Agonism and conflict in strategic urban projects: the dynamics of political opinion formation and social mobilization as condition and potential for reflexive governance

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Abstract

There has been a renewed interest and planning-theoretical underpinning recently for the idea of urban development projects as instruments for strategic urban transformation as well as for reflexive governance (e.g. Pinson 2004; Van den Broek et al. 2010; Oosterlynk et al. 2011). In many respects, however, the normative perspective envisioned by such contributions appears to stand in a counter-factual relationship to real-world scenarios. Empirical evidence and scholarly critique (e.g. Moulaert et al. 2003; Altshuler and Luberoff 2003; Salet and Gualini 2007) in fact highlight the fact that urban projects very often fall short of their strategic or integrative intentions: on the contrary, they often are occasions for untreatable controversies over urban development. As such, they express a peculiar a vocation for enhancing potentials for local conflict and often provide the scene for their very enactment.

Understanding the reasons and dynamics of conflict around urban projects still represents therefore a crucial precondition for arguing about the potentials for strategic reflexivity of project-based urban development initiatives. In this perspective, we need not only acknowledge agonism and conflict as constructive and constitutive elements of social relations, as sources of its strength and ability to innovate, but also inquire into the conditions under which agonism and conflict can be turned away from producing disrupting social outcomes and towards realising potentials for innovative transformative dynamics.

The paper proposes an empirically informed reflection on such conditions. Based on selected cases of conflict around urban development projects in Germany, it focuses in particular on a dual aspect which often characteristically defines the dynamic of

planning conflicts: the contradictory rationales and temporalities taken, on the one hand, by (institutionalized) policy development and planning practices and, on the other hand, by social mobilisation practices within the extended timeframe of the process. It argues that more awareness and consideration of the way an agonistic moment may develop and of the dynamics and forms of social mobilization (Melucci 1988) in the course of policy development and planning is crucial for addressing a process design that may enhance the potential for reflexive outcomes.

1. Introduction: on the 'strategic' potentials and challenges of urban development projects

Urban policy and planning research literature has shown recently a distinctive interest – with variable critical depth – for urban development projects as instruments for strategic spatial transformation (Pinson 2004, 2009; Van den Broek, Albrechts and Segers 2010; Oosterlynck et al. 2011; see also: Carmona and Burgess 2001; Carmona, Burgess and Badenhorst 2009).

Following a season of studies more explicitly targeted at inquiring critically into the contradictions of projects as the expression of 'neoliberal' practices of urban development policy (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter 2003; Moulaert, Rodríguez and Swyngedouw 2003; Salet and Gualini 2007a; Majoor 2008; Diaz Orueta and Fainstein 2008), these contributions signal a distinctive interest in re-assessing and re-defining (in critical but overtly normatively-oriented perspective) the potential meaning of spatial projects, within an alleged movement of 'revival' of strategic spatial planning as evoked, among others, by authors like Healey (1997, 2007, 2010; et al. 1997), Albrechts (2004, 2011), or Salet and Faludi (2000).

According to a meanwhile diffused commonsense understanding, the 'strategic' nature of planning is identified with a "long time perspective" which "does not specify a fixed end state but operates as a flexible framework for sustainable spatial development", by this combining "a strong 'action orientation' and an increased sensitivity to the multiplicity of actors involved in strategic spatial planning" and to the need for introducing forms of social innovation into the planning and policy process (Oosterlynck, Albrechts, and Van Den Broek 2011: 3).

What is particular interest for us here is the way a strategic orientation of planning is tied to the potential roles of projects as instruments and measures of spatial transformation. Key in this respect are the notions of action-orientation and co-production. In the words of Oosterlynck et al., "action orientation implies an interest in planning instruments [that may realise] the *governing of land-use conflicts*, ways of *integrating various spatial claims* and the *operationalization of spatial quality and sustainability*, whereas social innovation draws attention to *the coupling of the transformation of space and the transformation of social relations in space* and to the

satisfaction of local needs" (Oosterlynck, Albrechts, and Van Den Broek 2011: 3, italics added).

This understanding resonates of Healey's concerns for the potential and challenges that urban projects – in light of her conception of "place-governance with a planning orientation" (Healey 2010: xiii) – bear for practices of strategy formation in place development. Major urban projects are seen as new interpretations of urbanity through complex mixes of interests and resources mobilised, and raise the question of how to create new places that are not elite enclaves, but "long-term public realm resources", with "attributes of inclusive urbanity" (Healey 2010: 126-7). Urban economies, policy processes, public and private entrepreneurship and management models, mobilisation patterns, strategic imagination and framing visions, as well as positioning in translocal development trends, are discussed as elements that need to be understood on the background of the ongoing struggle for "safeguarding the public realm" in urban projects (Healey 2010: 159): a struggle which involves conditions like energetic agency and a proactive governance mode, skilled and committed guidance, critical monitoring by the political and civic community, plus a strategic view of trans-local connections.

Similarly, authors like Salet and Gualini (2007b; Salet 2008) have argued in favor of a joint critical consideration of aspects of conceptual, strategic and democratic integration across scales in the framing of urban projects as a condition for their capacity to introduce sustainable socio-spatial innovation.

Compared with a more critically-minded literature, however, recent discourse on 'strategic spatial projects' has often gained a distinctive normative orientation. Recent work by Oosterlynck et al. is, again, a significant example. Projects as the instruments for the "structural transformation of socio-spatial reality", in this respect, are seen as necessarily capable of exerting (strategic) 'selectivity' while pursuing an 'integrative' framework of goals, which in turn implies fostering horizontal and vertical forms of cooperation. In sum, projects constitute an instance of 'co-production' which implies "a specific focus on how spatial transformation may facilitate social innovation both in the substantive sense of improving the satisfaction of local needs and in the process sense of involving non-conventional, grassroots and disadvantaged actors and groups" (Oosterlynck, Albrechts, and Van Den Broek 2011: 3). Again, what is of particular interest here is however the convition that "[t]he *place focus* of strategic planning and design […] provides a promising basis for public-public cooperation as well as between the government and civil society and private sector actors (a 'government-led-but-negotiated form of governance' […]" (Oosterlynck, Albrechts, and Van Den Broek 2011: 3-4, italics added). This conception leans upon the 'four-track' model of strategic spatial planning elaborated by Albrechts (2004, 2011; see also Van den Broeck 2011), based on the combination of different action trajectories, "one for the vision, a second for the short-term and long-term actions, a third for the involvement of the key actors, and finally a fourth track for a more permanent process (mainly at the local level) involving the broader public in major decisions" (Albrechts 2004: 752).

In a similar vein, Pinson (2004, 2009) has argued about re-assessing urban development projects and their role in public policy. His reading is in line with an attention for the governance of urban projects as the specific focus of analysis, as expressed by approaches to the inquiry of projects as 'policy instruments' (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2004) as a way to get insights into the nature of a policy. This amounts to assuming 'projects' as the object, rather than as merely a unit, of analysis (Pinson 2004: 200). In this respect, projects can be analysed as a specific mode of policy action: rather than simply a context, arena, or sequence of actions that unveils a set of power relations and interests in the city, it represents a constitutive dimension of their enactment. Projects are a specific mode by which the urban policy arena is constituted.

In this perspective, "in as far as it adopts the instrument of projects, public intervention does not consist anymore in imposing the supremacy of public regulation, but primarily in organising the combination of different types of regulation" (Pinson 2004: 228 - my translations from French). This justifies an attention for projects that points at changing sources for legitimacy and effectiveness of public action, implying new 'reflexive' attitudes such as capacity of anticipation, integration of uncertainty, openness to context, decentralisation of action, and sensitiveness to actors (Pinson 2004: 220).

Interpreting projects as expressions of a reflexive and innovative process- and action-orientation of urban policy, however, remains problematic, and normative applications of this ideal deserve critical scrutiny. In fact, assumptions of projects as 'open' frames of public action, allowing reflexive responses to emergent outcomes and turning unintended consequences into collective resources, remains largely counterfactual if not merely ideal. Analysing their logic is hence crucial for a critique of the strategic nature of urban projects and of their potential as innovate instruments of public policy. This paper is a step towards such a critique.

2. 'Strategic urban projects' as object of theorization and object of research: insights from a social movement perspective

The brief, and certainly partial review of current scholarly discourse on 'strategic spatial projects' represents an outstanding critical background – as well as a critical object – for our assessment of urban development projects based on empirical evidence from some case-studies. It is based on an on-going critical concern, on the one hand, for a domain of urban policy and planning practices in which urban development projects constitute specific strategic-relational constructs (Gualini 2008, 2010, forthc.) and, on the other hand, for contentious character of urban policies and for the role urban development projects often play in this respect as factor of social contention – to the point, in some instances, of even becoming catalyzers of social movements and major foci of local political conflicts (Gualini 2011a, 2011b).

The perspective chosen in this paper, against this background of interests, is a quite specific one: it is an attempt to gain new sources of reflexivity from an engagement with the nature of social contention around urban development projects, and to do so based on hypotheses drawn from the literature on the dynamics of contentious politics and social movements.

Besides specific interest in this literature and in the issues it raises for critical-interpretive urban policy analysis, this approach is motivated by the conviction that the development of the 'strategic' features and the effective pursuit of the 'strategic' aims of urban development projects – as briefly sketched above – are only to a limited extent amenable to be subject to a 'design' intentionality, and that they rather highly depend upon the capacity for reflexive co-evolution in relation to insurgent social inputs along the life-span and dynamics of the policy and planning process. In this respect, the task of this paper constitutes a limited step in this direction of analysis, based on case-studies of the actual reality of what are all-too-often 'strategically dumb' projects. Along a critical reconstruction of their policy and planning processes and of related dynamics of contention, the paper aims at gaining elements of understanding of what the logic of social protest and mobilization can specifically teach us about how and under which conditions such a strategic reflexivity can emerge and be exerted.

2.1. Contentious politics and social mobilization

In this section, we first define the key assumptions drawn from research on social movements, and then formulate the hypotheses that inform the two case studies that follow.

In adopting a social movement perspective on conflicts around urban development projects, we move from the basic observation (Tilly 2004) that the dynamics of contention and social protest are tied to their political-institutional, social and economic context, and that this context significantly defines conditions under which they may take place. In this context, however, social movements must be understood as a distinct form of social protest and contention by virtue of three features that characterize them as collective action and as a collective construct (Tilly 2004: 53):

- they are sustained organized public efforts to raise collective claims, combining claimants, objects of claims and a public in a 'campaign';
- they combine forms of political action, which form over time context specific, standard-operating modes by which collective action is enacted: the social movement 'repertoire';
- they are public representations of unity, worthiness, collectivity and commitment, involving significant processes of identification and collective identity building.

The sorts of claims, forms of action, and collective identification mobilized and their combinations differ according to the time-space specificity of social movements and the contingent situations in which they emerge. Their relative salience may vary

among social movements, among claimants within movements, and even among phases of movements (Tilly 2004, 184). The origin and features of social movement claims, repertoires and identities, moreover, are rooted in the regime within which they operate. In this sense, as pointed out by Tilly (2006), contentious actions are shaped by regimes in several ways:

- by regulatory control on possible claim-making repertoires;
- by the power of policy practices and discourses to selectively constitute potential claimants and potential objects of claim;
- by producing streams of issues, events, and governmental actions around which movements may rise and fall.

The forms and dynamics of contention are hence a function of the specific political-institutional, social and economic conditions under which they emerge: it is in their shadow that a 'political opportunity structure' (Tarrow 1998) for collective action may emerge: "contentious politics is triggered when changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources of their own. They contend through known repertoires of contention and expand them by creating innovations at their margin. When backed by dense social networks and galvanized by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents. The result is the social movement." (Tarrow 1998: 2).

In our perspective, this observation is important in a twofold way. First, it leads us to consider planning practices as being defined as a 'policy regime', i.e. as an action situation which is not only shaped by political-institutional, social and economic framework conditions, but by the specific policy rationale that defines its course of action and by its potential for selective regulation of modes of collective action. Second, the selectivity of forms of social-political regulation and discipline expressed by planning as a 'policy regime' may precisely become the occasion for forms of identification, leading to the emergence of a 'political opportunity structure' for collective mobilization.

This observation is important in relationship with the insurgent, constructed and anything but 'natural' features of social movements – an aspect which has led scholars to warn against the 'ontologisation' of social movements (Melucci 1988: 330). Against approaches to social movements that emphasize factors for individual mobilization – material interests and resources as well as subjective and voluntaristic variables – over the symbolic-cognitive and interpretive aspects of social experience, authors like Melucci (1988, 1989, 1996), Snow (et al. 1980, 1986), Tarrow (1998) and Tilly (2004; and Tarrow 2006) emphasize the emergent and constructed character of social movements as forms of collective action.

As these author show, a motivation to adhere to a context of interaction – like a form of collective mobilization – *per se, i.e. a priori* of interaction itself, is rarely found; conversely, with the varying of activities and modes of involvement, interests for participation and modes of participation also tend to vary: "the 'motives' for joining

or continued participation are generally emergent and interactional rather than pre-structured" (Snow *et al.* 1980: 795). Motivation to participation can neither be seen exclusively as an individual nor as a discrete variable: it is rather constructed and consolidated through interactions and in the framework of their process-like dimension (Melucci 1988), whereas "rationales for participation are both collective and ongoing phenomena" (Snow *et al.* 1986: 467).

Actors 'produce' collective action because they are able to define themselves and to define their relationships with the environment (other actors, available resources, opportunities and obstacles) in terms that involve a collective and shared identification of issues and issue-boundaries, in relation to which they feel their interests to be involved and they might consider to mobilize their resources in that direction. The identities that are thus strengthened are 'social products' of the events that occurred in a particular time-space conjuncture (Melucci 1988, 1996).

Contrary to conceptions which see the outcomes of social movements as functions of the definition of objectives and of the group's ideology - thus binding them to the sharing of defined 'values' –, this conception understands processes of collective mobilization as phenomena subject to significant variability according to differences in relational structures. In this sense, the relational settings of interaction constitute at least as important factors in defining paths of participation and cooperation as dispositions or value assumptions do.

2.2. Social movements and planning processes: research hypotheses

This aspect is of relevance in relationship with fragmentation that characterizes contemporary societies in late modernity (Melucci, 1989, 1996) and the way this affects social movement in the urban context. It hints at a recognizable change in features in contemporary urban movements, whereby 'neoliberal' and globalized urban development policies and practices have contributed to a progressive erosion of cycles of urban movements based on established local groupings and interests based on traditional forms of affiliation and mutual identification – be they corporatist, class, or community based – and on their social movement infrastructure (Mayer 2007). While moving away from conflicts grounded on basic social cleavages, however, urban conflicts have pointed to the emergence of "a variety, a multiplicity of conflicts, revealing the untreatable diversity of local societies and the emerging need to build shared identities" (Pacchi and Pasqui 2011: 4). To this obviously contribute the new cross-sectional social impact and visibility taken by the 'neoliberal project' in cities, as well as an unprecedented local as well as trans-local mediatization of urban struggles.

This is in line with the observation that contemporary social movements take often the form of 'multiform movements' (Tarrow 1998: 103), flexibly, syncretically and pluralistically combining different forms of collective action and tactics. This accounts for the fact that often, in contemporary social movements, "heterogeneity

and interdependence are greater spurs to collective action than homogeneity and discipline" (ibid.: 137), and that mobilization often takes the form of democratically decentralized movements (ibid.: 129), that is, of 'decentralized, segmented, and reticulated' groups that capitalize on variety and pluralism.

Two interrelated conditions are crucial for collective mobilization to occur under such conditions. The first is the enactment of opportunities for involvement through the development of a repertoire of actions: "contentious collective action demonstrates the possibilities of collective action to others and offers even resource-poor groups the opportunity that their lack of resources would deny them", and thus "it can pry open institutional barriers through which the demands of others can pour" (Tarrow 1998: 87). This aspect points to the importance of the 'public performance' of contention and of the development of itineraries of repertoire change in response to changing opportunity structures.

The second is the importance of symbolic mobilization in order to define alternative belief systems that may constitute interfaces for mutual identification and support collective action. In fact, "it is participants' recognition of their common interests that translates the potential for a movement into action" (Tarrow 1998: 6), but this recognition is an interpretive endeavor that implies developing frames of identification that allow to bridge differences in positions and preferences and to create new symbolic-cognitive bonds. This explains the importance of collective action frames and of dynamic and co-evolutive processes of framing in the development of social movements

'Framing' results from practices of consensus mobilization intended as a practice that involves constructing symbols of consensus: these however are not only drawn from 'categorical identity' (Tarrow 1998: 119-120) but increasingly involve mobilizing emotional commitments that may contrite bridging categorical differences. Thus, "most of the work of 'framing' is cognitive and evaluative – that is, it identifies grievances and translates them into broader claims against significant others" but, to a significant extent, it involves "tapping or creating emotional energy" (Tarrow 1998: 111). This can occur through different processes of framing – like frame bridging, frame amplification and frame extension – and ultimately lead to *frame alignment*, i.e. of the alignment between individuals' or groups' frames along *collective frames*. As such, "frame alignment [...] is a necessary condition for movement participation, whatever its nature or intensity, and that is typically an interaction accomplishment" (Snow *et al.* 1986: 467).

'Framing' is anything but a purely intentional process: it is an interactional outcome, as part of what Tarrow (1998: 121) calls 'framing through contention' – and, at the same time, it is a condition for reproduction and co-evolution of interaction.

This leads us to discussing two last interrelated aspects that are key for assessing social movements in the framework of planning processes: the nature of frames dominating social movements, and their intertemporal dimension in terms of their

possible trajectories of evolution. They bear a combined relevance to the question of the social-political outcomes of contentious movements in the context of public policy and, in particular, their prospects of their co-evolution towards integrative rather than polarizing and ultimately disruptive outcomes.

The first aspect can be usefully discussed combining the typologies of conflicts and related forms of social movements advanced by Pizzorno (1993) and Melucci (1996), as Pacchi and Pasqui (2011) have recently proposed. In their view, even if their peculiar combinations are frequently observable, distinguishing these types analytically is important in order to recognize the different consequences that different kind of urban conflicts based on them can have for planning and policy practices.

Pizzorno (1993) proposes a threefold typology in which he distinguishes 'recognition', 'interest' and 'ideological (or value)' conflicts. 'Interest conflicts' are typical for parties which share the same values and the same systems of relations in a pluralistic environment in which they struggle for their relative distribution of benefits. Obviously, conflicts of interest can be radical and can entail radical opposition, but they usually are framed as a distributive game, in which what is at stake is typically a comparative benefit gain.[1]

'Recognition conflicts' are conflicts that are promoted around a group's or actor's claim for recognition of its identity. As Pizzorno underlines, 'identity' in this case is anything but a given, being rather often defined in opposition to other parties, and involves therefore struggle for mutual identification in which a new identity is a possible outcomes of the conflicts itself.[2]

'Ideological (or value) conflicts', finally, involve clashes among (ontological) world-views and among systems of values and beliefs which claim for universal validity. The relation to concrete interests is therefore often not transparent if not irrelevant, and different interests can be bridged and conveyed.[3]

[1] In the characterization by Pacchi and Pasqui (2011: 4): "Interest conflicts take place when scarce resources (and firstly land and its possible uses) are distributed through planning decision. Often these kinds of conflicts have an economic and financial dimension: for example the competition between different uses of transformation areas is often a competition between developers and landowners, or between different promoters, or between financial operators and developers, and so on. If we consider also the public administration an economic actor producing resources through planning permissions, also the bargaining between institutional bodies and the private sector can be considered an interest conflict."

[2] In the characterization by Pacchi and Pasqui (2011: 4): "Recognition conflicts take place when social groups (often local) want to be recognized through planning decisions that contribute to their identification. Often these kinds of conflicts are connected with the defense of 'local' (environmental, cultural, community) values, or with the claim for exclusive uses of a public space, against uses considered inconvenient."

[3] In the characterization by Pacchi and Pasqui (2011: 4): "Ideological conflicts take place when the beliefs themselves (the very ontological frameworks) are a contentious object. In this kind of planning conflicts there is not a shared framework between the parts: the framework is the object of conflict. Radical ecological conflicts, for example, can be considered ideological, because the parts

If we combine Pizzorno's typology of conflicts with the emergence of specific kinds of social movements which give expression to them, as in Melucci's typology, we gain elements for interpreting the potential evolution trajectories involved. As Melucci (1996) underlines, new social movements increasingly involve practices of mutual identification and recognition that tend to stress the limits of social representation within which traditional class or corporatist struggles were played out. Melucci's distinction between 'claimant', 'political' and 'antagonistic' movements resembles the one proposed by Pizzorno in that, moving from one to the other, it stresses the increasing importance of alternative framings both as a factor of external positioning and of internal cohesion of the movement – with an increasing availability to systemic conflict as factor of identification and mobilization. In the words of Pacchi and Pasqui (2011: 5), "[m]oving from a claimant to a political and to an antagonist movement, the symbolic content tends to increase, while the divisibility and negotiability of goals tends to decrease, and so does the reversibility of conflicts; in the end, such conflicts tend to become zero sum rather than positive sum games."

The second aspect concerns the intertemporal dimension of social movements, that is, the development of cycles of contention and of the evolution they may take – through phases of mobilization, processes of diffusion, extension, imitation and reaction, and possibly demobilization and decline (Tarrow 1998: 142 ff.). The issue is relevant in view of the outcomes of contentious planning processes. The trajectories taken by social movements around contentious plans and projects, as pointed out earlier, are the result of the strategic selectivity of 'policy regimes' and of the way opportunity structures are defined and appropriated by collective actors.

The hypothesis that can be inferred from these observations and that we want to explore is threefold:

- firstly, as they contribute to defining the political opportunity structures for contentious actions and for collective mobilization, and ultimately for the nature of social movements, planning processes and the 'policy regimes' in which they are embedded are also determinant for shaping their evolutive trajectories;
- secondly, the co-evolution of planning processes and social movements in a defined contentious situation depends upon the way forms of strategic reflexivity either side are developed on either side and on how these mutually interact;
- thirdly, a more developed awareness of dynamics of contention and social mobilization in planning processes is essential for developing a strategic reflexivity of public policy that may make co-evolution towards integrative outcomes possible.

The question is, ultimately, how far awareness of the nature and meaning of social mobilization processes is can be developed within the context of planning processes and how far this may lead to responses and realignments that may develop a form of strategic reflexivity and favor the emergence of integrative outcomes.

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want to produce (different) universal systems of values and meanings. Often, in this kind of conflicts scientific information and technical knowledge are at stake."

3. Planning processes and cycles of contention: two case studies

In this section, we present two case-studies of actual conflicts around urban development projects in Germany. The case-studies neither claim to be exhaustive overall assessments of these conflicts nor to draw conclusions on grounds of direct comparability. However, they share a common interpretive framework based on the *joint analysis of planning processes and of related cycles of contention*. The focus of interpretation is therefore the pattern of co-evolution of planning and contention, as can be interpreted through an analysis of the social mobilization developed around each project.

3.1. The case of MediaSpree, Berlin, 1992-2012

Introduction

The urban development project known as 'MediaSpree' – extending over 180 ha. for an originally expected built space of 1.3 mio. sqm. and an investment volume of ca. 2.6 billion Euros – is basically a marketing construct. MediaSpree does not actually exist as a unitary, let alone publicly initiated project. It is basically the result of a marketing initiative, characterized from the outset by an incremental approach to place-making. As a unitary project, it is identifiable mainly by a strategic frame of a mainly symbolic branding- and marketing-oriented nature. This is reflected in the nature of public-private relationships developed around the project.

Phase one: indicative strategic framing

The public career of the project has developed in a distinctively incremental way. Its origins date back to the early post-reunification years, in the early 1990s. Despite its regained centrality, the area's development potential was rather neglected in the immediate aftermath of Berlin's unification, being sidelined by a focus on development along the so-called *Zentrenband* connecting the eastern and western city and on the 'critical reconstruction' of the historic city pursued by the *Planwerk Innenstadt* (Senatsverwaltung 1997). Nevertheless, this planning background proved to be determinant in framing its prospects as attention extended to the area of the Ostbahnhof, leading to an urban design contest in 1992 and to the first formally binding plans in the mid-1990s. Extending the design rationale of the *Planwerk Innenstadt*, plans foresaw a new skyline made of a 'chain of architectural pearls' along the eastern waterfront.

The fusion of the boroughs of Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain in 2001 introduced the opportunity for a unitary development scheme. The planning document devised by the Berlin Senate – as a complement of the *Planwerk Innenstadt* – in coordination with the boroughs, the *Leitbild Spreeraum Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg* (Senatsverwaltung 2001) is a spatial-functional vision which redefines the

Spreeraum as a unitary area and attempts at a coordination of the heterogeneous developments taking place. The focus was on tertiary development along a livable waterfront environment for a mix of leisure and working activities. Subsequently, the vision was strategically targeted towards creating an attractive urban environment in particular for 'creative' and media enterprises to locate, prospectively contributing to clustering and specialization in key sectors for the city's economy. Nevertheless, the strategy was clearly functional to a maximization of development potentials. This was backed by provisions for a 10-meter public waterfront integrated with a new open space along remains of the Berlin wall, the East-Side-Park.

The resulting planning approach relied on a flexible steering mode with minimal regulating inputs from the public. Despite its identification as strategic development zone, the city's direct commitment – besides the provision of incentive structures mainly through public subsidies – was from the outset significantly restrained. As the strategic frame was made of an indicative system of objectives implying incremental market-based mechanism of implementation, the relational frame adopted was a relatively stable but loose, disjointed structure of relationships.

Phase two: market-oriented strategic-relational framing

MediaSpree's planning objectives were mainly pursued through joint marketing efforts. This in fact amounted to a substantial delegation by the city to a private interest coalition to define a development strategy for the area. The result was a flat hierarchy behind which, however, lies an apparent dominance of behaviours and attitudes framed by market-oriented visions and behaviors clearly dominated, which made the future of the area primary dependent on the demand-side and on investors' preferences. This aspect, as we will see, bore important consequences for the project's reception in public debate in the first phases of contention.

Accordingly, MediaSpree gained the status of a strategic project *de facto* more by marketing and branding than by formal political commitment. A crucial role was played in this by the initiative taken by the area's landowners – in large part public- or semi-public corporations – shortly after the adoption of the *Leitbild* to join a local marketing agency. Originally founded as Spreemedia GmbH, the agency was turned a few years later into an association known as Mediaspree e.V., financed with the contribution of the Federal scheme for regional development and by members' contributions.

Change from the original form of a limited liability company to an association, introduced in 2004 and politically supported by the Berlin Senate, conferred the agency a semi-public character strongly contrasting with the original set-up. This transformation however did not change its mission as an agent of property interests, entrusted with marketing properties, attracting investors, networking and counseling members, and building an image for the purpose of an effective overall development of the area. Following the successful location of the headquarters of firms like MTV

Europe and Universal, Mediaspree e.V. consistently focussed its image-building and marketing efforts on media-related industries.

Mediaspree e.V. represented an attempt at contrasting a weak market situation by channeling investors' attention on a unitarily marketed area. Its associative form suggests transparency as an expression of non-self-interested conduct.

Despite this carefully constructed public image, Mediaspree e.V. was neither an open forum for public consultation nor a true interest coalition. On the one hand, an extended range of local stakeholders was never involved, the public being represented by local authorities – the Berlin Senate and the borough – in the advisory board along with the Chamber of Commerce and the local Agency for Labour. On the other hand, while the agency acted as collective representative of property owners, negotiations about concrete investment deals were kept strictly individual.

Another significant feature that emerged along with this relational setting is that MediaSpree was never formally declared as a priority project of the city. In line with its rather non-committal attitude, in overall terms the Berlin Senate adopted a delegation strategy which – next to a key role for Mediaspree e.V. – implied leaving formal planning authority with the local borough. The borough acted mainly as controlling instance in enforcing planning laws, regulations and development contracts. At this level of the planning procedure, the borough was thus entitled to formulate its own goals and to exert influence on developers. The key instrument for this was the development contracts attached to each building plan and reflecting the degree of cooperation between the public and the private investors. The Senate however kept planning authority over some areas – e.g. Anschutz and some others – as well as significant influence over areas of state-owned enterprises. The presence of land property of significant public-owned companies in fact the Berlin Senate a stake in development in the area. It was to become, however, also a potential source for conflicts of interest between the Senate and the borough – particularly, as we shall see, as the project became contentious.

Phase three: awareness raising and antagonistic mobilization

The project's strategic and relational framing briefly described constitutes the framework within which MediaSpree turned, within a few years, into one of Berlin's hotspots of overt antagonism. Despite all this, it took relatively long for citizens groups to raise their voice – in particular, participatory process having been kept strictly formal. This is in part certainly due to the practices of Mediaspree e.V., which have remained largely unaccountable as well as unaccessible to the general public. Moreover, in first instance, its branding approach constructed an artificial image that was little targeted to as well as little felt by local citizens. In addition, given the nature of the area and the significant physical and symbolic separation from its Kreuzberg side, developments on MediaSpree's core areas did not

necessarily raise expectations of typical neighborhood conflicts. For long, all these factors contributed to the rather limited public visibility of the project.

This however was rapidly bound to change in the mid-2000s. A variety of development contributed to introduce the first phase of mobilization. For one, the pervasive marketing and branding activity of the agency – with its symbolic co-optation inclusion of local 'grassroots' activities in image building – increasingly raised awareness on the factual consequences of planned developments for the alternative milieux that had been making the area famous – and a major tourist attraction – after Berlin's reunification. Moreover, some key initiatives dramatically contributed to rise local as well as supralocal awareness.

In fact, dependence on market forces led development of MediaSpree to be in part defined by single disjointed development initiatives, for which ad-hoc negotiation frameworks were defined. These were clustered in particular in a section called Oberbaum-City as well as in a large-scale project by the American investor Anschutz Group – now known as O2-World Arena – for which development contracts were signed with the borough in 2000.

The initiative by Anschutz – one of the first major foreign investors in the area – to build a large multifunctional event arena bound to exert a huge impact on the area. Development contracts – by which Anschutz agreed pay-offs for road improvements and contributions to the realization of a playing field and the East-Side-Park along the Spree – were defined directly with the Senate at a time in which the overall concept for MediaSpree was still in the making, and were decisively influenced by Anschutz negotiating power vis-à-vis the boroughs' compelling need for facilitating investments under public zero-cost development conditions. This led to obtaining a prominent and intrusive position in the area. One paradoxical result was that the planned East-Side-Park appeared to be degraded to a facility dependent on the investor's will – keeping an unhindered riverside view and waterfront access – to which even part of the former Berlin wall monument has been sacrificed. This had a tremendous impact on public perception on the threats to an area that had turned over years into one of the city's most dynamic and creative hotspots of informal development.

This rise of visibility went along with the progressive emergence of antagonistic action, drawing in particular from autonomous-anarchist circles related to a mixed milieu of squatters and extending to insurgent anti-capitalist and anti-gentrification groupings, which had increasingly been pointing to the segregation and polarization effects of east-Berlin's revitalization processes.

A crucial role as an 'early riser' and as a broker of citizens' mobilization was to be exerted by the formation of the association *MediaSpree Versenken!* ('Sink MediaSpree!'), as it proved capable of directing attention to the specific local development challenges involved in the project while tying them to a broader, city-

wide system-critical movement. In a few years, MediaSpree Versenken! managed to develop reference to the Spree waterfront area into a cohesive and bridging symbol.

On the one hand, the contentious practices it promoted – like demonstrations, occupations and flash-mob inspired performances – were capable of appealing to actors and groups attached to specific local development issues, like the public nature of the waterfront and the nature of its uses and appropriation, as well as to tie-in to the pragmatic interests of a variety of local actors, particularly of 'pioneers' of temporary creative-cultural and leisure-oriented uses of space. By this, its actions also contributed to turning the image-building campaigns of Mediaspree e.V. upside-down, and to introducing a symbolic re-appropriation of the image of the area. On the other hand, MediaSpree Versenken! proved capable of connecting local and supra-local interests and perspectives and in bridging scales of protest. Accordingly, while slogans like 'Spree waterfront for all!' rapidly became carriers of broader forms of protest and mobilization and gained local as well supra-local attention – beyond the ideological origins of the promoters – as rooted in an alternative vision of local development, MediaSpree itself become an overarching symbol of opposition to the 'selling-out' of the city.

Not surprisingly, the features of the relational setting also turned into a significant matter of contention at a point in time in which first antagonistic actions raised attention on the contentious potential of the project, as the marketing agency and the actors they represented lent themselves to becoming an amenable symbolic target for movements critical of neo-liberal urban developments – not necessarily with direct local ties.

Phase four: institutionalized dissent and diffused contention

MediaSpree Versenken! became a significant actor in the project's arena by raising attention on the exclusionary character of planned development and on the marginalization of local interests. In organizational terms, MediaSpree Versenken! represented anything but a decentralized-networked movement in the strict sense (Tarrow 1998: 129), and actually kept a radical ideological core throughout the cycle of contention. Its actions, however, developed on the background of a significant resurgence diffusion of urban antagonism in Berlin, with significant forms of 'localizing protests' (Mayer 2007), like the actions promoted by the Berlin Social Forum founded in 2003, but also the emergence of contentious urban policy issues leading to direct actions like the storming and subsequent public appropriation of the Tempelhof area in 2009. In this respect, the resonance of its actions was amplificated by the network-like diffusion of urban policy related contention in the late 2000s.

MediaSpree Versenken! contributed thus to conferring visibility and symbolic unity to contentious forces around a project. What is also notable, however, is that it managed to develop elements of a counter-project which – even more than the symbolically powerful, but techno-politically unviable alternative to Stuttgart 21 –

could introduce a wedge in local planning. By this, it eventually gained an active role in the policy process as it managed to channel a diffuse public distress towards recognizable planning counter-proposals.

Success in mobilizing citizens – under the slogan 'Spree waterfront for all!' – towards a local consultative referendum, which was ultimately held in July 2008, led to overwhelming support for a development alternative to the official plans. This was expressed in the form of concrete physical requirements – a 50-meters clearing along the whole of the eastern Spree-side in order to realize a consistent public waterfront, a unitary 22 m. building height, and a pedestrian-only use of the planned bridge – which were easily identifiable beyond more or less ideological divides, but would in practice imply a moratorium and a substantial revision of formally and in part legally binding agreed developments.

In the aftermath of the referendum, these requirements and their implications for political action temporarily became the main focus of contention for current local politics. Crucial for the dynamics of contention around MediaSpree was the fact the referendum had forcefully altered the relational setting of the project, introducing new constraints and resources for policy actors. This implied not only new opportunities for representatives of the movement to influence policy agendas, but also the emergence of hidden intergovernmental tensions as it put the project's main public actors – the Berlin Senate and the borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg – in a rather awkward position.

While formally directed to the borough – statutorily mandated to give a formal response to the consultation – the referendum clearly was primarily directed against the 'neoliberal' practices of Berlin's governing coalition and of its business partners. While the joint marketing agency was liquidated in late 2008 – formally because of expiration of federal funding, but factually as a sign of the weakness of its coalition of interests face to the political challenge ahead – the Berlin Senate and its decided unwillingness to revise strategies for the area became the political target of contention – with developments around Anschutz's O2-Arena as the main symbolic marker.

The borough's potential to influence development, on the contrary, was reinforced, even if controversial. Following the referendum, the borough was forced to balance between dual political commitments. Its official position was – in line with formal planning developments – that, while demanding consideration for citizens' orientations, the referendum could possibly alter the state of things. In fact, established or progressing development contracts negotiated with developers define a difficult balance of public and private interests which – so went the argument – would have required amendments involving often dramatic compensations. On the other hand, the borough was asked to play a mediatory role which could only be possible if significant if partial recognition of citizens' requests could impact on the redefinition of the project.

The resulting situation was conflictual. The Senate at several occasions threated with withdrawing the borough's planning authority over the area in case decisions should be enforced that would imply devaluation and/or compensation measures. Subsequently, the Senate confirmed the borough's authority, as well as these threats, upholding the original planning goals (Abgeordnetenhaus 2008a) and pursuing a strategy of sidelining the referendum's result.

Moreover, after the liquidation of Mediaspree e.V. no unitary representation of land owners is presently in place. In July 2008, in reaction to the referendum, twelve major land owners have constituted an informal agreement based on the demonstrative rejection of any public dialogue. Nevertheless, controversy continued on whether existing formal agreements really constituted a binding legal obligation – as the Senate argued – since not all areas actually had defined building contracts, while several areas still lacked concrete commitments by developers.

The emergence of social antagonism thus also created new political opportunities for the borough. While subaltern in terms of power relations, its new position introduced possibilities for refining its own role by exerting a more proactive and ad-hoc mediation between public and private interests.

Following the referendum, the borough first promoted a discussion forum, and then established a public commission – the *Sonderausschuss Spreeraum* (Bezirksamt Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg 2007, 2009), including all political groupings of the council as four citizens' representatives – called to deliberate on the planning amendments demanded by popular vote. The commission was an attempt at bridging interests and opening-up participation in response to increasing unease with the shortcomings of formal decision-making processes. As such, it asserted the legitimacy of stakes beyond those represented by Mediaspree e.V. and the need to articulate consensus at a broader scale of involvement. While the results reached by the commission were disappointing and ineffectual – as well as contested by opponents (Initiativkreis Mediaspree Versenken 2009) – in upholding the formal prerogatives of the project against demands for change, it actually contributed to creating a structured arena of exchange to a range of actors, leading to some significant is partial and ad hoc change in plan provisions on specific lots. It was an expression of an insurgent dynamics of informal deliberation practices which, far from capable of revising the overall strategy for the area, nonetheless contributed to a significant if piecemeal shift in attitudes and practices.

A first notable example was readiness shown by the Berlin Senate in late 2008 to rethink its land-use policy along the Spree (Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin 2008b) introducing measures for safeguarding non-commercial, social and experimental activities and to adopt according up-dates of the *Leitbild*.

This involved a revision of criteria for land assignment adopted by the Berlin public land agency, the *Liegenschaftsfonds*, introducing new possibilities for the promotion

of alternative socially oriented projects in strategic (re-)development areas (Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin 2010).

Significantly, this partial reorientation of public policy developed within a broader public debate on the rationale of urban development (Stadtforum Berlin 2009) – of which a project like MediaSpree had been a major catalyzer.

Thus, while revision from rent maximization goals towards a more socially oriented (and more effective) land policy agenda was formally included – in the wake of an insurgent housing policy issue – in Berlin's new coalition agreement (SPD – CDU 2011), the issue also became a stake for broader forms of mobilization. In 2011, the civic initiative *Stadt Neu Denken* brought together a coalition of representatives from academia, professions, arts and civic associations and groups around the idea of an alternative approach to urban development. Soon around 500 individuals and civic organizations were involved in activities centered on developing ideas and requesting public policies allowing for socially attentive and flexible forms of urban development capable of reflecting the social creativity and pluralism of local urban contexts.

A further development which clearly reflects issues and demands raised in the framework of MediaSpree and other contemporary planning controversies – and which can be seen as a clear albeit partial response to shifting public moods on urban issues – is Berlin's Senate initiative of launching an IBA Berlin 2020 as a policy framework for a more experimental and participated approach to urban development in the inner-city fringes (Senatsverwaltung 2011).

3.2. The case of Stuttgart 21, 1988-2012

Introduction

Stuttgart 21 is a project which has become the center of a complex and still on-going social and political controversy, bearing different conflict potentials and developing along several significant social and political dimensions. As such, it has already acquired a significant position in public as well as scholarly attention. The intensity and diffusion of antagonism developed around the project are uncommon to public policy processes in Germany, and have prompted attention e.g. on the 'new' sociological features of urban protest and citizens mobilization around contentious urban development initiatives – their peculiar cross-sectional and inter-generational features being one of main aspects addressed by social researchers.

Above all, Stuttgart 21 has triggered a large public debate on issues concerning local policy and the apparent legitimacy deficit of public decision-making procedures incapable of incorporating a truly agonistic dimension of politics. Accordingly, the features taken by citizens' mobilization against this project have turned Stuttgart 21 into a catalyst for a broader public debate on the 'renewal' of local democracy.

First phase: techno-political conception

The beginnings of the project's political career are marked by what will be experienced as a key feature throughout the protest mobilization, a significant lack of transparency and of public openness. The marking event was the press conference in which, on April 18, 1994, the project called 'Stuttgart 21' was officially presented as a partnership project of the German federal government, the Land Baden-Württemberg, the City of Stuttgart and Deutsche Bahn AG (DB), involving a new underground station on the location of the extant, urban redevelopment dismissed railway grounds, and an improved railway connection to Stuttgart airport. What was presented by the protagonists themselves as a 'coup' (Heinz Dürr, CEO of DB, *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* 14 February 1995, quoted in: http://www.leben-in-stuttgart.de/geschichte.htm) marked a style of policy-making which was characteristic for a phase of techno-political conception carried out 'behind closed doors'. In fact, a first concept by Stuttgart-based transportation expert Gerhard Heimerl for a transit station connected to a new railway line to Ulm had been developed by DB since 1988, and was backed in September 1992 by a first crucial intergovernmental agreement on a solution combining a new station to a specific railway development option.

Significantly, in this phase, the way the project was managed in the public domain does not allow it to arise above a threshold of attention amenable to turning it into a significant issue in political campaigns. This happened despite the fact that critique had been voiced early: the alliance *Umkehr Stuttgart*, composed of seven environmental and transportation advocacy groups, had expressed dismissal of the project, backed by the Greens which advocated the 'lean' alternative (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 1995) – with arguments later by and large taken over by the movement. This was certainly due to the peculiar inter-institutional and inter-party support which backed the project, but also to the form of political communication adopted. In both the elections of the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg in April 1992 and the elections for Stuttgart city council in June 1994, Stuttgart 21 did not play any significant role. Even more significantly, the issue was almost completely absent from official parties' election campaigns for the Baden-Württemberg parliament in March 1996.

Second phase: formal planning

The latter elections took place at the outset of the *second phase* of the process, which marks the beginning of formal planning. From 1995 (first feasibility study presented in January, first exposition of plans in Stuttgart) (DB 1994) to early 1997 (decision on the design competition for the station), the foundations were laid for the start of the legal planning procedure, the *Raumordnungsverfahren*.

Meanwhile, a framework agreement among the institutional partners reached in November 1995 established mutual responsibilities in the development and financing

of the project, based on fixed costs forecasts – with a ceiling on public expenditure – and defined performance benchmarks. Both provisions, and in particular the former, were to become major issues of contention as for the cost-benefit ratio of the project and, above all, the transparency of expenditure forecasts.

The inter-institutional agreement of November 1995 was a landmark event in the development of the project. After only two years from the launch of the project, with formal planning procedures still pending, a contractual foundation for the project was laid down binding all partners (DB, Federal government, State government and the City of Stuttgart) to realizing the project under defined financial and operational conditions. The agreement provided for a timeframe and a building costs ceiling of 4,893 billion DM to be covered according to defined share rules by DB, the Federal state, the State Baden-Württemberg, the Region and the City of Stuttgart.

The double-bind realized between the parties in 1995 – to be later strengthened by agreement between DB and the City of Stuttgart by which 'fixed' the former's gains from the sale of the released railway tracks areas for urban development – was to become a major political factor and a key argument for the allegedly 'irreversible' character of the choice to build Stuttgart 21. By this, a contradictory situation was defined: on the one hand, a techno-political solution in a relatively advanced and concrete decision-making stadium, backed by a binding long-term financial and operational agreement; on the other hand, a still running formal planning procedure which, while formally providing for them, in fact ruled out any public consideration of techno-political alternatives of development.

A key defining element for the ensuing controversy since the *Raumordnungsverfahren* was the practical impossibility for any significant alternative concept to be analysed and discussed in public. In fact, the subsequent formal planning procedure, the *Planfeststellungsverfahren*, contemplated an alternative infrastructure and urban-regional transportation concept based on a rationalization of the existing node, which however was dismissed as not capable of realizing the objectives of the project. The strategic aim of Stuttgart 21 was since that moment held as identical with the techno-political adopted – by which, any possibility for public debate to influence the nature and features of the project was effectively ruled out. Accordingly, during the formal planning procedure and the consultation process involved, no real interface for dialogue with instances based on rejection of key tenets of the concept or on requests for alternatives was in any way made available. Rather, a political-institutional logic made of presumptive consensus formation and procedural legitimation consistently became dominant in framing the context in which contention could develop.

Third phase: institutionally-framed contention

Mounting civic protest notwithstanding, the planning process proceeded swiftly. In February 1997, a first phase of formal public insight and consultation – as required

by the *Raumordnungsverfahren* – was opened: the objections submitted – mostly referring to environmental and local impacts and on property rights – manifested the project's potential for conflict. Nevertheless, in November 1997, the *Raumordnungsverfahren* was positively concluded and the operational planning phase, the *Planfeststellungsverfahren*, introduced. During the *Planfeststellungs-verfahren*, 11,500 objections were presented by about 2,700 citizens, local communities and environmental groups, which were mostly dismissed as not relevant.

In this phase, contention around the project arose significantly, gaining a significant role in political campaigns, for the first time, on occasion of local elections in Stuttgart – involving choice of a new mayor – in October 1996.

Despite significant elements of polarization and even personification of the issue in party-political spheres, the dynamics of contention was still strongly framed by the institutional and procedural logic of the formal planning process. This occurred in two different, apparently contradictory, but intertwined ways.

On the one hand, the formal planning process offered a framework for expressing dissent on the project which – despite increasing contestation – still proved capable of framing and 'disciplining' protest. In fact, this framing capacity was to endure until the mid-2000s, when the last judicial procedures ensuing from the formal planning process were finally decided against the projects' opponents. A contribution to or, at least, an attempt at 'disciplining' protest was also given by an institutional strategy of 'displacing' dissent by opening spaces for participation on significant local side-aspects of the overall project. A significant moment in this strategy was the public participation procedure initiated by the City of Stuttgart in 1997 on the basis of the urban development framework concept for the railway areas to be dismissed, drafted by the city's planning department (Stadtplanungsamt Stuttgart 1997). Attended by an average 200 citizens and developing in a highly contested atmosphere between March 1997 and mid-1998, the public participation procedure increasingly manifested the limits of an approach systematically devised to exclude debate on the strategic conditions for development in the area and, in particular, on the feature of the infrastructural project on which it is premised. This rapidly led to radicalization and to petitions of principle concerning a truly democratic assessment of the effectiveness and legitimacy of Stuttgart 21 as a whole. As a matter of fact, as a side-effect of opponents' disappointment about public consultation, the first significant judicial initiatives against the city's decisions concerning the project were launched by representatives of the movement.

On the other hand, the first significant organized civic initiatives started addressing institutional possibilities for democratically rejecting the project. This is in particular the case of *Leben in Stuttgart - kein Stuttgart 21*, a civic initiative founded in 1995, which in July 1996 managed to gather 13,000 signatures in support of a local petition to change the city's statute in order to allow holding a local referendum on Stuttgart 21. Demands for a democratic opening of decision-making procedures, however,

were doomed meet on deaf ears on side of political party coalitions in power. Until 2007 – and before regaining significance in 2011, under completely changed political conditions – requests for a referendum remained a constant strategic focus of opponents, and their recurrent dismissal the marker of an political-cultural hegemonic elite and of its supporting interests coalition.

Between 1997 and 2001, Stuttgart was the scene of constant but scattered and often minor protest activities against the project developing within this dual frame. The experiences made by contentious forces on both these levels – the establishment of an effective interface for debate and strategic interaction, and the employment of institutional resources – however, proved to were key to the shift in protest and to the formation of a true an unprecedented social movement against the project during 2000s.

Fourth phase: extended and decentralized mobilization

Despite procedural successes and resulting claimed legitimation, the project's prospects become increasingly problematic in the late 1990s-early 2000s in connection with inter-institutional issues (not least, because of the self-deceiving timeframes and financial conditions defined for its realization, face to the need to complete the framework of agreements on matter of transaction involved) and, furthermore, with significant change in the nature and forms of civic protest.

In order to understand the reasons for this shift, three aspects must be considered. The first concerns the increasingly problematic commitment of the city's government to co-financing agreements with long-term political and administrative consequences. After a crucial a covenant between the Bund and DB was signed March 2001 – securing federal support to a project the financial viability of which appeared increasingly questionable –, in December 2001 the City of Stuttgart purchased from DB – for an amount of 459 million Euros which, according to opponents, clearly exceeds any reasonable profitability – the areas on which it committed itself to realising 17,000 new jobs and 11,000 residential units, thus significantly contributing to securing financing for the project.

The second aspect concerns the increasing symbolic visibility of the project and of its consequences as its realization approached. Controversies on the demolition of parts of the listed station hall building – designed by Paul Bonatz in the late 1920s – and on the destruction of parts of the popular historic park space, the Schlossgarten, in the city center, in particular, contributed to heating discussions and spreading civic mistrust, and marked the last stages of approval of the project, which was finally reached in 2007.

The third aspect is, as previously mentioned, the progressive expiration of procedural-juridical resources for effective opposition and the exhaustion of related strategies of contention by civic initiatives against the project.

As a matter of fact, between 2005 – when the *Planfestellungsbeschluss* was adopted – and April 2006 – when the last pending lawsuits against Stuttgart 21 were dismissed in favour of the project by the Land court of justice, rendering the *Planfestellungsbeschluss* legally binding – not only the last formal hurdles for the project, but also the last factors for strategic restraint to contention were removed, and a new structure of opportunity for new direct antagonistic actions emerged.

This was further reinforced when, in the following years, the latest attempts at adjudicating the right for popular expression were exploited. A significant escalation in readiness to public protest was reached with the mobilization in favor of a local referendum on the project, which was backed by about 67,000 signatures, but again dismissed by a majority of the Stuttgart city council in December 2007. In July 2009, also the Land court of justice – on grounds of the extant contractual agreements among the parties reached in 1995 and 2001 – rejected popular requests for a referendum on the project.

Meanwhile, the landscape of contentious practices against the project was significantly developing. Already during mobilization for the referendum, random demonstrations had been held demanding a stop to the project, with an estimate average of 5,000 participants. In July 2007, the various streams of opposition expressed by actors, initiatives and groups in and around Stuttgart were bundled in an umbrella organization called *Aktionsbündnis gegen S21*. The *Aktionsbündnis* brought together most 'historic' protest groups along with insurgent initiatives developed along the way. The *Aktionsbündnis* included local citizens' associations (Leben in Stuttgart e.V., SÖS Stuttgart Ökologisch Sozial), associations for ecologic protection and heritage at state and local level (*BUND, Stiftung Architekturforum BW*, *Aktive Parkschützer*, *Schutzgemeinschaft-Filder e.V.*), political parties of the centre-left spectrum (*Grüne, die Linke, SPD-Mitglieder gegen S21*), unions' representatives (*GewerkschafterInnen gegen Stuttgart 21*), and specific issue-related associations (*Pro Bahn e.V.*, *Verkehrsclub Deutschland*). The model was later imitated by similar associations dealing with the issue in other regional contexts (e.g. *Aktionsbündnis Heilbronner gegen S21).* The focus of mutual identification was support for the concept known as K21, which had definitely gained a key role as an alternative to the official project after it was presented in 2000 under the name 'optimised terminal station' (*Kopfbahnhof*) and subsequently fine-tuned in terms of both technical and financial terms. The concept showed on grounds of technical performance and of its comparative cost-benefit ratio the futility of 'megalomanic' structural interventions, while still allowing for 75 ha, i.e. about three-quarters of land-use gain through improvements on the railway tracks.

The *Aktionsbündnis* was led by a coordination team of about twenty representatives, which devised basic strategies concerning the repertoire of actions and the communication and negotiation strategies to be adopted. The pattern of protest initiatives however remained decentralized. It represented, in this respect, a typical example of a democratically decentralized movement (Tarrow 1998: 129), i.e. of an organizational setting drawing its strength from representing a decentralized,

segmented, and reticulated coalition of groups which allowed for multifarious and pluralist expressions of contention while providing an 'master frame' for mutual identification and recognition.

The new constellation formed an important condition for the development of a true social movement in opposition to the project, as it extended not only the basis for representation, but also opportunities for identification with and participation in contentious practices.

Under the umbrella of the *Aktionsbündnis*, the movement soon promoted a broadly accessible and appropriable repertoire of actions. Most remarkable of all was the start of the weekly *Montagsdemonstration*en against the project held in front of the station in Stuttgart's city center. The career of Stuttgart's *Montagsdemonstrationen* – started almost spontaneously on October 26, 2009, with five participants – was to become as remarkable as was the symbolic reference chosen: the public Monday's demonstrations held by citizens of Leipzig, Dresden and other cities in the doomsdays of the German Democratic Republic in 1989, as a public expression of a withdrawal of trust and legitimation. The extent reached by such statement of distress towards politics and institutions by an increasingly broad range of participants – held for the one-hundredth time in November 2011 and attended by a steadily rising number of participants – was a powerful attractor of statewide media and public attention for the Stuttgart 21 controversy. It also constituted a new structure of opportunity for broadening mobilization, in that it laid the conditions for the emergence of a repertoire of forms of contention made of peaceful direct actions performed in public, like the weekly demonstrations, the tatzebaos and public 'wall-of-complaints' postings, and other performances like sit-ins, human chains, the occupation of endangered trees, monuments and public places, as well as the mobilization of creative and suggestive symbols (such as the recurrent Swiss national flag waived during demonstrations: a symbol for both a referendum-based democratic culture and for an integrated railway network planning approach opposed to the criticized DB planning philosophy).

Success by the Greens in June 2009 local elections – replacing for the first time the Christian-Democrats as the largest party in city council – and the start of the *Montagsdemonstrationen* later that year introduced a new public mobilization phase, further fuelled by the ongoing unveiling of contradictions in the financial basis of the project.

Under these changed social and political conditions, events around Stuttgart 21 rapidly precipitated. On February 2, 2010, the first tree cuts marked the actual beginning of construction works, which were readily countered by mass demonstrations: on July 10, attendance reached 20,000. On August 25, under police protection after demonstrators had occupied the roof, demolition of the north wing of the old station terminal began. Two days later, over 30,000 participants demonstrated against the project forming a human chain around the station. The

Montagsdemonstrationen gained a new salience and went on throughout the year, with participants constantly rising and reaching up to 60,000 in late 2010.[4]

Meanwhile, with politics at the federal, state and city level becoming fully involved with the issue – with the Greens as the party-political wing of the project's opposition, the Social Democrats in Stuttgart finally accepting requests for a referendum, and the federal and Land government coalitions rejecting any claim for political or legal revision – citizens' protest extended to the occupation of public spaces in central Stuttgart. As a consequence of its insurgent politicization – in view of state election to be held in early 2011 – first attempts at mediation were initiated on September 24, 2010, but failed. This phase culminated in the dramatic events of 'black Thursday' when, on September 30, 2010, ruthless attacks of armed police forces on protesters during a demonstration against the cutting of trees in the Schlosspark left about four-hundred citizens hurt – among which 50 school children – and one seriously injured. At this point in time – and with the determinant contributions of these scenes of violence – Stuttgart 21 had definitely become the most mediatized event in recent history of German politics and society.

Fifth phase: mediatized re-politicization and mediated negotiation

Under the pressure of September 2010 events, and under the threat of a significant regime change after the 2011 Land government elections, the main actors on both opponents and supporters agreed in October 2010 to the need for an extraordinary measure of mediation. Remarkably, this new phase combined a distinctive re-politicization of Stuttgart 21 with a condition of radical uncertainty among the involved actors. This historic conjuncture may explain the peculiar mutual interdependence that led political actors to agree to a moratorium of regular procedures and to initiate a mediated negotiation experiment in order to deal with the conflict. Under unprecedented nation-wide public attention and media coverage, what was originally a 'local' issue became the occasion for experimenting and debating a new form of public scrutiny and deliberation around a major project – and an occasion for renewal of democratic practices.

This is not the place for discussing details of the mediated negotiation procedure conducted in Stuttgart along eight sessions between October 22 and November 30, known in Germany as the *Schlichtung Stuttgart 21*. The features and outcomes of this highly significant but contradictory experiment are worth an analysis of its own (see: Gualini 2011a, 2011b). Here we highlight aspects crucial for understanding the impact the *Schlichtung* had on the social movement against Stuttgart 21. As a crucial

[4] As is usually the case, figures on attendance of demonstrations obviously differ according to sources: e.g. a demonstration on October 4, right after 'black Thursday' – as reported by *Der Stern* (2012) – was attended by 54,000 according to the organizers and by 25,000 according to police. It is also worth noting that the rise of public opposition fostered emulatory reaction like the organization of counter-demonstrations in favor of the project, backed by advocacy groups like *Wir sind Stuttgart 21* and *Für Stuttgart 21*, often tied to governing coalition parties.

result, the parties agreed that a 'stress-test' assessing the expected performance of the project would decide about its prospects of realization. This key provision from the mediation, albeit agreed upon by all the parties – including DB – to be binding, was marred by two contradictions, which soon proved of major political relevance. Firstly, the solution was basically technical and, moreover, it was technical in a non-neutral way, being strongly framed as a technical test of the proposed solution – the official Stuttgart 21 project – and by no means as way of testing alternatives that may express a different view on the problem to be addressed. In this sense, even if allegedly binding, the stress-test represented no opening whatsoever to alternative views on Stuttgart 21. Secondly, all possible exit strategies following from the stress-test were subject to the contractual bonds extant among the project partners. This amounted *de facto* to a black-mailing factor for DB towards both the Land Baden-Württemberg and the City of Stuttgart, as it implied substantial and politically unbearable claims for financial compensation in any instance – from the extension of moratoria on construction works to the demise of the project – that contravened scheduled realization. In addition – as turned out after the mediation sessions and in particular after conduct of the stress-test – granting independence and transparency in conduct and dissemination of results of the assessment proved impossible under such conditions, lending DB in many respects an unreasonable vantage position.

It is significant that, after a highly contested presentation of the result of the stress-test on July 29, 2011 (SMA 2011), allegedly confirming the DB's expectations of technical performance and thus giving way to the project, its validity was broadly contested by representatives of the *Aktionsbündnis*, while attempts by the mediator, Heiner Geißler, to bring into play a new 'integrative' solution based on the K21 concept (SMA and Geißler 2011), was readily dismissed as already negatively assessed in the *Planfeststellungsverfahren*. Paradoxically, at this point in time, arguments about the project's 'legitimation by procedures' seemed to have won it.

Sixth phase: mediation breakdown, institutional pacification – and demobilization?

It is impossible to understand the shift in the cycle of contention following the *Schlichtung* without emphasizing change in political conditions introduced by the 2011 Land elections and how they transformed opportunity structures for mobilization. As a matter of fact, the March 2011 elections had already exerted their influence long before being held, favoring the actors' willingness to enter a procedure of mediated negotiation. Much more disruptive was however their effect as they led to an historic change in government regime – with the Green party becoming the second largest fraction in the Baden-Württemberg parliament behind CDU and ahead of SPD, and ultimately leading to an unprecedented Greens-SPD governing coalition which made Winfried Kretschmann the new prime minister of Baden-Württemberg and the first Green prime minister in German history, and which relegated the Christian-Democrats to opposition for the first time in 40 years.

As a result, the Land government had become the institutional, but internally divided, representative of a diverse constituency of project opponents: on the one hand, it was to be held accountable for its electoral promises and, in particular, for promoting a state-wide referendum in case the *Schlichtung* would not effectively stop the project: on the other hand, however, it was now also accountable managing institutional agreements concerning the project.

Of this complex double-bind, the Greens-led governing coalition of Baden-Württemberg was soon to experience the consequences – in first place, after the referendum – held on a state-wide level on November 27, 2011, after a complex institutional procedure to make it possible – failed to reach majority for the rejection of the project.

Under these conditions, the movement had since experienced first instances of 'de-mobilization': remarkably persistent, but declining participation to the demonstrations in front of the station, as well as so-far isolated, but significant instances of polarization and radicalization. Of great public significance was, for instance, not only overt denial of legitimation to the referendum by several opposition groups, including some of the key representatives of opponents, but also the occasional outbrake of violence, originated by the splitting of strategies of groups which had joined the Aktionsbündnis, but had denied legitimation to the mediated negotiation process. As construction works at the station resumed on June 20, 2012, the first violent clashes with police occurred – probably due to the actions of a splitting group, the *Parkschützer* – resulting in 15 arrests and in charges against unknown for attempted manslaughter, within what had been until then – and with the exception of 'black Thursday' – a peaceful movement.

4. Provisional conclusions: social mobilization, cycles of contention, and the reflexive capacity of planning

It is obviously unwarranted to draw comparisons from two case-studies as diverse – and still ongoing – as Stuttgart 21 and MediaSpree. Nevertheless, the focus we have placed on the co-evolution of planning processes and cycles of contention makes it possible to recognize significant differences and to advance a few conclusions with regard to our hypothesis.

In general terms, we can characterize the key difference between the two cases in the following terms.

In the case of MediaSpree, the cycle of contention, moving from an essentially antagonistic mobilization with strong political-ideological tones, developed around an opportunity structure which made it possible to establish a ground for a broad symbolic identification (the fusion of local and supra-local urban policy issues around MediaSpree as a 'neoliberal' symbol) as well as to develop elements of a concrete alternative (an 'other' vision of urbanity for the area) which created

opportunities for activating interest based claims. This led to complex combination of diffusion and differentiation of social mobilization which, however, realized a relative shift from ideologically based antagonism towards more interest based claims for recognition. Apparently, this was key to the development of an interface with the statutory planning process and their actors and, ultimately, for the inclusion of elements of the repertoire of contention into the strategic response of actors.

The opportunity structure for social mobilization in the case of MediaSpree was therefore increasingly shifting towards an alteration of the strategic-relational setting of the project itself, and this – at least potentially – introduced significant factors affecting its evolution.

As of today, contestation and antagonistic action appear to have been playing a key role in altering the relational framing of the project and, more significantly, in possibly fostering reflexive strategic responses. They have generated significant public attention and capacity of local mobilization as well as opportunities for redefining the role of public actors and for partially reframing their priorities. Far from being settled, the controversy around MediaSpree appears to have at least generated conditions for a significant reflexive evolution of the project.

Very much to the contrary, Stuttgart 21 seems to delineate a paradigmatic example of a planning process reinforcing an opportunity structure for enhanced ideological radicalization of protest.

This is not to say, of course, that opposition to Stuttgart 21 was itself 'ideological' or not grounded on concrete alternatives. It means to say however, that the capacity to develop alternatives within the strategic framework of the project – a role meant to be played by arguments and proposals clustering around to the counter-project K21 – was progressively marginalized by the early closure of the planning process to any significant form of reflexivity with regard to the nature of the insurgent contestation. As a matter of fact, the modes of regulation and disciplining embedded in the statutory planning procedures – the legalization of dissent and its dispersion through singular compensation measures – in this case did not realize a dilution of protest, but rather its reinforcement across highly diverse interests and social groups. What has therefore characterized Stuttgart 21 as a unique case of extensively cross-sectional as well as intensively emotional social mobilization in opposition to a public project is that it has become symbolic for the unresponsiveness of politics and institutions and, for this reasons, increasingly political-ideological and antagonistic in nature – despite its diffuse 'bourgeois' character.

Such a reading would contrast, of course, with one underlining the 'post-' or 'anti-political' nature of Stuttgart 21 protest since, on the contrary, it underlines the political salience of a situation incapable of providing for adequate arenas for dealing with interest based claims. In this respect, the ideological and antagonistic nature of social mobilization is probably attributable in large part precisely to claims for recognition by citizens feeling excluded and estranged from public policy.

This is not the place for a thorough analysis of the reasons for this – which are in large part recognizable in the institutional and procedural rationale of planning for strategic development projects, in Germany as elsewhere. What we want to point out here is that, according to the features of the planning process, social mobilization around Stuttgart 21 gained momentum precisely in connection to the emergence of an opportunity structure that may appear surprising in relation to the 'concrete' nature of the object of opposition: an opportunity structure sustained by – but also increasingly 'stuck' into – a complex frame dominated by symbolic and identity-related recognition claims, with a distinctive antagonistic political-ideological profile. This frame made it possible for a broad cross-section of local society to identify and mobilize against the project, but its reverse was the progressive limitation and marginalization of opportunity structures for creative-integrative influence. As a matter of fact, the attempt to develop margins for integrative solutions thorough a procedure of mediated negotiation produced almost farcical results (Gualini 2011a, 2011b).

It is remarkable, in this respect, that even a dramatic change in the relational setting of local politics and institutions could not effectively alter the pattern of decision that had clustered over time along the project, consolidating it as an un-reflexive – object almost beyond the wish of the involved actors. It is hence only tragic that today – after a generous, but highly belated, and ultimately ineffective attempt at mediation, marred by problematic framework conditions, as well as after a long sought-after but ultimately failed referendum – the only possible alternatives (bot not unlikely) to realization of the contested project appear to be either its financial-operational break-down and abandonment, or a polarization and radicalization of protest. At any rate, Stuttgart 21 appears as of today as the ultimate example of planning failure to develop a capacity of strategic reflexivity and integration vis-à-vis the dynamics of social mobilization in a local context.

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