

Governing with the Citizens

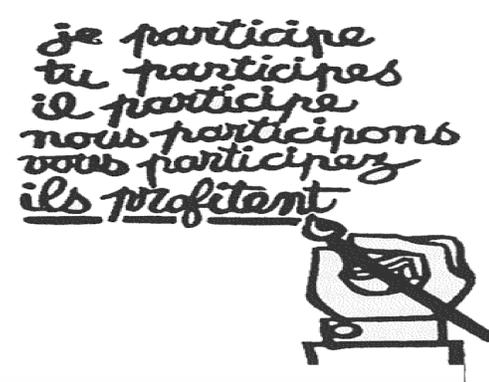
Strategic Planning: Participation and Deliberation in Urban Governance

Sonia Bussu

In recent years there has been much political and academic interest in new modes of local governance, which are increasingly based on deliberative mechanisms and engage larger sectors of the population. This comparative case-study of strategic planning in four medium-sized Italian cities (Trento, Sassari, Prato and Lecce), characterized by different socio-political and economic contexts, intends to contribute to bridging the gap between two theoretical paradigms that, albeit their distance, often study the empirical phenomena: URBAN GOVERNANCE and DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY. This study intends to examine issues of participation and governance at the urban level, in a context of multi-level governance.

- What is the impact of strategic planning on the local polity?
- How is such an impact enhanced or hindered by local context?

The comparative case-study will help to evidence the impact of SP on the local polity and how such an impact is either hindered or enhanced by endogenous factors (i.e. pre-existing associational density and the degree of strength and autonomy of the local leadership) and exogenous factors (i.e. institutional constraints and opportunities at other jurisdictional levels).



Strategic urban planning (SP) entails a collective vision of the territory's future, elaborated through the involvement of the local community within deliberative forums. Local stakeholders define strategies that can enhance economic development and competitiveness, but also improve liveability and strengthen social cohesion.



Cases	Associational Density	Leadership	Degree of Autonomy
Trento	High	Local: Centre-Left Provincial: Centre-Left Strong centre-left municipal administration since the early 1990s	Autonomous Province
Prato	High	Local: Centre-right Provincial: Centre-left Regional: Centre-left First centre-right local government after over 60 years	Ordinary Statute
Sassari	Medium	Local: Centre-left Provincial: Centre-left Regional: Centre-right Fragmented party structure; centre-left municipal administration following centre-right	Autonomous Region
Lecce	Low	Local: Centre-right Provincial: Centre-right Regional: Centre-left Strong centre-right local administration on its third mandate	Ordinary Statute

Methods

Data collection is based on textual and content analysis of official documents and websites, local newspapers and other relevant written and video material, and on semi-structured in-depth interviews with a variety of actors involved in SP. Interviewees were selected among participants in SP, ensuring as far as possible a balanced mixture of all interests involved, whether institutional, private or social.

Preliminary Findings

Empirical research has been carried out in Trento (36 interviews) and Sassari (46 interviews). Preliminary findings seem to show that:

- Strong leadership (whether political or administrative) and continuity of such leadership is pivotal to coordinate and sustain participatory mechanisms;
- An understanding of social capital *à la* Coleman (1990) (social capital is created when relations among people change so as to facilitate action) is more useful than Putnam's (1993) culturalist understanding of the concept (as pre-existing associational density will determine good governance), in order to understand the impact of participatory mechanisms;
- Even where there is strong leadership, lack of coordination among levels of government limits the input of these initiatives – without tangible results it is difficult to sustain participation;
- The mayor often acts as the champion of these initiatives, whilst the Council is left at margins, with important repercussions in terms of local democracy and the relationship between representative and participatory democracy.

		Leadership	
		+	—
Associational Density	+	Trento	Prato
	—	Lecce	Sassari

References

- Coleman, J.S. (1990), *Foundation of Social Theory*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
Putnam, R.D. (1993), *Making Democracy Work: Civic Tradition in Modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press