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ID 1016 | THE RETURN OF PUBLIC PLANNING IN A POST-POST-POLITICAL MEMPHIS

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ABSTRACT: In the US Old South, a context that is characterized by major social and racial gaps and the worship of individual freedoms, planning has always faced significant challenges. Especially in the last couple of decades, the growth of electoral consensus in favor of a political establishment that is clearly against the very existence of any form of public spatial planning – perceived as an unbearable interference with the freedom to dispose of private property by legitimate owners – has favored the establishment of neoliberal planning methods and contents. This is true also for the southern city of Memphis, west Tennessee, the 'northern capital' of the Delta region, whose history has been shaped by king Cotton. However, in Memphis, that in many ways represents the full accomplishment of what in the literature is defined as a post-political city, i. e. the substantial death of a political debate able to reflect social conflicts together with basic forms of public welfares, few signs of interest in traditional forms of planning, i. e. an effort by public institutions to govern spatial dynamics in the name of the 'public interest,' are appearing. Surprisingly, the very actors that have played a major role on the post-political stage, are today taking a

stand against the lack of rules and boundaries for individual and corporate freedom in the real estate sector. This paper discusses the nature of this emerging paradox, presenting the very first outcomes of a case-study research project, carried out by the Department of City and Regional Planning (CRP) at the University of Memphis, TN, with the purpose of contributing to the planning theory debate on possibilities of planning resistance and/or renaissance in the face of neoliberal challenges.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the famous US TV series named Parks & Recreation, where the vice-director of the Parks and Recreation Department of an imaginary US town, the good will and optimism of the leading character, committed to the provision of the best possible service to citizens, clashes against her boss' believe that public government is a waste of tax-payers money and his dream to have the entire public parks system privatized and managed for profit. One might believe that the paradox of having a vegan managing a butcher shop is just a comical trick suited for TV; on the contrary, every American knows that reality has surpassed fiction. Almost half of US citizenry, which – especially after the 2016 Presidential election – is gaining a significant portion of the country's political power, that believes in a governmental model that is almost negation of itself, and is based on the substantial idea of dismantling every form of public planning, in the European sense of it (Trapenberg Frick, 2013).

In this perspective, the city of Memphis, the only democratic Hub in the republic state of Tennessee –a State that in 2011 has abolished the State Planning Department, which for many years had been the only professional support for most of TN towns totally lacking planning capacity – is starting to show some countertrends. As a matter of fact, the local debate is displaying a growing interest in a form of 'public planning' inspired by the value of social justice to overcome the historic dominance of total individual and corporate freedom of action (especially on the real estate sector).

This paper discusses the nature of this emerging interest in public planning, presenting the very first outcomes of a research project, carried out by the Department of City and Regional Planning (CRP) at the University of Memphis, TN that has focused on the motivations that led to it as well as the difficulties and contradictions faced by public planning within a traditional anti-planning context. The research has been conducted through a hybrid methodological approach which mixes:

- The case-study approach (Yin 2013), developed through a variety of qualitative methods (demographic and spatial analysis, in-depth interviews with key informants, archival research, GIS mapping, participant observation of planning-related events);
- An engaged-scholarship approach (Boyer, 1990; Ashley & Vos, 2015), based on which long-term community-university partnerships carry out research that is meant to advance disciplinary knowledge while addressing the most oppressing local planning issues.

2 HIDEOUS PLANNING

In general, in the history of US public institutions the very concept of what is 'public' is significantly different from its European counterpart, with evident effects on the functional, social, and aesthetic aspects of cities as well as on the ability for public bodies to impacts them (Fairfield, 2010).

Since the first days of colonization, the US socio-political system was established on the worship of every form of individual freedom connected with the dream that individual talents can lead toward social upward mobility in a land of great opportunities –, in open contrast with the ancient system of the British colonizer, which was based on a system of birth-related privileges (Warner, 1995). From the perspective of this paper, this premise is strongly related with a planning tradition that is strongly influenced by the need of protecting the individual freedom of not just owning as much property as one can afford but also disposing it with plain autonomy (Kayden, 2009). This does not mean that US Planning has not been able to generate examples of "public city," i. e. portions of the built environment that embodies a 'public' meaning and/or pay a 'public' function, being owned or not by a 'public' agency; nor it means that there are not examples of planning regulations over private property owners. It does mean, though, that all these examples are both qualitatively and quantitatively very different from the European cousins.

Memphis can certainly be taken as an example: the city was founded at the beginning of the XIX century by freemasons and real estate investors, with the hope of making profit out of the creation of a fluvial commercial hub along the Mississippi River, half way from New Orleans and St Louis (Sigafoos 1979). Thanks to the capital connected to the commercialization of 'king cotton,' grown in large quantities in the entire Mid-South Region, the City has successfully and continuously expanded over the centuries, with the result that Memphis is today one of the less dense US metro area (just to have a European comparison: 4 times larger than Milan, with less than a half of the population).

Since the 1947 Comprehensive Plan inspired by the City Beautiful Movement (Memphis City Beautiful Commission, 1947) until the last officially adopted Comprehensive one (Memphis & Shelby County Office of Planning & Development, 1981), Memphis planning history is full of tools and strategies meant to stimulate new developments, with a focus on the construction of public infrastructures that they need to be fully functional, with a lack of expectation that local government might provide public goods, spaces and services. In Memphis, 'Public' planning, i. e. the act of public agencies to govern urban spatial dynamics, has been challenged on many fronts.

First, within the normative framework that characterizes most of the Old South, unlike what happens along the two coasts, urban planning is not one of the compulsory activities of local governments and there a general lack of public planning culture. For the most part, public bodies engage in the preparation or in the update of building codes without the kind of general vision of development that comes with genuine comprehensive planning. Moreover, there is a substantial lack of norms through which real estate developers are forced to pay for the infrastructural, environmental, and social costs associated with the new developments they are profiting from. Very much like it worked in Italy before the Ministerial Decree n°1444 in 1968, Public bodies are expected to cover the costs associated to the provision of services such as parking, public spaces, transit, etc. thanks to increases of property taxes associated to the new development (except for public schools that are funded through a direct fee on residents). From a European perspective, this system seems to be conceived to favor private and corporate interests in the real estate sector but has a very limited capacity to shape vibrant, layered, and well 'served' neighborhoods and cities. On the contrary, from the perspective of the average mid-southern resident, whose maximum living aspiration is the maximization of privacy and quality of their individual housing unit (Putnam, 1995), this is a hideous system that forces households to pay taxes for their properties that are higher in Memphis than on unincorporated land (land that belongs to a county but is not included in a municipal boundary). For this reason, since the '60, many middle and middle-upper urban residents, mostly with white skin, in the search for 'more fiscal freedom' and willing to put more distance between themselves and the inner-city black communities, have continuously moved immediately out of the City boundary. The City government, in an effort not to lose its precious tax base (and therefore its ability to perform a basic level of services), has responded with a strategy that has encouraged and certainly not discouraged urban sprawl: periodic forced annexation of developed land to the city boundary with the consequent imposition of city taxes on residents that lacks any sense of belonging to the urban community (more data can be found at https://www.shelbycountytn.gov/2954/Annexations). The outcome of such a strategy is a highly sprawled and racially segregated city, that often lacks basic city services (public spaces, transit, security services, etc.) and even the basic qualities of a functional and pleasant urban environment (sidewalks, parks, street appliances, etc.); a city with a dying 'hearth,' i. e. with most the inner-city neighborhoods in extreme social, physical and economic decline.

3 BACK TO A POST-POLITICAL CITY

When the last Comprehensive Plan was officially adopted by the City in 1981, there was still not a clear strategy against urban sprawl: the plan contains a general development vision that still considers urban development occurring in non-developed land as a positive economic engine. It indicates priority governmental actions but does not contains clear and effective land use restrictions. The plan identifies the revitalization of the urban core – mostly Downtown – as an absolute priority but does not identify the connection between downtown decline and urban sprawl and does not indicate local government's responsibilities for revitalization. In the 1977, following the example of many other US Cities facing sprawl and internal decline, the City helped establishing what then has become a completely independent revitalization non-governmental agency called Center City Commission (today Downtown Memphis Commission, DMC) in charge of carrying out direct physical improvements and, mostly, of attracting private investments to Downtown through incentives. In its strategic plan from 2013, the DMC explains

how the agency “is funded with an additional fee on Downtown commercial properties and with direct contributions of Downtown real estate investors; DMC is not funded by any city or county taxes” (DMC 2013, p. II). The necessity is to reassure city and county residents that they are not paying for what in a European perspective can be described as an important public effort: resuscitate a portion of the city that holds enormous historic and cultural values for the entire city and region.

Downtown investors have received significant incentives with almost no land use constrictions. In particular, the City has offered a red-carpet treatment to private investors that have developed hot real estate spots along the river (both north and south of Downtown), which are today sites for luxury houses with a direct view on Mississippi sunsets. The consequence is the growth of urban spaces with a public appearance but owned and managed by private hands seeking to raise (or keep) the value of their real estate investments.

In addition to all of this, the City has also managed to redevelop all the public housing complexes that were built during the New Deal era all around Downtown. Due to decades of disinvestment and lack of maintenance, public housing all around the US had become the symbol of ‘concentrated poverty,’ to be considered the main cause of inner city decay. To address such an issue, the US federal government created special funding programs, HOPE VI and, later, Choice Neighborhood, to replace public housing with privately owned and managed ‘mixed-income’ developments. Since 1995, the City of Memphis has used both federal programs to redevelop all its public housing complexes, replacing two thirds of public housing residents with middle-class ones and transferring most of the affordable housing business – through the federally funded section 8 voucher program – from public to private hands (Saija 2017).

Looking at all these strategies together, the overall effort of central city revitalization is perfectly aligned with the global neoliberal trend according to which local governments progressively should resign their responsibilities to produce or shape the ‘public city’ to focus on provisions and services that guarantee the flourishing of entrepreneurial freedoms and profits (Harvey 2007), especially order and security (Tulumello 2017). One of the main occupations of the local government in the shaping the of Urban environment in the last thirty years still reflects the model opposed by planners in Cleveland in the 70s (Krumholz 1982): the use, in a more or less direct way, of tax-payers’ money to attract and keep private corporations under the idea that they are going to provide jobs for the local workforce. Too bad that fiscal incentives or other kinds of support (such as various kind of urban improvements) are often provided without any formal agreement on the way jobs created (salaries & benefits, residency and socio-economic status of the employees, etc.) or any other guarantees of a ‘public’ redistribution of the corporate profit made through such a public support. In other words, Memphis public bodies have intensively used governmental power for “creating the sorts of physical conditions which can best serve industrial growth, also attempt to maintain the kind of "business climate" that attracts industry: for example, favorable taxation, vocational training, law enforcement, and "good" labor relations.” (Molotch 1976, p. 312).

From a European perspective, in such a context, the lack of public planning is counterbalanced by the extraordinary planning capacity of non-public players. Since the 80s, decision-making, investments, service provision, and urban revitalization efforts have been in the hands of a complex socio-economic system made by:

1. The philanthropic community, which captures a significant amount of private money before it goes into the public budget as tax-dollars. Private foundations, considered more financially reliable and transparent than public bodies, receive private donations that are eligible for tax breaks and manage them with full independence from the public decision-making system;
2. The private development sector, made of private developers as well as professional design, engineering, and planning firms, that sees the growing financial investments in inner-city neighborhood as an additional area of profit;
3. The non-profit community, made of organizations that receive and manage funds coming from different sources for the implementation of projects that are in line with their specific mission. In all the US cities, the non-profit sector plays a very significant economic role, and not only because it carries the responsibility of providing many services that in most European countries would be provided by public agencies (health care, education, social services, etc.). There is a specific type of no-profit that plays a special role in inner-city revitalization, the Community Development Corporation (CDC), a community-based “legally incorporated, non-profit agency empowered to purchase, develop and manage residential

and commercial property, or to provide loans and technical assistance to other organizations doing these same things" (Robinson 1996, p. 1652).

Many scholars have studied the type of alliance that is frequently established between the first two types of actors as well as local politicians and the media, describing it as a 'growth-machine coalition' pursuing "a constantly rising urban-area population – a symptom of a pattern ordinarily comprising an initial expansion of basic industries followed by an expanded labor force, a rising scale of retail and wholesale commerce, more far-flung and increasingly intensive land development, higher population density, and increased levels of financial activity" (Molotch 1976, p. 310). Other uses the expression "Urban Regime" to indicate the fact that informal partnerships between City Hall and the business elite in Urban Context are the mechanism through which decisions are made effectively even in the face of the many limits of US governmental powers (Stone 1989). More recently, scholars have introduced the concept of Post-political City, to indicate the ability of the development coalition, encompassing both economic and political powers, to kill every real social conflicts while erasing the very political essence of urban debates (MacLeod, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2010).

Within the Growth Machine and the Urban Regime frameworks, CDCs are frequently described as the only type of urban development actor that can play a counteracting role, with the potential (and sometime the ability) to break the monopoly of urban 'growth machines' and 'regimes' in the urban development business (Berndt 1977, Bratt 1989, Medoff & Sklar 1994, Robinson 1996) while advancing the interests of low-income inner-city residents. In the transition toward the Post-Political city, scholars have questioned the ability of CDCs to play a real counterbalancing role in the game of urban development in the absence of a real social conflict and clear political debate, it is difficult to have CDC (Stoeker 1997).

Memphis, very much like many other American cities, for decades has been characterized by a level of interplay between these three types of development actors and local officials that remind of these characterizing Molotch's Growth Machine (1976), Stone's Urban Regime, and, since 1991, a post-political city. In 1991, Memphis citizens, 55% of them were blacks (today they are 63%), elected the first black Mayor of Memphis, defeating an opponent who had been Mayor for 10 years and campaigned as an administrator who could attract business. The new Mayor and, even more, his appointed head of the Housing and Community Development Division (HCD) were both successful black leaders embodying the American myth of self-made men able to make their way out of poverty to a full commitment toward black empowerment. They both promised a new season of policies focused less on tourism and business and more on social programs, on city's public schools, and, most importantly, on inner-city revitalization. Public declarations seemed to imply a break into the 'Urban Regime' that had ruled the City for decades, but initial research outcomes show that it might have really meant a change in the [color of the skin of the] actors involved in informal relationships without really changing the nature of the decision-making method. For instance, the intensive use of HOPE VI funds by HCD – in partnership with the local Housing Authority – to redevelop public housing complexes can be interpreted as a neoliberal use of governmental powers (and money) to advance entrepreneurial 'freedom' (and profit) while generating 'post-political consensus' (MacLeod, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2010) pursued by a strong populist leader advocating for relocation, redevelopment, and privatization policies that are 'good for everybody.' The same leader that has proactively used tax payers money to attract in Memphis a number of private corporations such as Electrolux, BassPro, and others. For decades, almost the totality of planning-related decisions made by the City were led by HCD and its director, in the absence of an updated Comprehensive Plan, in the face of a very week Land Use and Planning Department, and with City Council acting as an uncritical enabler. Moreover, the 2007-08 recession, related to the housing bubble associated with urban sprawl, has further weaken Memphis' public planning: at that time, most of the salaries of the City of Memphis Planning Department's employees were being paid by the fees collected through the development process (mostly related to subdivision requests and new constructions). The collapse of the development sector then caused the failure of the Planning Department's budget and the consequent reduction of its workforce by almost 50% (from 250 to 130 units) in only one year.

What is even more indicative of the post-political nature of city planning in Memphis, is the big role played by the private foundations in the Community Development field; an interest that has always been carried out with a high level of independence from the public sector, especially after the 2007-08 recession. Based on the data, it is evident that the endowments of the private foundations involved in the community development field have not been impacted by the recession as much as the private development sector and the City Planning Department, as further sign that most of the weight of the recession has been

carried out by the shoulders of the public sector and the low- or middle-income sections of the population, without really impacting the richer strata, who are usually in the position of making donation to the philanthropies. These were, however, forced to rethink on how to make their investments in community development and inner-city revitalization more strategic, in the face of a significant increase of poverty rates, housing vacancies, fiscal delinquency, and street crime within the inner-city loop (source: US Census 2001-2010). The immediate outcome of the recession was not only the significant increase of the classic symptoms of urban blight but also the reduction of the capacity of the extremely large number of Memphis CDCs of counteracting those symptoms.

To enhance of level of efficacy in the Community Development sector, between 2007 and 2009 foundations have come together forming what they called the Greater Memphis Partnership, hired a Planning Firm from St. Louis – EDAW Inc. –, and led to the finalization of a Strategic Plan for the Memphis Metro Area named Greater Memphis Neighborhood: A Blueprint for Revitalization (Greater Memphis Partnership, 2009). The Plan identifies priority areas and priority actions to by undertaken. Despite the fact that the document mentions the involvement of the main public agencies, "the city contributed to the process with a symbolic token, just to be able to say that had a horse in the race."(key informant interview carried out by the author) The whole plan was funded by philanthropic foundations with the purpose of prioritizing Community Development investments, allowing the philanthropic community to act in full coordination and synergy. Three inner-city neighborhood were selected as investments areas and foundations were led to prioritize their funding toward CDCs and organizations operating there. Today, these three neighborhoods have received the most investments for revitalization amongst the totality of inner-city neighborhoods.

In synthesis, Memphis urban dynamics of the past decades are characterized by the complete lack of rules for new developments, the absence of any meaningful attempt to limit sprawl, the privatization of what was left of public services' provision (public housing, public spaces, etc.), and a process of inner-city revitalization led by a non-public system based on a solid dependence of CDCs from philanthropy. Successes in the inner-city revitalization process, in particular, might led neoliberal supporters to argue that planning without a public power – where major decisions do not engage, not even within a regimental framework, elected officials – is possible and might even look successful. Is that really the case?

3 MEMPHIS 3.0: CHANGE OF DIRECTION?

Some of the most recent events in Memphis might start to provide a partially negative answer to such a question.

Paradoxically, the very system of actors that have de factu replaced the lack of public planning over the past decades, are today showing clear signs of interest in restoring the planning functions of the main public bodies, while asking public officials to take more responsibility toward spatial governance: private foundations and the major CDCs have clearly expressed, over the past couple of years, the importance to have a strong an well-functioning public sector if the persistent city decline is to be really faced. Despite the sign of revitalization of few inner-city neighborhoods, city leaders agree on the fact that none of their efforts neither HCD aggressive approach to development has really changed the fact that the city is in a lagging status that seems to be impossible to overthrow. In their new discourses in support of a stronger public sector, the issue of social justice makes a recurrent appearance, in a city where 26.2% of residents live in poverty (a % that is almost twice the US average and one and a half higher that the average of the Metro Area; source Delavega 2016). We do not know whether this means that the richer residents are progressively realizing that they cannot live their entire life in their luxury homes out east or along the river and they want a city to live in where they can feel safe and comfortable. What we know is that the very philanthropy managing the wealth that does not get through the public treasury, after the Blueprint planning experience, has decided to significantly invest planning process that, unlike the Blueprint one, are have the capacity of strengthening the capacity of the two main local public bodies: Shelby County and the City of Memphis.

They started with supporting the preparation of the Mid-South Regional Greenprint and Sustainability Plan, "designed to enhance regional sustainability by establishing a unified vision for a region-wide network of green space areas, or Greenprint, which serves to address long-term housing and land use, resource conservation, environmental protection, accessibility, community health and wellness, transportation

alternatives, economic development, neighborhood engagement, and social equity in the Greater Memphis Area" (Memphis-Shelby County Office of Sustainability, 2014, p. 9). For the preparation of the plan, Shelby County Government was awarded a $2,619,999 Sustainable 61 Communities Regional Planning Grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The philanthropic community was instrumental in funding the preliminary steps that had allowed the County to be successful in such a high competitive federal program. Moreover, despite the official focus was supposed to be on green infrastructure, the plan clearly tries to address their connections with all the other areas of intervention that usually characterize a Comprehesive Plan. Its main contributors admit that in an ideal world Greenprint planning should have followed a Comprehensive planning process. However, they think that in many ways the very Greenprint, with its high ambitions, has played the role of forerunner: it has, for the first time, shown to the 'public' and, in particular, to many important local players the legitimacy and the importance of a well-run public planning process.

The Greenprint, published in 2014 after a long process and the engagement of more than 50 stakeholders, is in the process of being successfully implemented, thanks to the immediate financial engagement of the philanthropic community: the main local foundations have been proactive in supporting the physical execution of the most important sections of the new green infrastructures: in some cases they have directly bought the land and led the construction works to then donate the final result to the City – this is the case of the Memphis greenline, for instance – or to ad hoc non-profit – this is the case of the Wolf-River Greenway, donate to the Wolf-River Conservancy –. The tangible successes of the Greenprint and the general enthusiasm generated in the pubic opinion, has played a key role in the will of the City of Memphis to create a position for a Bikeway/Pedestrian Coordinator, which has helped generating more than 71 miles of new bike lanes since 2010, more than doubling the previous 63 miles already existent (Smiley et al. 2016).

Most of all, the Greenprint has reached its declared goal of triggering a new Comprehensive Planning process of the City of Memphis, the first one in more than 40 years. In this process, the main private foundations have, again, played a major role; they have funded with almost 2 million the first three years of the process called Memphis 3.0. This amount has covered, amongst other things, the totality of the salaries of 5 new planners hired by the Planning and Department of the City of Memphis to run the process, under the promise of future stabilization of their salaries with public funds.

Scholars that are familiar with the literature on planning in a neoliberal era, the idea that public planners are, de factu, on private foundations' paychecks could be interpreted as a clear sign that public bodies are under the complete influence of the local business elite. This interpretation could be confirmed by the fact that, one year into the process, the founders have explicitly requested to be part of a Memphis 3.0 Advisory Board, a committee of 'wise' individuals that can suggest and lead the process through the 'right' steps. Morevoer, there are very few doubts on the expectations that the Memphis' commercial elite has from the process; expectations that are summarized by the title of a public seminar organized by the Memphis Chamber of Commerce on February 2017: Why Comprehensive Planning is Good for Business: 10 years after the recession and decades of incentives and actions in favor of a good business climate (total freedom of action of the private sector, especially in the real estate sector), Memphis is still a city that grows physically but not in terms of tax base. What is gain by the suburbs is lost by the inner-city neighborhood and viceversa, in a zero-sum game; a game that is unsustainable not only for low-income residents but also for the commercial elite, which is seeking a drastic change of direction. In this scenario, Memphis situation could be labeled as a paradox (Rushing 2009): in a context where the public hand still lacks of resources and spatial governance capacity and where the broad socio-cultural system is indifferent, if not clearly hostile, to the very concept of Planning, here is the business elite that is strongly contributing, at least in this phase, to a change of mindset. From all our interview with stakeholders, it appears that they all genuinely hope in a real "inner-city revitalization," referring not just to the physical structures but also communities: it is almost like the private sector is advancing the hypothesis that financial growth is not possibile without a certain amount of socio-cultural fairness, which can only be systematically addressed by a strong and affective public sector. One could advance the hypothesis that, after trying to act independently through the Blueprint, they are all realizing of the necessity to have capable public actors, which are "not kept hostages by private corporations and able to pursue courageous choice."

Whether this is a temporary phase or the appearance of a new paradigm of possibilities for public planning in the reign of neoliberal culture the future can only tell.

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ID 1356 | 'DECISION NOT TO DECIDE': A NEW CHALLENGE FOR PLANNING

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1 INTRODUCTION

Urban planning developed during the twentieth century under conditions of strong national welfare states and relatively weak civil societies (Davies, 2001). The need to protect the public interest and guarantee its rights led to the establishment of hierarchical planning systems throughout the developed world. Planning mechanisms were designed to guarantee equal allocation of resources and appropriate infrastructure for various sectors (Dean, 2011, Piketty, 2014). In the urban realm in recent years, the unprecedented scale of urban transformation and the weakening of the social, economic, and political frameworks that constitute the background for planning, has meant that the impact and the pressure of direct cooperation of interest groups on urban space has considerably increased (Alexander, 2002; Kolossov, 2005). Planners and politicians have to cope with interest groups characterised by diverse institutional structures, access to resources, and inconsistent territorial interests; a particular challenge to the planning system is posed by groups committed to non-liberal values and concepts.

Indirect cooperation reflects similarities in the way people ‘read’ and interpret urban space, direct cooperation reflects economic interests and social organisation, and both can evoke planning policy issues (Fischer, 1982, Alexander, 2002; Kolossov, 2005). While many of these issues, such as the buying of land by purchasing groups or Gated communities, are addressed by an authoritative pronouncement and clear-cut decisions to create an official groundwork of action, there are many others that planning policy makers avoid or refrain from addressing. Both adopting a stance and choosing to abstain from doing so have far-reaching ramifications for society. The difficulties of liberal planning when faced with implementing what is defined as “the politics of accommodation” (Lijphart, 1968; Davies, 2001), and in resolving spatial conflicts between groups and individuals in diverse democratic societies, will be discussed in this paper. In order to explain the ways individuals incline towards and cooperate with groups to claim space, the research will use the themes of social relations and control mechanisms to examine the effects of organisation in housing. The themes of group behaviour in urban space and the policy of non–decision will elaborate the way different groups adopt different strategies to claim space. Hence, the research will examine the ramifications of 'Non-decision making' (NDM) for autonomous individuals and groups who organise neighbourhood change.

The case studies that have been selected are interesting because they function somewhat as ‘limit cases’ that demonstrate the ramifications of NDM for neighbourhoods changed by different levels of cooperation. They are therefore very different: The type of state in which planners operate, the relationship between civil society organisation to the state or municipality and the role of religious activists (Imams in Whitechapel and Rabbis in Zangwill Street) are very different in both locales. On one hand there is the