

Between landscape rhetorics and ‘scalar traps’: the asymmetric governance of contentious urban development

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Keywords / governance and participation spatial and political re-scaling, urban development and the landscape

One day in February 2001, the street-walls of Rome have been filled up with posters celebrating the safety of Tor Marancia estate, a broad green area strategically positioned within the city centre of Rome, which was expected to be the site of a high-density development project.

These placards have been signed and placed by each single political party, NGO, and civil society association, exulting for having saved the estate, and claiming credit for the result.

A question obviously arises: if everyone was happy for the conservation of the estate, who wanted its exploitation? Tor Marancia was saved from whom?

At the time, I was doing a research project on the relationship between landscape and planning, and I was interested in deepening the actual role of the landscape within planning processes and tools.

Because the supposed victory against the building exploitation of Tor Marancia was said to be determined by its importance for the urban landscape, and its protection established according to its landscape and heritage values, it caught my attention.

It was really because of the landscape that the motleys of actors involved in the decision process converged toward the same understanding, and succeeded in erasing 2 millions of cubic meters of building rights? Have they been erased, or what else happened to them? Which kind of process determined that result? What happened exactly, how and why?

Unfortunately, that day of ‘collective celebration’ was not the end of the story.

Aim of this paper is to present the results of two research pathways which converge on, and through, the case-study of Tor Marancia.

The first one is dedicated to the forms of governance which can (or are expected to) be activated on landscape issues, and to the actual role played by the landscape in governance

processes, considering their outcomes. It is also related to the question of the implementation of the European Landscape Convention (ELC), particularly in its explicit reference to participation and governance. The relationship between landscape and planning - the meaning and role that the landscape assumes within planning theory and practices - and the actual role played by the landscape within planning processes and tools provide a background.

The landscape is intended here as:

- a field for experimenting forms of inter-institutional cooperation, participation, civil society commitments, and governance (as normatively stated in the European Landscape Convention - ELC);
- a tool for measuring and/or a field for improving institutional capacity and the effectiveness of what is (at least by words), normatively assumed.

The implicit assumption is that the landscape mirrors the space-society relationship, and that once the rhetorics which commonly shadow its actual role within planning are unveiled, it can be useful to understand and to deepen these relationships in their power and hegemonic meaning.

The second one is a still on-going multidisciplinary research dedicated to the forms which neo-liberalization is assuming at local level¹. It focuses particularly on the changes they determine in the public discourse on land use, and on their translation into urban policies: how they affect socio-spatial configurations, which is their spatial meaning and outcomes, their impact on the formation of coalitions, and on democratic decision processes (Harvey 2005; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck, Theodore and Brenner 2009; Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010). These policies, which can be referred to forms of neo-liberalization, make recourse to spatial and political re-scaling (Brenner 2000, 2001, 2004), while often hiding actual interests and values through 'main issues' – those issues which always appear as priorities in the political agendas at all level – such as that of environmental sustainability, or, as in this case, that of landscape protection.

The case-study of Tor Marancia - one of the most controversial cases in the recent planning history in Rome - allows to put together these questions and to unveil rhetorics, asymmetries of power in governance and planning processes, and the 'scalar traps' they produce.

In fact, it is precisely because of the recourse to the landscape, for the specific meaning that the concept of scale (and of scaling) it embodies, that actual interests and powers can be disclosed. The case enlightens problems of power as related to knowledge, of 'transparency' of decision processes, and the actual meaning of participation and governance in neo-liberal socio-political contexts. But it also shows how through the landscape, declamatorily used by the different coalition discourses, the contradictions between planning objectives and results, between the advantages and disadvantages at stake and those actually produced, are clearly revealed.

Although 10 years have elapsed since the planning controversy concerning Tor Marancia has been legally solved, the whole story with its territorial consequences at the urban and metropolitan scale are still largely unknown, and quite underestimated.

¹ The research group is composed by Ernesto D'Albergo and Giulio Moini (dept. of Social Sciences), Barbara Pizzo and Giacomina Di Salvo (dept. of Planning), La Sapienza Università di Roma.

A brief 'case history'

Tor Marancia estate is a broad green area (200 hectares) at the border of the 'Parco dell'Appia Antica' (whose it is considered as a 'natural' extension): since the '50ies, through the political action of an important group of intellectuals led by Antonio Cederna², it has been the object of a strong civic battle for landscape protection. But the land-use statute of a half of the site (114 hectares) was that of a building site, deriving from precedent land-use regulations (the prevision dated 1962 was of 4 million cubic meters of new buildings, for 40.000 inhabitants, afterwards it has been considered as over-dimensioned, as well as the whole 'old' plan). In the '90ies the estate became the field of a long-lasting conflict which opposed public institutions at all levels, land-owners and real-estate investors, NGOs, associations and the civil society, together with representatives of all political parties.

The actors involved (institutional and non institutional) were divided into two opposite coalitions, whose unbalance has been displayed later. More precisely, an historical reconstruction of the case (Pizzo and Di Salvo 2011) showed that there were two different arenas: one in which the actors played the role they publicly have assumed, the other in which positions were much more unstable and fluctuating, capable to change according to the context's changes. Furthermore, not every actor had access to both arenas demonstrating deep asymmetries of power in the governance setting, while the City Council and the Executive played an ambiguous role: seemingly that of *super partes*, while negotiating with land-owners and real-estate investors³.

The conflict lasted more than 10 years, and was almost causing the failure of the on-going redaction of the regulatory plan for the city of Rome.

The solution which followed consisted in 'compensations': the building rights (which meanwhile had been reduced to less than 2 millions of cubic meters through 'protection variants'), have been shifted to other parts of the city - precisely to 16 rural areas, enormously re-increased thanks to forms of reward⁴.

Within the years 1999-2002, the choices which mostly influenced the course of the conflict have been taken.

² Antonio Cederna (1921-1996), archaeologist, journalist and political activist, co-founder of Italia Nostra, spent his life studying, disseminating and fighting for the protection of Italian cultural and environmental heritage. The Committee against the development of Tor Marancia estate, was named 'Comitato Cederna' in his honour.

³ A more complete and detailed history, already presented and discussed in conferences and seminars, will appear in forthcoming publications.

⁴ Regarding the mechanism of compensations, it can be briefly highlighted that it was already foreseen by the preliminary 'Plan of Certainties' (Piano delle Certezze) in 1997, as part of the technical norms of implementation of the Regulatory Plan. This tool allows to 'transfer' development (building) previsions involving protected or high-value sites (from an ecological or landscape point of view), to other sites: the former land-owners would be refunded for their lost ownership and rights and also rewarded for accepting to move, not in monetary terms but through an increase of building rights. It was presented as an alternative solution to expropriation for public utility. Moreover, it was implemented through a simplified administrative procedure, and precisely through the 'Accordo di Programma' (Program Agreement) established at national level (Legislative references are: L. 142/90; D.lgs. 267/2000 art. n. 34), which permits individual, one-by-one agreements. The point here is clearly how this tool (of compensations) has been used, and what its use meant in planning and in governance perspectives.

- The Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Heritage, imposed a restriction on the land use of the area, while the Archaeological Office ('Sovrintendenza') asserted the incompatibility of any building exploitation with its landscape and heritage values. But in 1999 the City Council approved the building plan named 'Parco Numisia' ('Piano di lottizzazione').
- In 2001, the Region declared the estate as part of the 'Parco dell'Appia Antica' – changing it into a Regional Park. According to the Italian planning legislation, it means that no form of refund was required.
- In 2002, the City Council, from the part of the City of Rome, decided for the public acquisition of the estate through compensations. As explained before, this was not compulsory with the restriction imposed by super-ordinates institutions (the Region). Anyway, it was presented as unavoidable in order to convince owners and investors to 'renounce' to the building rights they claimed; according to the City Council, the decision was consistent with the Major engagement for Tor Marancia, which was finally 'saved'.

The 'mechanism' of compensation produced an increase of buildings rights which turned out to be more than the former provisions of 1962 - whose over-dimensioning had been commonly recognized. Furthermore, the land-use of 16 rural areas all around the sub-urban region have been changed into development areas, and their potential to seriously compromising the whole 'urban balance' is very high.

I want to underline here that each decision has been taken 'in the name of the landscape', and justified through a 'landscape discourse'. In fact, except for a preliminary phase in which the mobilization was addressed at defending the estate as an open space against the risk of a further increase of the building and urban density, the civil society engagement was in landscape protection. Each public institution, notwithstanding their own different understanding and behaviour, declared to aiming at that same objective, and also the owners and real estate investors, in presenting their development project under the name of 'Parco Numisia', cunningly allude to its environmental value (they wanted it to be intended as a 'park'), and to its historical and archaeological value (the name makes reference to an ancient roman family, that of Numisi).

But the same landscape, which was a main issues in the public discourse on Tor Marancia and, more generally, in the discourse which was used to sustain planning choices, now openly shows the contradiction between discourses and actions, objectives and results⁵. It reflects the policies that have been actually implemented, what kind of socio-economic interests have been taken into consideration, and which kind of socio-spatial configurations have been actually produced⁶.

⁵ Shifting the attention to the whole regulatory plan whose redaction was on-going while the story of Tor Marancia estate developed, the two main planning strategies of the rail-road network, known as 'iron therapy', and of the ecological network (the 'green wheel'), which had a strong meaning and value for the urban landscape and its inhabitants, tended to hide millions of cubic meters of new buildings realized through various forms of public-private negotiations in order to get private financing for public spaces and public goals – while a general look to what the plan actually produced until now shows the well-known gap between private and public advantages.

⁶ As to landscape as a 'by-product' of the interaction of different policies and actions, intentionally and even unintentionally produced, and as its capacity of mirroring socio-economic and socio-spatial relationships, see: Pizzo B.

Tor Marancia was safe and included within the 'Parco dell'Appia Antica', but the very principles which guided the mobilization against its exploitation have been negated. We may say that the ideological position of the landscape and environmental associations has been used by the counterpart in order to exacerbate the conflict and obtain the maximum result for private investors. In fact, if the goal of the mobilization was the protection of the urban landscape and the environment, we may now say that this objective has been undoubtedly not reached. The same can be said focusing on land-use and urban expansion control as main objectives: the case of Tor Marancia contributed in determining an impressive waste of land, a reckless exploitation of the soil, so that the 'Campagna Romana' has been deeply jeopardized. Obviously, this do not necessarily mean that the local associations were wrong in promoting their action, or that the very action was wrong in expressing just local interests (a kind of NIMBY reaction), but just that it did not result into a victory.

On the contrary, the case demonstrate of the lack of a consistent policy of landscape and environmental protection – in counter-tendency with a general orientation at European level at containing land consumption and urban expansion.

Moreover, it can be said that the problem was not 'solved', it was just moved - from a highly conflictual context to a very broad context (16 areas in the suburbs) where no immediate opposition, nor conditions for contestation, were to be expected; and that won who had well-defined but non site-specific, 'un-spatial' interests, as required by the present forms of the Market. In fact, unlike the people involved in the mobilization who were fighting for a certain site, real-estate interests could have been moved almost anywhere within the metropolitan area, as the Public Administration itself helped to do, through the mechanism of compensations.

The case displays how the landscape, interpreted as a by-product of policies and actions, mirrors space-society relationships in their socio-economic and socio-spatial features, thus showing the contradiction between objectives and results in spatial planning and policies, and helping at unveiling actual power relations orienting or even driving governance processes.

About landscape and governance

There are some fundamental reasons for relating landscape issues to that of governance.

For my present purpose particularly, they concern first of all the related conceptual developments of landscape and of scale, which have been provided by (critical) human geography.

In my view, landscape studies gave a fundamental (even if very often implicit) impulse to the problematisation of geographic scale which has been seen, before the last two decades, as pre-given and fixed. This derives from landscape's trans-border nature, from its aversion to be constrained within pre-defined borders, and even more from its intrinsic trans-scalarity which combine a geo-spatial dimension and a social dimension. It is also related to the rather acknowledged trans-scalar definition of its values and interests, which brings about the problem of establishing to whom the landscape is (must be) referred.

2005, 2007. A fundamental reference for this approach to landscape studies is E. Sereni (1961), *Storia del paesaggio agrario italiano*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

So the quest for trans-scalar understanding, and for its political meaning and implications, is particularly important for tackling landscape issues, thus implying multi-level decision making and governance.

Landscape governance / landscapes of governance

Iridescent concept, vague meaning, 'empty signifiers' (Offe 2008): these are just a few among the definitions used to refer to the highly disputed nature of the concept of governance, which also fit for the landscape.

Notwithstanding the definitions of both concepts seem to lean toward their intractability, they are at the core of the reflection and of the scientific production of many disciplines since decades –as literatures fully shows–, broadly and commonly used and, more recently, also in joined forms.

For my present purpose, I need to point out here just two problems, also for the relevance they assume within the selected case study:

1. Disciplines which have a normative and operational dimension require operational concepts. The question arises of how can the landscape be adequately operationalized, and which operational definitions reveal to be the more useful in a planning perspective.
2. A step toward the operationalization of too theoretically rich concepts is that of joining them with, and constraining them within, a defined operational approach. Is it the case of landscape and governance? Which are, or could be, the operational implications of threatening the landscape through forms of governance?

1. It is long that the landscape has a predominant position within different disciplines, where it assumes a broad range of meanings. What would differentiate planning in threaten it, is that it could not simply accept its ambiguity as constitutive. More precisely, accepting it does not mean necessarily and directly that the concept of landscape can be used with each one of its manifold nuances for each different purpose. As for planning in particular, it means that for each different approach and planning tool (e.g. regulative, structural, strategic), must correspond one precise definition/interpretation of the landscape. The alternative to this basic rigour is the intractability of the topic, and the related (inevitable) dissatisfaction for the results of planning policies and actions (Pizzo 2005, 2007). Experience shows rather a different trend. The fields (of both research and practice) where the concept of landscape is used are still increasing, not implying a progressively more specific differentiation and disciplinary framing, but a further stretching of its semantics instead.

2. Given the highly contentious nature of the concept of governance, it is rather clear that its combination with that of landscape hardly can bring towards a higher accuracy.

However, their use in combined form is increasing. The question can be analysed in a double direction: how and why governance enters into the landscape discourse, and how and why landscape enters into the governance discourse, and precisely:

a) The turn toward participation *and* governance is a fundamental content of the European Landscape Convention (ELC), and also a priority for its implementation. So that it is more than

a decade that the discourse on landscape is developed in relationship with one concerning socio-political and institutional settings and behaviour. b) Landscape enters in the field of Governance contributing to its further extension, also suggesting the wide range of governance approaches and styles; in particular, c) Landscape Governance can be interpreted as a broadening of the field of action of Environmental Governance, appeared in the '90ies, with which it shares similar problems (those problems which cannot be tackled within predefined borders, nor just within the realm of public actions). Emphasizing the need for a more integrated approach of nature and culture (Whatmore 2002), or the socio-cultural construction of the very concept of nature (Castree and Brown 2001), it allows a more specific focus on socio-cultural aspects.

I will summarize here some of the more interesting case-study results, highlighting what we can learn from the story of Tor Marancia about the actual role of the landscape in planning and governance processes, proposed as conclusions.

In the name of the Landscape

Within planning processes the landscape is very often presented as a 'main issue' as well as a shared common interest and as a 'common good' to be strenuously defended – hardly ever explicitly clarifying what is really at stake under such a broad and multifaceted concept, and to whom the same landscape is referred.

The title / legitimacy which is given for justify public or collective choices, in a system where democratic representativeness is often questioned for its weakness and limits, became progressively decisive. While a recent essay titled 'In the name of whom?' (T. Vitale, 2007 - original title in Italian), there is a broad and differentiated 'Not in my name' movement (largely diffused through the web) which refuses institutional positions as non-representative of the citizens will, while reclaiming the right of individual expression.

The political and sociological critique about this question is here intertwined with the one related to planning, to space and territory which represent the object and also the field of the conflict which, 'mediated' through the landscape, concerns socio-economic and socio- spatial development models.

The case of Tor Marancia enlightens that the claim to landscape goals, and the recourse to the concept of landscape for sustaining the political discourse on spatial planning did not contribute in considering the decision as a political construction; on the contrary, it left space for 'naturalistic' explanations, technical judgments and expert solutions which hidden elitist economic interests and the political dimension of the question.

In the name of the landscape, every kind of spatial policy can be promoted. In most cases, it is not the landscape the focus of the interest: it is rather the medium through which some kind of public discourse on territorial development (urban, metropolitan, regional) is conducted.

To whom does the landscape belong?

In the European Landscape Convention (ELC) perspective, member states are asked to establish procedures for the participation of the general public, of local and regional authorities and all interested groups in decisions processes related to the landscape, implicitly assuming the competition among different interests. From an ELC point of view, which is

strongly locally-oriented, participation and governance on landscape matters are recognized as able to re-build social relationship and sense of community, local identity and exchange, to tackle conflict and to strengthen democratization, legitimacy and social justice (Jones and Stenseke 2011; Jones 2011; see also: Pedroli B. and Van Mansvelt D.J. 2006; Prieur M. and Dourousseau S. 2006).

The case presented here demonstrates that all these potentialities must be seriously revised, at least when overcoming the local dimension, which is usually the case, particularly considering that globalized neo-liberal policies are trans-scalar by nature (as the landscape itself). Participation and governance should become rhetoric, which mystify power relations, tend to erase or to soften inequalities of knowledge, power positions, interests and motivations of the different participants, and can led to manipulation by the strongest among stakeholders.

To be assumed as a field for practicing forms of governance, also in the sense of ELC, a 'non-naturalistic' definition of landscape would be preferable, such as that of 'strategic construct' (Pizzo, 2005, 2007). This would highlight the nature of social construction of the landscape, and of the choices it requires as political.

Landscape and 'scalar traps'

ELC focuses particularly on the local dimension and scale, thus contributing in diffusing the interpretation of the local level as the more adequate and preferable for tackling landscape issues. This because of their nearness to the population effectively involved into decision processes and affected from the choices related to their 'living environment'.

This can led to what has been called 'the local trap': a prejudicial consideration that localized decision-making is inherently more socially just or ecologically sustainable (Brown and Purcell 2005).

The case of Tor Marancia shows that the landscape has been able to widely mobilize the civil society at local level. But because of the incomplete knowledge owned by the involved actors about the factors and variables at play in the controversy, and because of the weak understanding of its multi-scalar implications, it brought, through a 'scalar trap', to results which are definitely far from what the civil society movement, NGOs and associations ever expected.

The landscape has the power to activate mobilization but people involved do not always have the knowledge/power to understand what was going on, and particularly in a trans-scalar perspective, for which they often demonstrate insufficient cognitive, and an even more poor strategic capacity or understanding. The fall into a 'scalar trap' is often the case. Moreover, a paradox emerges: the wider is the impact of the issue, the weaker the mobilization could be. (D'Albergo, Moini eds. 2011. See Moini pp. 17-43, and Inwinkl pp. 101-123).

The need of a cognitive and a strategic trans-scalar capacity

Landscape can be dealt with governance (multi-level governance particularly) assuming its social construction and its socially constructed political scales. From this perspective, the focus of ELC on the local scale represents a critical point, since the same ELC can be interpreted as an example of the trans-scalar dimension of landscape governance. In fact, while ELC concentrates on local landscapes, recognized and defined as such from their inhabitants, in

that they are the object of a Convention at trans-national level, signed by a supra-national institution (European Commission), and from its Member States (national level), they inevitably assume a trans-scalar character.

This address the reflection toward the role of transnational organizations (also NGOs) and corporations which, together with the most powerful among the National States, play a decisive role in the governance processes at all levels.

The relationship between the rise and diffusion of the concept of Governance with that of Globalization, interpreted as a re-articulation of politics at different spatial level (Brenner 1999, 2000; Jessop 2003) is of primary importance for the argument proposed here.

The case presented here clearly shows how the more preferable solution at the local scale (envisaged also by the local community) is no more likely to lead to the preferable outcome for the landscape, in general terms, than one at any other scale: instead, it should have unexpected negative effects at a different (wider, in this case) scale. Moreover, scales are always the product of political struggle, and, as the case rather clearly shows, the same power positions which determined a certain solution define also the proper scale for that solution, so that political rescaling cannot in any case be disregarded, on the contrary it has to be the focus of critical inquiry, also (and particularly) when talking about the landscape.

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