued in a more effective way.

Starting from these territorial dimensions, municipalities are asked to direct the projects emerging from strategic planning processes towards some major themes:

- policies and interventions aimed at the increasing the quality of life within cities, while acting on the inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups and creating opportunities for human capital qualification;
- projects that can act on the balance between city and its regional context particularly on areas where the redevelopment may help in reducing peripherality and in promoting the attractiveness of those functions supporting social and economic regeneration processes;
- actions intended to create public collective goods, including those immaterial and organizational steps needed to ensure the effective participation and partnership forms within the strategic plans building and management phases.

Concerning the suitable methodology for the construction of strategic plans, the *Guidelines* recall those practices made in national and international experiences: a propulsive role by the municipality leading the process, the continuous involvement of multiple social and economic stakeholders, the importance given to the listening and communication activities, the public subscription of commitments by those public and private actors interested in the plan implementation, the monitoring and evaluation of the projects against pre-identified objectives. Along with the emphasis on the process and on planning as a "relational" activity, it is still recalled the need to consider the strategic frameworks as reliable planning frameworks or as consistent sets of strategies, objectives and local development projects, even able of suggesting appropriate organizational and management models in order to ensure the integration among policies and planning levels.

4. Territories and governance: different interpretations at regional level

The program of the MIT envisaged a key role by the Regions at various stages of the initiative. First of all, Regions were asked to adapt the contents of the MIT *Guidelines* to their priorities in terms of regional and urban development. In addition, Regions were called to define the rules in order to select the cities where the strategic plans should have been promoted. Finally, they were called upon to manage the implementation and evaluation of strategic plans of cities.

The flexible options provided by the national *Guidelines* allowed Regions to respond to these tasks with quite diverse orientation and styles of governance:

- some Regions have considered the policy of strategic planning in the cities explicitly functional in pursuing the objectives of territorial development at a regional level;
- other Regions, drawing on the more purely voluntary and opened character of the first strategic plans in Italy, entailed considerable autonomy to the municipalities in building territorial coalitions and in the identification of development strategies at the local level.

The most emblematic example about the first conception is found in Apulia, where the Region has taken a strong role as a director of strategic planning initiatives and of the local projects connection with the regional development strategies. Through its regional "Guidelines" (published in 2007 and called "Guidelines for the strategic planning") the Region has developed a methodological approach having three key objectives: (1) making more consistent the strategic planning processes at the local scale, in order to achieve greater comparability of results; (2) making the projects contained in the strategic plans, more functional to the EU's 2007-2013 programs by quality standards and prior evaluation procedures that can give greater implementation assurance; (3) coordinating the strategic plans outcomes with the other government tools of territorial development, particularly the Regional Spatial Plan and the Regional Transport Plan. In Apulia it is made an explicit option in favor of inter-municipal coalition for strategic planning, in substantial continuity with the option practiced with the "Integrated Territorial Projects" carried out in the period 2000-2006. The ten territorial strategic plans are a finalized expression of territorial coalitions involving the major urban areas of the region (Bari, Taranto, Foggia, Barletta-Andria-Trani, Brindisi, Lecce), as well as those local systems characterized by particular elements of identity and territorial cohesion (Daunians Mountains, Murgia, Southern Salento).

In Campania, the programmatic assumptions moved in line with the Apulian case but produced highly controversial or even partial results (as in the case of the uncompleted Strategic Plan of Naples). The initial intentions were to strengthen the strategic policy for the city already developed in the programming period 2000-2006 and based on the Integrated Territorial Projects aimed at the urban areas of the five provincial capitals. These guidelines were further enhanced during the preparing process of the Regional Spatial Plan (approved in 2008), a document based on the principles of strategic planning where the major cities in the region are represented as nodes on which is founded the whole territorial development of the region.

In addition, the Campania Region concentrates all the available resources just on five strategic plans, ensuring municipalities a greater investment for the management of planning processes, compared to all other regions. However, during the time between the start of strategic planning processes and their conclusion, the stearing role of the Region weakens gradually. In the five urban centers, overlapping with the provincial capitals (Naples, Salerno, Caserta, Avellino, Benevento), the strategic planning processes have been started, but do not follow the provisions of coordination and integration to the regional policies that were initially planned. Consequently, the five strategic plans will substantially follow independent paths, reaching project outcomes (sometimes partial or incomplete) the scope of which is still difficult to assess. Instead of Apulia and Campania, in Sardinia and Sicily it prevailed a more neutral role of the Region regarding the coalitions and the priorities to be focused through the strategic plans. The result is a strong proliferation and heterogeneity of strategic plans at the local scale.

In Sardinia, the issue of urban development and the encouragement of "new governance tools" in urban areas were already focused in the structural funds 2000-2006, which provided the opportunity for cities to receive funding for the construction of "strategic urban plans". This chance was provided to a wide variety of municipalities, since the Regions divided the Sardinian urban system into three main types: (a) systems with metropolitan characters (Cagliari and Sassari), for which the priorities are to strengthen services of excellence and the rare features, in addition to the recovery of degraded or socially problematic areas, (b) the medium-sized cities (provincial capitals or cities with more than 15,000 inhabitants), where it is necessary to strengthen those functions supporting their territorial and productive systems, and (c) the smaller towns, considered as important points of animation for the inland and low population density areas.

The synergy between the financial resources provided in the 2000-2006 programming cycle and the MIT program has enabled the Region of Sardinia to trigger a large number of strategic planning processes. It is possible to order this complex web of local initiatives in three main families. First, the strategic plans of major cities identified by the criteria of the national Guidelines (Alghero, Cagliari, Carbonia, Iglesias, Nuoro, Olbia, Oristano, St. Helens, Sassari, Selangor), with a predominantly municipal character, even though there have been processes of openness such as in the metropolitan area of the regional capital, Cagliari. Secondly, the 23 strategic plans supported by the 2000-2006 financial resources, which have been also conducted according to the logic of cooperation in situations of particular thematic or territorial contiguity. Finally, a sort of "coordinating" strategic plans, arising from the opportunity given to the provincial capitals (seized by Sulcis, Nuoro, Oristano, Sassari) to develop planning processes aimed at making complementary all the projects emerging from the municipal strategic plans. In general, despite a highly fragmented situations in terms of strategies and local conditions, the strategic planning processes have been brought to completion in short time, compared to other regional contexts.

In Sicily, the stearing role assumed by the regional government is even more weak, targeting just two population thresholds – 30,000 inhabitants for single cities, or 50,000 inhabitants for coalitions of cities – as requisite to promote a candidature. The identification of the municipalities beneficiary of the incentives was held in two phases: the first (2006-2009), which led to the activation of 13 strategic planning processes, six of which were promoted by coalitions of local authorities – including the metropolitan area of the second city of the region, Catania –; the second (2007-2010), which allowed the preparation of other 17 strategic plans (including those of Palermo, Messina and Syracuse), ten of which were inter-municipal ones. Overall, strategic planning has involved 213 Sicilian municipalities, where is concentrated more than 80% of the regional population.

The prevalence of such an explicit bottom-up approach in Sicily, is explained by some characteristics rooted in the governance of the regional territorial policies. In the absence of clear regional guidelines in the field of urban development, and without a regional land use plan, it has prevailed for over a decade, the practice of delegating to municipalities the making of strategies for sub-regional development policies.

This is clearly evident in all regional planning initiatives promoted through national or EU's programs, such us the Territorial Pacts or the Territorial Integrated Projects promoted in 2000-2006. Consequently, it is hard to consider the urban strategic plans in this Region as a deliberate contribution to the integration between regional and local territorial policies.

Table 1 - Models of governance and number of strategic plans in the Southern regions

Region	Approach	Strategic Plans	Intermunicipal Strategic Plans
Molise	Top Down	1	1
Abruzzo	Top Down	10	6
Apulia	Top Down	10	10
Basilicata	Top Down	2	0
Campania	Top Down	5	0
Calabria	Mixed	11	4
Sicily	Bottom Up	30	16
Sardinia	Bottom Up	10	1
		79	**38**

The picture emerging from the sample of the four studied regions shows that the interpretation of strategic planning processes and their position within the regional governance can take very different forms. In general terms we can say that the strategic planning model adopted in the South appears as an "hybrid" between the strategic approaches developed in the cities of Northern Italy (marked by a strongly proactive and flexible character) and the programming approach promoted by the EU's regional policy and based on projects integration and effectiveness. Southern strategic plans should therefore be considered as tools of regional policy (and of EUs policy in particular) but developed with that inclusive and participatory approach which is typical of those strategic plans aimed at overcoming the rigidity of traditional urban policies.

In addition, the role attributed to the strategic plans must be necessarily linked to the interpretation of urban and territorial policy issued in the different regional contexts. In a case such as Apulia, strategic plans are prepared in a phase of deep planning innovation in the government of territorial development. This has meant that strategic plans were considered as a real contribution to the building of a new regional spatial strategy. In a case like Sicily, the richness of local initiatives does not apper to be balanced by a structured and integrated territorial policy at the regional level, with the consequence to increase policy and governance fragmentation.

Chart 1 – Municipal (black simbol) and InterMunicipal Strategic Plans in the Southern regions

Municipal Strategic Plans
Inter-Municipal Strategic Plans
Centre-North Regions
Southern Regions
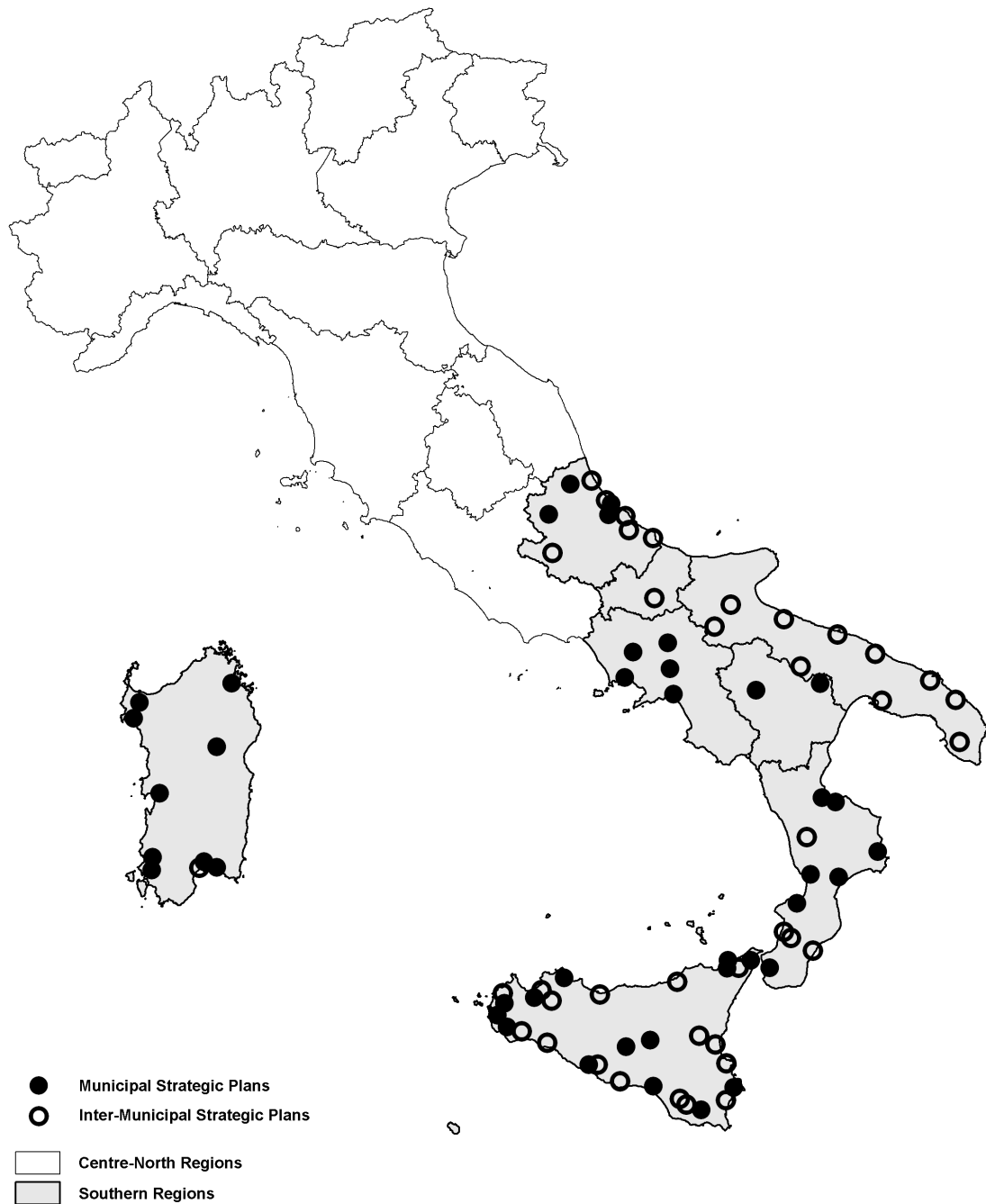
5. Concluding remarks

The reduced time occurring from the conclusion of most of the strategic planning processes in the Southern cities involved, makes premature an organic evaluation about the effectiveness of each single planning experiment. Moreover, only recently are appearing in the italian literature contributions proposing to extract general lessons from the experiences developed in last years (Vinci, 2010a; Pasqui, 2011). At present, it is possible to identify some general issues which must be included into a broader discourse around the evolution of urban policy in Italy and the effectiveness of regional policy in Southern regions. I propose to to identify three main issues around which it is necessary to build a critical discourse about the experience of strategic planning:

- the relationship between public policy and urban policy in general;
- the question of management or the "implementation gap";
- the question of the selectivity (of strategy and policy);

About the first question, Pasqui (2011) states that the Southern strategic planning experiences need to be understood in the light of the interpretation of a cycle regarding both policy and politics in the whole national context. Pasqui argues that the nexus «between city and development – and, ultimately, also the same change in the urban question in Italy (...) after the collapse of the local and national political regulatory systems happened in the early '90s – depends in an essential way from the parable of a political cycle that now seems largely exhausted» (Pasqui, 2011, p. 67). As a result, many strategic plans of the Southern cities are likely to "arrive late" because – after more than a decade of experimentation in the field of urban policies which culminated in the late 90s – «the climate is not best suited to initiate processes that require care and cohesion, technical and political responsibilities» (Pasqui, 2011, p. 68), like those such extensive objectives demanded to the cities by the national *Guidelines*. At local level, the weakening of the political agenda referring to urban development is manifested especially in terms of weakness of the political leadership within the planning processes. Camagni for example says (2010) that in the Southern strategic plans, the emergence of believing local leadership has been limited by the presence of public incentives, without which many planning processes would not have been initiated.

The leadership weakness tends to be automatically reflected on the second question, namely the chance that the visions and planning frameworks provided by the strategic plans would be translated into sustainable programs in political, economic and technical terms. The involvement of private capitals in addition to an overall fragility of the public leadership – Camagni adds (2010, p. 99) – is a weakness that many strategic plans will meet in the transition from the "ideation" to the "realization" phases. Looking at the strategic plans from the perspective of hundreds of local development projects conducted over the past two decades in Southern Italy, Deidda argues how this mosaic confirms a sort of Italian anomaly that would be a «good capacity to build frames and programs, for which exist adequate cognitive resources, and a widespread inability to make them live through good projects, consistent actions and interventions.» (Deidda, 2011, p.112). The phase of implementation – especially at large territorial scale or when plans have innovative and complex nature – is a very critical stage, because many problems which have not been glimpsed in the design phases might occur later, into the operational phase. Under these conditions – Deidda still states – the "laboratory effect"

thus ends in running out itself, without the chance to transfer good practices and ensuring the institutionalization of successful solutions (Deidda, 2011, p.114).

The selectivity matter may in turn be divided into two closely interdependent issues: the first, arising from the ability of the political-institutional systems with regulating roles in the process – in this case the Regions – of limiting the number planning experiments to the areas with greatest potential in terms of local development and contribution to regional priorities; the second one refers to the ability of planning processes at the local scale to identify limited set of projects and policies which can trigger real "breaking" processes in the local development model.

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