

**«Are there identifiable trends in Planning Research?  
....I wouldn't say so; there's actually no planning  
research at all!».**

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The title of my paper is provocative; I intend to say that – at least in Italy- planning research has been extremely static over the last 40 years, with the consequence that no new trends in research have been developed. Through a discussion on the meaning of planning as a profession, on planning teaching as intended in Italy and a comparison with other European cases, derives my suggestion for a new planning teaching strategy based on a critical and theoretical formation of the student rather than on his/her practical training via professional simulation.

***The Italian context; «too much means nothing».***

Since the '60s the concept of *planning reform* has been linked to a wider and more comprehensive context including *land* and *local authorities reforms*, where the latter were considered prerequisites for the former to happen. Planners attributed themselves a political role (land and planning reforms are different though, being the first a political matter and the second a social, theoretical and technical one), with the consequence of impoverishing the planning profession as a whole.

The results are clear today: comparing the INU acts (*Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica*, which is the most representative body of planning culture and practice in the country) of 1960 and 1990 for instance, it is significant to notice that Italy is still using the same urban standards of 1942, no land reform has been developed, and we are still using the same urban law established in 1942. Planning knowledge is therefore «circular», meaning that the issues discussed today are the same of 40 years ago. Such an absence of new ideas has implied the interruption of research in this field. It would be interesting to make a comparison with other (not only European) Countries (at

least those whose lecturers are involved in this workshop: Great Britain, Holland, USA, Norway). We could already get some suggestions from the results of the AESOP project.

***Struggling to teach nothing or looking for new directions in planning education?***

Taken for granted that there is little new knowledge in the planning field, and as a consequence no new trends in research, the question to address now is: «what to teach in Planning courses in our Universities ?».

Other research branches related to planning, such as sociology, geography, and economy have been widely developed over the last years. Planning, if intended as *territorial planning*, that is *land use regulation*, has been recently object of empirical studies; from here though no theoretical developments have been derived.

A further point needs to be done: *how is «planning» approached?* When referred to the city, it is approached as: 1) research on and of cities, 2) city design, and 3) planning cities. Planning is both an action (that of «challenging the use of limited resources such as land, the environment, space, to offer better conditions enhancing the development of human activities») and an «art», that including «methods, techniques, procedures and theories enabling problem-solving in given contexts». Problems arise when these three approaches are confused or overlapped especially in the teaching practice.

In a recent conference on planning education (AESOP 1997), I identified the main faults of actual teaching programmes, as related to the excessive predominance of simulation and practice on theory. In particular my concern can be articulated as follows:

- Impossibility of re-creating real social-economical-political interactions in classrooms settings;
- The use of theoretical issues as a base for cause-effect transformation processes, rather than as informative tools to verify and analyse critically real transformations.

It derives that city-planning teaching is since recently intended more as urban design (experimentation and simulation of the real life context) rather than as a cognitive and evaluative

tool aimed at preparing students for the real life context. I intend to develop my discussion on this concern.

The aim of the PhD workshop is to compare this view with that of other participants; in particular, I would like to draw your attention to the following issues:

- How useful is planning practising for teaching planning, and what kind of expertise is relevant? If you agree that practice cannot be properly simulated in a teaching environment, what you use instead?
- Do you identify trends of research that I haven't found in Italy? If so, which one can provide good outputs for teaching planning?
- Can we produce or refer to good examples of BEST PRACTICES of Teaching Planning Practice (regulatory land-use-plan-making and, in general, all those plans with strong regulatory plans, according to the Country)?

#### ***Further issues to be tackled within the Workshop***

The above general arguments are the base for my contribution to the PhD workshop, which will focus on the following issues: (i) the significance of territorial planning, (ii) the relationship between planning and market, (iii) research and practice interaction within the Academia.

#### ***1. Is planning still relevant?***

First of all I would like to address the following question: «will planning remain a significant activity? Is there any future for planning?» Of course the answer is affirmative, and the events of the past decade prove to what extent planning is necessary to manage urban and territorial transformations.

Urban policies in a number of European countries highlight the degree of planning required by the urban market to operate effectively. In fact, although it may seem paradoxical, deregulation itself has always required strong Government intervention, and can therefore be considered a rather unusual kind of planning activity.

If we look at what is happening in the European countries in recent years, it seems that, apart from the traditional differences, the two planning systems (Anglosaxon and Mediterranean) are converging to common trends. In the Anglosaxon model, the discretionary power of the public administration is relevant (whose subjects assume strong responsibilities), whereas in the Mediterranean procedures and rules are much more relevant (especially the rules).

In the former, rules are generally few and clear, while in the latter they are many, contradicting and confusing (I am thinking of the Italian case, and don't know if i can generalise).

After observing these issues from the inside due to practice, we feel that, although there are many differences (approach, culture, and management systems) there is a basic convergence. Such common tendency would consist in thinking of and practising planning as *part of the market*, rather than as an external object. This is due to various factors\: the welfare resources restriction, the public withdraw from the economic sectors (often more apparent than real), the principle of subsidiarity and the integrated participation of the private sector in urban changes (this has always been present but now it looks more evident).

Our workshop should verify how correct this assumption is, with which characteristics and according to which trends.

## ***2. Planning and market: a better understanding of the relationship in research and practice***

Property is a market which could not survive without direct and indirect Government control , planning being the main tool. Land use control - usually carried out with traditional techniques - underlies each and every planning policy. However, theory appears to have underestimated this feature of local planning and the traditional model has been disregarded by research within Academia .

Land use control is not the only way to measure territorial change. In fact such changes are the outcome of a practice entailing a greater interaction among a number of legislative, spatial , economic and institutional features. It is also the result of the interaction between planning

trends and the market, the latter not referring exclusively to the property market. Urban markets and urban plans are but two sides of the same coin.

In spite of the above statements being self-evident, there is no match between the importance of these relationships and their place in theory: this is one of the key issues we have dealt with when studying the relationship between practice and theory.

The situation can be described as follows:

- theory and research remain enclosed in their specific sector and in separate academic spheres
- practice tends to progressively adjust to the developments on a case by case approach, without rethinking the situation
- Universities are caught between a general approach (“polytechnic” if you like, theory and method-oriented) and a more professionally-oriented approach.

In the 80s, planning difficulties and reorientation meant that the professional nature of education began to be questioned.

Focusing on the relationship between market and planning is a meaningful choice in itself, because of the importance of the relationship, but also, and above all, because this approach enables us to highlight how physical change interacts with the range of social, economic and cultural phenomena which are the prime cause of spatial transformation.

In the course of this workshop, I hope we shall be able to shed some light on these issues.

### ***3 How can research and practice interact?***

In the introduction, I have questioned on the development of research about planning. It should be clear, though, that there has been vast research undergoing in the last years, on fields related to planning, and the results need to be considered. We are focusing though on «pure» planning research; with regard to this particular form, the question is : to what extent can research generate the knowledge required to develop more reliable and consistent planning techniques and procedures, , and to what extent can these improve the traditional results?

Another question concerns the professional world: how can it best stimulate the academic research world, so that problems and events can be addressed by theory? How can tools be developed to keep abreast with the faster and faster changes in the social and territorial contexts to which planning policies have to be applied?

Planning and research are mutually dependent: their relationships are decisive for the quality of planning expertise and action in society.

#### ***4 The relevance of Doctorates***

If we take a look at our Universities and Schools, we find a research area which is relatively homogeneous (that is to say which is comparable): this is the area of the PhDs. The question then is: are PhD courses able to produce 'socially meaningful research', that is to say research that can be used to improve planning practice - that is technical expertise in the framework of a social process? If so, to what extent is this true? When analysing their finished products, i.e.: theses, we can ask ourselves whether they represent a satisfactory result in terms of the scientific content. Do they also represent a starting point for the practical use of such knowledge?

Currently the transfer of knowledge from research to the professional world is anything but easy or obvious.

One wonders to what extent research tends to develop in subject areas far from a planner's daily issues, and whether this trait is inherent to the nature of research itself. This dilemma has not been addressed in the two-pronged approach which currently can be seen in the PhD courses of the European Planning Schools: i) the traditional model focused on the scientific development of the discipline (research work for a doctorate is not conceived as training in research but as a contribution to the enhancement of scientific knowledge), ii) according to the professional model, a Doctorate is not only intended for a scientific career but also as a means to develop knowledge relevant to non university careers (see the good work made by Ingrid Lundhal under the cover of Aesop Project "Improving Planning Education in Europe"). Is it possible to conceive Doctoral

Degrees as widely applied research and development, oriented to the solution of problems related to practice?

I have raised a short list of issues this Workshop can address, leaving it to the participants to decide which specific features are worth discussing in depth and detail.

I hope this Workshop will open new inroads to further finalise and more fruitfully orient University research projects so as to match the needs of practice within the market.

Likewise, we hope professionals will pinpoint areas of interest for research to Universities.