PLANNERS' TECHNICAL EXPERTISE. CHANGING PARADIGMS AND PRACTICES IN THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Why is a planner hired? What is the specific knowledge and know-how that he/she brings into a planning process? These questions recurrently arise in planning practice owing to the rapid change taking place in disciplinary approaches and methods, the legal and administrative framework, and the ways in which actors interact. It is well known that political and technical aspects are intertwined in the planning process, and this may give planners a key role also in the definition of the goals for action. More often, however, common knowledge prevails in public decisions.

Planners have long been required to address issues no longer circumscribed to physical spatial organization and planning process management. Consequently, technical expertise has evolved from its architectural-engineering base to include socio-economic and environmental issues, as well as communication methods and participatory procedures. This evolution is still ongoing, challenging professional practices and educational programmes. This progress responds to the need for sounder methods and more effective tools with which to manage complex problems. But at the same time it produces a looser image of the planner as involved in a variety of issues, and distant from such strong professional figures as the engineer and the architect, who, in many countries, are traditionally responsible for physical planning. As a consequence, a wider – but well-defined – field of competence must be devised.

The paper focuses, after an analysis of how technical paradigms have evolved in the planning discipline in Italy, on the emerging types of expertise that are expected to form the planners' "toolbox". This requires linking the discipline's progress with that of the professional practice (controlled by the professional orders), overcoming the so-called theory/practice gap, as well as connecting the legal framework with the educational system (which still reflects traditional models). The analysis of the emerging need for planning expertise makes it possible to define some paradigmatic "planning figures" which can well represent the variety of technical expertise required.

Keywords: technical expertise, planner's profession, Italy

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1. Introduction. Why is a planner hired?

Why is a planner hired? What is the specific knowledge and know-how that he/she brings into a planning process? These questions recurrently arise in planning practice owing to the rapid change taking place not only in socio-economic phenomena, but also in disciplinary approaches and methods, the legal and administrative framework, and the ways in which actors interact.

The complexity of urban government requires an extraordinary ability to understand change, to forecast future trends, to build consensus on feasible proposals, and to construct coalitions. There is also an urgent need to give efficiency and equity to the public choices taken in the concrete forms of urban space organization and land-use regulation. Accordingly, specialized/sectoral knowledge is required together with expertise in decisional and implementation process management. In short, there is an increasing need for planning, although it is an activity whose legally binding rules and formally defined disciplinary practices recurrently become obsolete, and even more so land-use plans (Alfasi et al., 2012).

It is well known that political and technical aspects are intertwined in the planning process, and this often implies that technical expertise (which should "complement democratic discourse": Alexander, 2008, p. 210) play a minor role, while common knowledge, and in many cases political rhetoric, tend to prevail in many public decisions. This is why in some countries, Italy included, planners are marginalized with respect to administrators (Mazza, 2002, p. 24).

While for some scholars the focus of planning theory has been put on ethical and political issues, so that "planning theory literature… tends to flatten down planning to politics", thus marginalizing or cancelling the role of technical knowledge (Mazza, 2002, p.17, p.12), for others the opposite is true: "much of professional rhetoric of planning" remains "resolutely attached to the reassuring claims of technical expertise". It is stressed, anyway, that there is "at least implicit recognition that moral judgements and ethical questions pervade the daily practice of planning" (Campbell and Marshall, 1998, p. 117; also: Campbell and Marshall, 2000a).

Planning is a procedure applied to a variety of contexts and decisional processes, some of which are highly specialized, while others are more loosely connected to practices organized and defended by professional orders and associations. Planners have long been required to address issues no longer circumscribed to physical spatial organization and urban planning process management. Consequently, technical expertise has evolved from its architectural-engineering bases to include socio-economic and environmental issues, as well as communication methods and participatory procedures, and the process is still ongoing, challenging professional practices and educational programmes.

This progress responds to the need for sounder methods and more effective tools with which to manage complex problems. But at the same time it produces a fragmented discipline and a looser image of the planner (Mazza, 2002). The planner, in fact, is involved in a variety of issues, and his/her status is distant from that of such strong professionals as the engineer and the architect, who in many countries are entitled to take responsibilities for spatial planning.

In general, it is expected that a planning process (or a 'plan' as a statutory document) will bring 'rationality' (in its different conceptions: Alexander, 2000) into spontaneous processes (the market, social behaviours), as well as efficiency, effectiveness and equity into public decisions, operating with a view to the 'public interest', whatever its definition (Campbell and Marshall, 2002). From this perspective, what is the expertise provided by the planner?

The paper addresses these issues with clearly borne in mind that motivations for planning must be found in the search for collective benefits, going beyond the "implementation of a set of statutory requirements". This implies that the "importance of competence should never be disregarded" (Campbell, 2010, p. 472), because the "status of planners as experts resides in their command of specialist knowledge" (Rydin, 2007, p. 53).

The paper focuses on the Italian case by analyzing the progress of technical expertise from the traditional 'urbanistica' – characterized by the integration into the figure of the architect of the diverse competencies required by recurrent professional demand – to a more complex articulation of competencies.

The research questions addressed – with specific regard to the Italian case – are the following:

- What specific technical expertise is required of the planner?
- Is planning a compact discipline or is it fragmented into a number of sectoral bodies of expertise?
- What evolution has occurred in the educational system and what is the role of the professional orders?
- What are the expert roles performed by the planner?

An additional question regards whether there is a short-circuit between the demand for and supply of qualified expertise, considering that in many cases the awareness necessary to involve an expert emerges from a structured representation of problems and feasible solutions, as well as from the availability of qualified professionals.

In the paper, some key terms are used to define the issues at stake. In particular, by 'knowledge' is meant a person's endowment of information organized by means of theories and methods (on the basis of "causal relationships": Rydin, 2007, p. 53), considering that knowledge production follows different paradigms (Alexander. 2010), but in planning it is mostly "socially constructed" (Healey, 1997), or "constructed through social processes" (Rydin, 2007, p. 52). Know-how (competence) is the ability to make use of knowledge in order to achieve the results expected. Expertise is the capacity of a person (often recognised as a professional) to make use of appropriate knowledge and know-how to analyze problems and propose solutions.

Planning theory and planning practice

The nature of planning is primarily operational. Its rationale consists in its capacity to yield results better than those expected from the unplanned course of events. Its main goal is "the development of practical outputs" (Goldstein and Carmin, 2006, p. 68) in order to provide benefits for the communities involved, and its strength

consists in the ability to furnish a strategic framework that interacts with the operational solutions (Mazza, 2002, p. 11).

These premises stress that the discipline is oriented to devising and applying operational methods and tools, and that it accompanies political actions in order to improve current conditions from a 'public interest' perspective (Alexander, 2002; Campbell & Marshall, 2002). This is a key issue which raises ethical concerns due to the application of values, so that a strong role is assigned to political representatives and – when activated – to participatory processes.

It is traditionally assumed that, in order to pursue specific goals, a government authority "can select one instrument among others" (Ponzini, 2008, p. 12), but policy tools and government instruments – planning practices included - become part of the 'government culture' and problems are often expressed in light of the consolidated technical-administrative instruments. This is the case of Italy, where the role of municipal plans has become consolidated in the public opinion (notwithstanding their unsatisfactory effectiveness), and professionals are educated and trained in order to address problems by means of the statutory planning instruments.

It is probably counter-intuitive that the prevalent operational orientation of planning and the complex technical/political relationships require a strong theoretical basis. In fact, actions must be supported by a sound knowledge of reality, an appropriate interpretation of phenomena and trends, as well as by the ability to connect diverse points of view and sectors of activity. And this implies a sound theory and interdisciplinarity. In fact, planning "has a history of drawing from many disciplines" (Goldstein and Carmin, 2006, p. 68) and this can be considered "a weakness – making it difficult for planners to know exactly what belongs to planning", while "others see it as a key strength" (Davoudi, 2010, p. 33). The risk is the fragmentation of the discipline and the coexistence of different – sometimes conflicting – theories and methods, while there is a strong need for technical knowledge meant as "a formalized knowledge that is linked to defined theoretical frameworks and leads and affects practices" (Mazza, 2002, p. 12).

Planning is characterized differently among countries, but it is generally founded on technical sectors – in particular urban design – on the one hand, and it shares methods and tools with social sciences on the other (Goldstein and Carmin, 2006, p. 67). In short, it concerns policies and practices, and its scientific bases are related to sociology, economics, environmental sciences, geography and GIS, but it also includes creativity and know-how in urban design and many other substantive fields of operation.

A key question regards the connections between methodological and operational aspects, and therefore the extent to which theory is important for practice and, on the contrary, the extent to which experience is important for innovating theory (Salet and Finka, 2010). In planning, theoretical issues are not commonly addressed by practitioners, who leave to academia the task of working on theory, developing criticisms, and formulating new proposals, while practitioners are subject to well-regulated procedures and must apply rules and respect legal constraints. These differentiated roles create the 'theory-practice gap', which regards "how theory is or is not used in planning practice" (Allmendiger, 2002-2009, p. 23) or, as Alexander (2010) put it, whether "planning theory affects practice", due to the complexity of

transferring innovative knowledge into operational practices. In this regard, it must be considered that "epistemic communities… or communities of practice… operate to construct knowledge in processes that involve scientific experts and practitioners" (Rydin, 2007, p. 53).

As said, planning is intrinsically locally connected because it is related to the politico-administrative system, the educational tradition, and the professional environment, and because it reflects a wider institutional culture. However, there are common bases and similar historical developments, together with shared current concerns. A first step in the evolution of the discipline dates back to the public interventions in the economy after the 1929 crisis, which gave a wider role to the state, enlarged the areas of regulation from the physical space of the city to other sectors, thereby requiring the development of methods and techniques for programming – temporally and spatially – the interventions and assessing the expected results. A second step can be identified in the 1960s, when planning "became firmly ensconced as a public sector activity that drew increasingly on formal social-scientific theories and rational decision-making to solve problems" (Forsyth, 2007, p. 464). In the 1950s planning split between "'town planning', which is essentially procedural, and 'urban design', which is essentially qualitative" (Alfasi and Portugali, 2007, p.166).

These are the bases on which the discipline has developed in recent decades, with growing exchange and integration across regions and countries. However, differences among countries in planning trends and practices still persist. In recent years, planners in the USA and the UK "have seen themselves as applied social scientists" (Stiftel and Mukhopadhyay, 2007, p. 565), after a struggle with Urban Design and Architecture (Anselin et al., 2011), whereas "Design approaches to planning appear to be more common in continental European schools and in schools in developing regions" (Stiftel and Mukhopadhyay, 2007, p. 565).

In the European countries planning has evolved significantly in recent years, defining a discipline not centred on design and rational-comprehensive urban planning models. In fact, European integration has produced an amalgam of intervention models which were once markedly distant. Moreover, professional planners increasingly share approaches, languages and tools (Fürst, 2009), although there are still important differences in the founding bases (national legal systems, in particular), in their denominations (Vogelij, 2008), and in the instruments and procedures adopted (Tira et al. 2011).

In Italy, the delivery of planning courses mainly at the schools of Architecture and Civil Engineering and a professional practice still dominated by such practitioners keep the discipline connected to urban design.

2. New planning demands. The Italian planning case

The Italian case is characterized by a paradox: a unique urban history but poor current urban development. This is due to the ineffectiveness of planning practices, which goes hand in hand with the weak recognition of the role of planners, in contrast to the celebration of a handful of 'archistars'. The inefficiency and the

lengthiness of planning processes reflect, on the one hand, patron-client relationships and the role of 'dark and grey networks' (Scattoni and Falco, 2011, p. 48), on the other the involvement of practitioners not specifically trained or professionally focused on planning (Scattoni and Falco, 2011, p. 48).
The Italian planning system has been defined in terms of an 'urbanism tradition' (CEC, 1997; Espon, 2007). In fact, it is based on urban design and centred on the municipal plan, although this level is nested in a hierarchy of different spatial plans, and in recent years sectoral programmes and different approaches and practices have emerged. The innovation has concerned different issues: firstly, the form of plans, then their contents, lastly the planning process.
As regards the form of plans, the following aspects should be stressed:

- a distinction between structural features and operational contents, with the former role assigned to spatial/regional plans, but also to structural municipal plans framing operational/ implementation documents (Tira and Zanon, 2011; Scattoni and Falco, 2012);
- the multiplication of spatial (regional, provincial, landscape defence) and sectoral plans;
- the activation of a variety of implementation plans by means of concerted actions (Gelli, 2011; Governa and Salone, 2005);

As regards contents, plans must deal not only with the organization of new urban zones but also the rehabilitation of already built-up areas (historical centres included), the protection of natural values, and support for economic development (Piccinato, 2010). The innovation of the planning process is closely bound up with the previously cited aspects, and it includes citizens' participation, a pivotal role of assessment procedures, and a growing weight of public-private partnerships. More generally, there is abandonment – in many cases without it being clearly stated – of the 'rational-comprehensive' model in favour of a multi-level system and an incrementalist method. And the technical competencies required must change accordingly.

3. Evolution of planning expertise

In Italy, planning is a regulated profession as far as statutory plans are concerned, while numerous other planning processes and actions do not require a chartered professional. Territorial and urban planning processes must be conducted, and in particular concluded, by an expert who is entitled to 'sign' such a plan. This implies that different figures intervene in the process, but its coordination is the duty of a chartered professional. Social scientists, geographers and experts in legal and administrative matters are therefore excluded.
With the inception of formalized urban planning procedures (in the 1930s and in particular after the approval of the urban planning law in 1942), both substantive and procedural contents started to be addressed by architects and civil engineers. Subsequent changes in the issues to be tackled and the way in which planning processes must be managed have not reduced the role of such technicians, who are well protected by their professional orders.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the shift towards regional development and the emergence of social concerns required new kinds of expertise. Regional economics and regional science began to play a role, in particular at the territorial level, while concerns about urban quality and the effectiveness of urban plans – reflected in new legal requirements – entailed a renewal of planners' expertise. The drawing up of municipal plans required more accurate forecasts as well as precise quantitative definitions of housing, social service, and green area needs. Zoning became a more structured way to provide rules. Notwithstanding the search for 'fairness' and 'transparency', the planning process remained top-down and bureaucratic.

In the 1980s the issues were, at the territorial level, landscape defence and environmental protection. At the urban level, the rehabilitation of historical heritage and, more extensively, of the built environment – including derelict land and industrial sites –- constituted the main theoretical and operational innovations. These concerns required not only assigning new tasks to local authorities but also defining new challenges for urban planning, and soliciting new technical expertise. Finally, a response to the complexity, lengthiness and ineffectiveness of usual planning was found in an incremental approach based on "a kind of informal deregulation, characterized by 'doing', with emphasis on achieving greater effectiveness through specific urban policies" (Gelli, 2001, p.190).

In the 1990s other challenges and opportunities brought about further innovations. In particular, the perspective of sustainable development and the adoption of practices such as Local Agenda 21s – together with many environmental conflicts – were characterized by the involvement and participation of citizens, interest groups and associations. And new kinds of expertise started to be required to facilitate the participation and involvement of citizens and social actors, as well as for dispute resolution.

Other changes characterized the controversial 'negotiated programming' schemes which, at different politico-administrative levels, produced "public-private agreements or pacts" formally reached among different administrations and interest groups (Gelli, 2001). This period was also characterized by the role of European Union's projects and programmes as well as by the European spatial planning culture (Governa & Saccomani, 2004). In particular, urban regeneration programmes marked an evolutionary shift "from physical renewal to urban regeneration" (Governa & Saccomani, 2004, p. 337), because they addressed spatial-architectonic aspects together with social and urban quality issues – including competitiveness goals. As regards the expertise required, the incrementalist method implies the capacity to choose the appropriate 'policy tool' (Ponzini, 2008), to assess alternatives, and to elaborate agreements among different actors. Communication, assessment and negotiation should characterize such planning processes.

Other issues at the urban level regard efficiency, quality and equity of land-use plans. And these have prompted experimentation with new planning methods and tools, in particular with 'equalization' schemes intended to balance the gains and losses due to zoning prescriptions, as well as to share the advantages of development rights between private operators and the public authority.

Planning approach	Perspective	Planning model	Key technical figure	Expertise required	Legitimacy and justification for planning
Urbanism	Aesthetic quality	Urban design	'Integral architect'	Town planning	Architecture history/ Creativity
	Functionalism	Planning techniques (infrastructure, functions allocation)	Civil engineer Infrastructure engineer	Spatial organization Infrastructure planning	Techniques
	Land-use rights assignment	Zoning	Law expert	Legal framework	Law
	Planning procedures	The plan 'as the law says'	Administrative procedures expert	Legal framework / organization management	Legal procedures
Economic / local development	Socio-economic development	Regional development plan	Economist/ social activist	Regional / local development	Effectiveness of public expenditure
	Service provision	Social planning	Sociologist	Sociology	Social quality
Concerted planning	Effectiveness Equity Feasibility	Incremental planning Land-adjustment PPP	Assessment expert Mediator	Assessment /	Consensus
	Multi-level governance	Multi-level planning	Mediator	Communication / Interaction	Agreements
Participatory planning	Citizens' involvement /participation	Communicative planning	Facilitator	Communication / Interaction	Deliberation/ Plan effectiveness /efficiency

Table 1. Planning approaches , motivations, models, and practices, planners' roles, expertise and legitimacy for planning in Italy.

The current situation is therefore characterized by a plurality of issues to be tackled by different planning processes and documents, and the need for technical expertise has increased and also diversified. The recent evolution of technical instruments from GIS to data management and communication tools (internet and social

networks) has added new requirements for planners, who must intervene in complex processes and appropriately manage such a variety of instruments.
In table 1. it is provided a synthesis of the coexisting planning approaches, motivations for action, planning models used, key technical figures involved, expertise required, and legitimacy foundations for planning (and plans as legally binding documents).

4. The educational system and the professional environment

The change in the planning practices required the innovation of professional expertise. The need for change in the educational process was well understood back in the 1970s by Giovanni Astengo, who founded the first planning school in Italy at the Faculty of Architecture in Venice (Vettoretto, 2009). The new school gathered scholars qualified in various disciplines, but recognition of the professional role of planners was slow in coming because of the consolidated role of architects and engineers and the opposition raised by their professional orders.
In recent years, as the other European countries, the Italian universities have been reformed following the 'Bologna system', and also planning courses have been re-organized (Davoudi and Ellison, 2006; Geppert and Verhage, 2008; Geppert and Cotella, 2010). Not only have courses been split into undergraduate/master levels, but greater freedom has been granted to schools, which can now propose a variety of programmes. In theory, a break in the traditionally strict connection among the school (until recently called 'Facoltà', now 'Dipartimento'), the degree course, and professional practice has been introduced. In the past, in fact, graduates from faculties of architecture, having passed a 'state examination', could enrol with the professional Order of Architects, similarly to engineers, doctors, and lawyers, all of whom were entitled to enter professional orders. Now, different disciplinary schools can offer similar degree courses, and new programmes have been introduced in response to demands that had long gone unsatisfied. This innovation has required reform of the technical professions, recognizing the differentiation of specialisations and competencies, and finally accepting new figures into the boards of engineers and architects. This new system is more open than the previous one, but it reinforces the role of chartered practitioners against others whose expertise is more loosely defined, such as urban sociologists, geographers, environment analysts, etc. In particular, innovation has concerned the activation of courses, within the schools of architecture, in landscape architecture, historical heritage preservation, urban, territorial and environmental planning. The schools of engineering, for their part, have activated courses, besides the traditional one in civil engineering, in territorial and environmental engineering and in building engineering-architecture. A number of other courses relating to territorial matters have been activated, reflecting the specific orientations of the schools. For instance, undergraduate courses in landscape are offered by the schools of agriculture, while master courses in geography and cultural heritage management have been activated in the humanities faculties, and master courses in urban sociology, tourism and environmental subjects are present in the schools of sociology and economics.

An analysis of the planning courses offered by the Italian universities prompts some considerations. A total of eight master courses have been activated (plus one by a distance university). Contents and organisation are described in similar ways, but it is difficult to determine, on the basis of the usual wording of the 'Dublin descriptors' (Knowledge and understanding, Applying knowledge and understanding, Making judgements, Communication, Learning skills: Geppert, 2010), the differences among formats and contents. In general, they reflect the international debate and in particular the requirements of the 'core curriculum' proposed by AESOP and the 'common core' elaborated by ECTP-CEU, associations which devote considerable effort to gaining recognition for the role of planners (Geppert, 2008), promoting quality education, and amalgamating educational processes across Europe.
Descriptions define planning courses offered by the Italian universities not centred on urban design, which is a central subject for the schools of architecture. The aim is to train professionals able to support public authorities in the devising and implementation of policies, plans and projects. This implies knowledge of the issues tackled and the methods, instruments and procedures involved in planning processes. The planner must be familiar with economic, social, institutional, legal and ethical issues, and as a professional must be trained to support strategic, physical and land-use planning by public authorities but also by private companies. He/she must be able to coordinate experts in the various disciplines involved in urban, territorial, landscape and environmental planning processes.
Planning is considered a methodology with which to manage complex decisions, and as a process with which to draw up strategic, spatial, urban, landscape, sectoral and land-use plans. It is described as a complex and multi-disciplinary activity requiring different types of knowledge and abilities:

- ability to understand urban and territorial change, also in a historical perspective;
- knowledge and use of planning theories, methods and techniques;
- knowledge of methods and procedures for drawing up urban, territorial, landscape and environmental plans;
- ability to define strategies for urban development, spatial organisation, landscape and environmental protection;
- capacity to coordinate inter-disciplinary experts and activities;
- ability to communicate and manage participation processes;
- ability to make use of assessment procedures.

As said, the university reform has also required reform of the professional orders, which are now differentiated between undergraduate and graduate levels. The engineers' order is organised into various sectors. The civil engineers' sector gathers graduates in civil engineering, engineering-architecture, and environment and territory engineering. All of them are qualified to take responsibility in planning processes. Also the architects' order is now composed of different sectors: one is for 'traditional' architects, who can operate in all the various fields. Other sub-divisions regard historical heritage conservationists, landscape architects, and planners (Davoudi and Ellison, 2006, p. 34).

Considering the figures on the practitioners enrolled, the success of the reform has been limited. In 2008, there were only 468 planners compared with 134,507 architects. Engineers number more than 540,000, of whom one-fifth work in the civil and environmental sectors.

5. Planning paradigms and technical expertise

The following discussion rotates around the distinction between 'urban design' and 'urban planning' and draws on the distinction between 'theory in planning' and 'theory of planning' (Faludi, 1973) in order to ascertain what 'knowledge of planning' and what 'knowledge in planning' is needed.

The professional environment and the dominant demand by local authorities are still oriented towards the traditionally strong role of physical planning. But design of the urban space is one of the tasks to be accomplished by planning, and it can be regarded as either the key tool, within the 'urbanism tradition', or one of the products to be delivered by a multifaceted decisional process. More generally, planning should support the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of public decisions. But it is also concerned with goal definition. Planning expertise therefore regards the process, on the one hand, and the multiple issues addressed on the other, as well as the ability to communicate and interact with the client and the community, appropriately managing value-laden decisions. Different theoretical approaches, methodologies and knowledge characterize the action of the professional figures involved in planning.

As far as planning approaches are concerned, a variety of models coexist owing to the fragmentation of decisional processes, but an incrementalist practice dominates, together with the trend towards differentiating between strategic/structural planning levels and operational ones. Different directions are taken by regions and cities: the drawing up of specific 'strategic plans' in parallel with consolidated urban planning, re-interpretation of the statutory plans (Balducci et al. 2011), and activation of the 'two levels' system. This model integrates a strategic approach with the definition of structural-territorial aspects – concerning non-negotiable values and long-term decisions – to frame operational decisions. Current trends are strict defence of environmental and landscape aspects at the upper level and public-led operations at the lower one (this is the policy of regions like Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna), but also neo-liberal methods giving large space to private initiatives (Milan's position). The results are not entirely satisfactory: in particular, the Tuscan policy has not attained the efficiency expected (Scattoni and Falco, 2011) and Milan's planning is criticised in terms of its transparency and effectiveness (Mazza, 2009).

Methodologies connect the planning model adopted with the type of knowledge used. In particular, together with more technical-scientific methods concerning environmental, urban and social analyses and interpretation of future trends, design-oriented methods are used to elaborate proposals, and participatory methods support interaction with the actors involved.

As far as knowledge is concerned, it must be considered that in planning the scientific paradigm can be used only partially, because knowledge "informs 'good'

practice by 'enlightening' practitioners to improve their judgment rather than equipping them with technologies for better practice" (Alexander, 2010, p. 100). Therefore, different knowledge types can be recognized (after Rydin, 2007):

- empirical, relating to specific issues (design, infrastructure, assessment, etc.);
- process coordination, relating to process management ;
- communication/interaction, relating to process management and the involvement of stakeholders and citizens;
- legal/procedural, relating to process management and definition of the statutory contents of plans;
- normative, relating to the goals and decisions taken in the public interest.

The adoption of a planning model, and the use of specific methodologies and knowledge, define different professional profiles. The New Charter of Athens 2003 (ECTP-CEU, 2003) sees the planner as a scientist, a designer and a visionary, a political advisor and mediator, an urban manager. The analysis of the Italian case confirms these roles, and enables their operational definition. The proposed description may help in making planners' profiles clearer and more visible, expressing not only 'what they do' but 'what they are', considering that the legitimacy of expertise derives not only from recognition of the usefulness of the expert's knowledge but also from the trust gained by the expert. The scheme follows in some way the "role theory" (Mayo and Johnson, n.d.), because planners not only make use of their expertise, but intervene in a social arena, thus assuming a recognized role or, better a role-set, together with the associated professional responsibilities and obligations (Campbell and Marshall, 2000a, p. 300). They make use of different types of knowledge, take part in the co-production of knowledge during the planning process (Rydin, 2007) and play diverse "parts and scripts" (Mayo and Johnson, n.d., p. 3), adapting their behaviour to the context, but also contributing to change the context itself.

In short, the following planners' profiles can be described, stressing that roles depend on the specific planning approach adopted, but in many cases this choice is rather vague and multiple roles are performed.

- The 'process manager'. The planner knows how the planning machine works, first of all in legal terms. S/he is the 'driver'. This is not a minor role, because the Italian legislation is rather complicated, and a specific ability is required in order to overcome a bureaucratic application of rules (the plan as 'what the law says') which would refrain from innovating practices. Planning requires adopting an approach which can give the planner a minor (executive) or a major (consultant, social activator) role. In particular, a strategic approach should give the planner space to help change even the urban policy agenda (Pasqui, 2011). Management also involves coordination 'of' the planning process, that is, the multiplicity of actors involved, each pursuing his/her own objectives, as well as coordination 'in' the planning process, which concerns the experts in the different sectors involved. Management also requires communicative abilities, and the capacity to face the effects of the technological innovations (GIS, web-GIS, etc.) which are changing not only the materials of statutory plans (from 'paper documents' to 'electronic plans') but their

very nature (becoming dynamic, flexible, easily accessible to everyone, and hopefully interactive).

- The 'urban designer'. This is a consolidated role for the Italian tradition. The planner is expected to be able not only to physically organize the urban space connecting different structures and resolve conflicts in the use of space, but also to add value to the city. In particular, this is why the most celebrated urban planners and 'archistars' are involved in urban projects aimed at changing the face of cities suffering from economic crisis or loss of strong functions (Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum in Bilbao has become the paradigm in this regard). Expertise therefore oscillates from technical know-how concerning zoning, building codes and the like to more creative abilities. The emerging demands concerning sustainability, energy efficiency, environmental protection, urban security, require the innovation of consolidated knowledge, and the development of new urban models.

- The 'infrastructure engineer'. This is a traditional role, but innovation is rapid, and the consequences for the space organization of such 'sociotechnical' constructions (Graham, 2001) are important. Expertise therefore regards the specific structure and its effects, material and immaterial, direct and indirect, on space and society, on the environment and the landscape. The search for a more consistent connection between infrastructure networks and the territories involved (and local societies and economies) has been the focus of a programme of the Italian Ministry of the Infrastructure which showed the crucial importance of this topic and the sophisticated nature of the expertise required, which involves strategic thinking and local development perspectives (Fabbro and Mesolella, 2010; Janin Rivolin, 2010; Servillo, 2011; Zanon, 2011).

- The 'expert in local development'. Territory can be seen as the material basis on which to operate (as usual for economic development initiatives) or it can be considered the result of the complex relationships among the local society, the natural heritage and the historical organization of space (Balducci, 2011, p. 34, note). Competition among regions and cities has become a challenge for public policies and planning is progressively engaged in 'intercepting economic resources' and in supporting place-based economic development. 'Social capital' (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Trigilia, 2001) and 'institutional thickness' (Amin and Thrift, 1995; Healey, 1998) are the terms supporting this bottom-up vision and the planner is expected to play the role of a social activator, and to provide expertise in EU projects and financial support (Governa and Salone, 2004; Salone, 2010).

- The 'expert in assessment'. Planning increasingly relies on assessment of alternative proposals and on the evaluation of actions as far as environmental, social, economic effects are concerned. The ineffectiveness of traditional urban planning solicits replacement of the usual methods based on a prior design and allocation of rights and the subsequent control of the compliance of actions with legally binding rules. Also the 'two-level' articulation of plans requires the establishment of assessment criteria based on clear parameters in order to ascertain whether the goals

defined by the 'structural plan' are achieved, and what the environmental and social effects are (Scattoni and Falco, 2011; Tira and Zanon, 2011). As regards equity, this regards the equal treatment of landowners but also assessment of public spending and the effectiveness of planning because the public administration must find the resources and land to build the 'public city' (Micelli, 2002). Other issues are involved in terms of urban quality, feasibility, and sustainability. Planning tends to become a 'decision machine' generating a continuous flow of analyses, proposals, social and political interactions. It therefore requires the accurate assessment of decisions, and often negotiation with the stakeholders in order to manage land adjustment or to assign bonuses. The paradigmatic experience in terms of 'equalization practices' is that of Casalecchio di Reno, close to Bologna (Pompei, 1998), while environmental aspects were first addressed in innovative manner by the plan of Reggio Emilia (Campos Venuti, 1995).

- The 'regulator'. The planner knows how the legal framework operates and how the planning process must be developed in order to gain legitimacy for the plan. And this is strictly connected to land-use and development rights assignment. This role can simply involve the application of disciplinary knowledge or legal rules, but it is expected to go beyond such bureaucratic procedures. In fact, the innovation of planning is connected to the ability to manage land-use and development rights when the public authority grants bonuses in order to obtain additional public space, greater urban quality, and energy saving.

- The 'facilitator'. Participation is a problem of democracy (in order to involve citizens) and of efficiency (preventing the 'NIMBY syndrome'). The communicative method has become an "orthodoxy", although the search for consensus can imply quite different approaches and sensitivities (Rydin, 2007, p. 54). The consequences of this approach are important. Firstly, it supports the production of "local, experiential and contextualized knowledge", allowing the "contextualization of conventional scientific knowledge" (Rydin, 2007, p. 54). Then, it implies that planners, assuming a 'deontological' perspective (Campbell and Marshall, 2002), can help define what the public interest is among a plurality of interests. Communication expertise is not consolidated in Italy, in particular among technical planners, although participatory planning schemes in Italy are not new. In the 1960s and 1970s some charismatic architects (in particular Giancarlo De Carlo) and social activists (Danilo Dolci) experimented with participatory processes and more radical experiences. During the 1970s the city was the issue for many spontaneous political groups that pursued the 'right to the city' theorized by Henri Lefebvre, but were soon institutionalized in the form of 'neighbourhood councils'. In the 1990s the Local Agenda 21 schemes led to the activation of public participation, and in the past decade the multiplication of environmental disputes has pushed towards change in decisional methods, often after harsh social conflicts, which shows that local communities want to be informed and to take an active part in decisions. Finally, the strategic/structural role of upper-level plans, and the negotiation practices of operational levels, imply active interactions with the community, on the one hand, and landowners and economic operators on the other. A specific expertise is

therefore required for the management of participatory processes in order to avoid a misuse of citizens' involvement, to make an appropriate use of non-technical knowledge (Campbell and Marshall, 2000b) and to balance the power asymmetry among actors (Fainstein, 2000, p. 451).

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, what is the specific role for the planner? Certainly, most of the types of substantive expertise cited above do not specifically regard planners or planners alone. But some of the key roles devised require the involvement of professionals with sound specific knowledge, specialized training, and openness to experimentation (Balducci et al., 2011). In recent decades, the technical expertise of planners in Italy has been enlarged to include a variety of issues, and it is difficult to understand why the planner's role(s) is (are) not yet fully recognized. Of course, the discursive contents of most of the documents produced are not as impressive as architects' plans and engineers' calculations. But most often management of the planning process is extremely difficult and requires specific competencies. Some 'planning disasters', like that of the high-speed train project in Valle di Susa (Bobbio and Dansero, 2008), testify to the need for the appropriate management of decisional processes.

	Type of knowledge				
Planners profile	Empirical/ Technical	Planning process	Communication/ Interaction	Legal/ Procedural	Normative/ Value laden
Process manager		√	√	√	
Urban designer	√	√		√	
Infrastructure engineer	√				
Expert in local development	√		√		√
Expert in assessment	√		√		√
Regulator	√		√	√	√

Table 2. Planners profiles and types of knowledge involved.

Many of the pivotal issues characterizing planning, and in particular forecasting/time management, coordination and regulation, together with communication/interaction and assessment are fields to be covered by specific expertise. One risk is that specialization tends to fragment the discipline into a number of strands which often do not communicate with each other, bringing about, together with the "flattening

down to politics", a de-professionalization of planning (Mazza, 2002, p. 12). An effort to make specific expertise more visible (the 'roles' described above), and to coordinate the different sectors, would produce more recognizable and 'marketable' professional profiles, that are experts able to master different knowledge types, as described in table 2.

Italian planning education has been innovated, and its quality is comparable with, and competitive with, that in other countries. But planning still lacks an adequate recognition in Italy. Professional architects' orders have accepted planners but still tend to enhance the role of architects. The university reform has given sounder recognition that a specific educational process is required for planners, but the reform has given rise to a variety of courses in different subjects (geography, cultural heritage, etc.), some of which are extremely weak in professional terms, while the traditional subjects (architecture, engineering) still remain strong. Moreover, more operational expertise (typical of bachelor degrees), similarly to other technical professions (architects and engineers), is not yet recognized, although some specific competencies (GIS, for instance) are not covered by the usual degree courses.

Recognition of the roles performed by planners may help in developing awareness that different planning practices are performed, each requiring specific expertise, thus giving autonomy and visibility to policies, planning actions, and, at the same time, to planners.

In conclusion, planners are hired because they can play a specific role, and often in order "to be advocates for particular interests" (Campbell and Marshall, 2000, p. 302), but in many regards they are successful when they play more roles and these change over time, because planning becomes a learning process contributing to modify the decisional environment, and possibly the balance among the power relations.

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