RELATIONS BETWEEN PLANNING AND POWER

Mara Balestrieri, Researcher

University of Sassari, Department of Agriculture, Territorial engineering Area, Italy

Abstract

What is the relationship between planning and power? What kind of impact does it have on planning processes and governance of space? What kind of coercion should be exerted to regulate the built environment? Only recently has theoretical reflection on planning explicitly and directly addressed the question of the power planning necessarily possesses, trying to grasp the difference between physiological situations and pathological conditions, where there is a distortion of the relationship with decision-making, and other, power in implementing technical action. But this has not clarified the relationship properly. The paper addresses the issue by reflecting on some interpretative categories of power, their transposition onto the territorial urban dimension and their effects in terms of planning, so as to obtain the recognition of power as an important key to understanding spatial and functional organisation and to highlight how the link between planning and power often does not produce effects of collective safeguarding but of the defence of a few to the detriment of many.

Keywords: Ethic, spatial organisation, iniquity

Power and spatial organisation

Space and matters concerning it at any scale are not neutral with respect to the practices of power. There is an inextricable link between the one and the other that affects strategic choices in terms of planning and urban design, choices that are dictated by the need to create order within a complex structure like that of the urban body and at the same time regulate its relationship with its surroundings. This involves rules, norms, bans and, generally speaking, plans to be respected, instruments that inevitably contain choices. But to what extent are these choices actually made for the benefit of all? How decisive a role do partial interests play? If these choices have been indisputable and undisputed for a long period, nowadays they are increasingly at the centre of disputes and conflicts (Hamel, Lustiger-Thaler & Mayer, 2000). As it is recognised that the ethical role of the discipline precedes the technical one (Campbell, 2012), this is an aspect that cannot be omitted. The city is, in fact, by virtue of the ideologies underlying it and the set of conventions governing it, an organisation structured so as to make the dominant social mechanism work - though not without resistance, contradictions and disputes - and to maintain the existing power relations. Although this does not lead to a kind of geography entirely consistent with the system regulating it, since the process of space production is the result of continuous political and ideological struggles, it inevitably bears dominant signs and traits of it. In this framework planning activity is configured as an instrument capable of favouring or hindering the success of different social groups (Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1970).

The definition of the concept of power in relation to the city and its governance cannot be immediate and direct as it is manifest in many ways (Turner, 2005), ranging between physiological situations, indispensable in an organized system that requires some flexible though structured forms, and pathological forms, in which those who have the

possibility to influence the fate of the city more than others let themselves be guided by logics responding to the interests of the dominant social groups (Weber, 1968). The absence of an ethical impulse and of the pursuit of social justice ideals has characterised much of the history of the discipline, letting market and utilitarian mechanisms opt for the guiding principles of choices. The total willingness of the discipline to be slavishly instrumental for the desires of political and economic power, as well as its inability to be autonomous and take a critical distance from it, has become an important topic of discussion from various viewpoints. However, the issue of the relations between power and planning has rarely been explicitly treated in urban analysis. Here we wish to propose a contribution in this direction, highlighting that such interaction cannot be regarded as secondary when we objectively interpret the urban structure. As this is a complex, multifaceted issue, some reflections are proposed in the paper starting with a categorization of power in terms of the current urban condition in order to determine the relevance of the power/city link in relation to the attention paid to it by theorists and technicians. At the base of such reflection interpretative categories must be adopted that guide the reading of the urban context with reference to power. Hence the paper refers to Popitz' sociological analysis of power (Popitz, 1992) which identifies four essential anthropological forms ("power to offend", "instrumental power", "power of authority" and "power to change reality through technical action"), to evaluate whether or how they lend themselves to being transposed onto the urban environment through the instrumental use of planning.

The power to offend. Planned exclusion (access)

According to the first category, men have power over other men as they can endanger the existence of others by acting on their physical integrity, economic livelihood and social participation. This form of power is expressed both through recourse to violence, material damage and, therefore, physical aggression, and through deprivation of economic and relational resources, as well as rights to equality. "Direct actions against social participation begin with acts like taking one's distance, avoiding contact and hiding from view, to evolve into actions that tend to belittle and discredit the other to the point of their expulsion or prohibition, and are then reflected in the systems of legal and moral sanctions" (Popitz, 1992).

This form of power has been expressed in urban contexts in various ways in more or less explicit and vexatious forms of spatial isolation, ranging from extreme cases of total banishment (interdictio aquae et ignis) to the creation of 'removal' structures to accommodate, and above all separate, what was perceived as inherently dangerous (from illness to identity, discordant behaviour and social deviance in general). Despite the fact that social evolution has sanctioned the formal recognition of the principle of equity and social justice in the contemporary urban condition, exclusion and marginalisation have continued to grow till they have become one of the dominant traits (O'Connor, 2003). The global economy has produced an increasing gap between the richest sectors and the poorest segments of the world population, but also within each single society, emphasising the ambivalence congenital in urban life: the utopia of the city as the centre of well-being and freedom but the marginalisation and ghettoisation of some people that the city cannot or will not accept (Sassen, 1990). The contrast between the theoretical vision of a society dominated by equality values and the practice of escalation of differences and iniquity has resulted in spatialisation in watertight compartments, aimed at separating rather than integrating - spaces that testify to and depersonalise the split between social groups and are thus defined by moral boundaries prior to physical ones. In this sense, the contemporary city appears as a city of fragments (Marcuse & van Kempen, 2002), a set of distinct spaces paratactically juxtaposed without intersecting, and indifferent to each other, to which population groups correspond

that coexist on the same territory but become more and more separate and different from each other. The separation between the strong groups holding power (the faculty and freedom to make decisions with repercussions on the entire system) and the vulnerable groups that are excluded is inevitably reflected in spatial organisation which relegates the latter to the edges of the city. As pointed out by Bourdieu (1994), relations of strength and power are in fact inscribed in urban space; its structure and management become ways to exert predominance. The appropriation, negotiation and transformation of space have become fundamental stakes for individual achievement and hierarchical recognition, and the mechanisms of social closure find a precise parallel in the divisions of urban space.

What have changed over time are the ways in which this separation takes place, so that nowadays beside the spaces of imposed exclusion traditionally associated with urban exclusion processes (spaces of social racial segregation, ghettos, favelas, etc.), other less obvious but equally effective types are spreading: ones that can be defined as desired forms of exclusion (enclaves, gated cities, etc.), and others that can be defined as disguised forms of exclusion (gentrification phenomena), which are simply different manifestations of the same phenomenon - the individualisation of urban life and homogenisation of its weft in spatial ambits (Bauman, 2001). The former are actually nothing more than the materialisation of an attempt to create a social distance prior to a material one between groups that recognise themselves as equals. Intensification of the differences linked with globalisation processes in fact generates growing tensions and conflicts, to which local governments respond, supported by the housing and residential market, favouring forms of restraint and separation that make boundaries less and less permeable. The closure of space through physical, administrative or symbolic barriers is simultaneously a direct consequence and tangible proof of this phenomenon, as is the defensive use of it. The latter are ways in which power less clearly imposes its spatial distribution, creating conditions for the settlement of certain groups and the undermining of others through a targeted but disguised selection of the inhabitants. The symbolic and practical implications of gentrification have diverse, profound repercussions on the fate and status of the inhabitants of gentrified areas, so that, as Smith argues, those who take up the new prestigious positions in the city centre often have the features of a colonial elite (Atkinson & Bridge 2005). Even though the intense academic debate lasting more than thirty years on the long-term effects of gentrification phenomena in terms of social exclusion, marginalisation and polarisation has not actually led to a shared position, the initial enthusiasm has been replaced by a growing number of criticisms of this type of operation (Lees, 2008). The assumption that the creation of less segregated, more sustainable communities corresponds to gentrification is not as a matter of fact backed by much empirical evidence. For gentrification, far from being a tool for the promotion of tolerance, becomes part of a mechanism to reclaim some areas of the city by taking them away from the lower classes that have settled there during the period of withdrawal in favour of a model tending towards expansion.

Planning therefore becomes the expression of a kind of design that negates the very meaning of the city because it does not recognise space as an element of comparison. On the other hand, urban planning has mostly focused attention on designing for the elite, leaving the space of the excluded at the edge of both theoretical reflection and practical action. If global market mechanisms and the liberalisation and privatisation processes focusing on a profit logic, rather than one of compensation strategies between social groups with highly different economic capabilities, have a deep effect on the phenomenon of social exclusion, choices and urban policies often, however, constitute in their turn a factor as significant as it is underestimated. Several studies have highlighted the important role and intentional contribution planning has had and continues to have in creating and maintaining situations of exclusion in the city (Yiftachel, 1998; Lai, Wong & Chau, 2011), driving the spatial location

of the various population groups through a series of mechanisms like zoning, housing policies (assignment and location of social housing) and management of infrastructure programmes, as well as the development and management of services, which have succeeded in becoming tools themselves in the creation of more or less deliberate, serious forms of exclusion (Fischel, 2004; Levine, 2006), producing imbalances and pockets of privilege both in terms of quantity and quality.

Instrumental power. The control and manipulation of fear (expectations)

The second interpretative category suggests that men have power over other men because "they can take and give something to the other turning this option into threats or promises" able to affect their behaviour. The basis of this kind of power is a possession, which translates into real power, exploiting tension, worry and uncertainty towards the future. To exercise power, "violent acts, in fact, are mostly not required, as threats are sufficient that guide behaviour through fear, and promises that guide behaviour through hope" (Popitz, 1992). These factors complement and reinforce each other in various ways, for in the same way as a promise is inherent in every threat - the waiving of punishment - so in every promise is implied the threat of non-reward.

Fear and hope have taken on an increasing role in urban organisation, together with the spread of a collective state of uncertainty induced by a constant feeling of insecurity (Bauman, 2005). This feeling of fear has pervaded the city, generating new distrust, deteriorating relationships, and making irrationality and emotional sensitivity the guiding thread of a certain type of intervention on urban space, that sort of militarisation and contraction of public spaces (Davis, 1990; Madanipour, 2003) that proves however to be totally ineffective, since fear accentuates insecurity and uncertainty accentuates fear, based on a self-feeding circuit.

In this framework any kind of conflict is banned, being conceived as a threat, a disease of shared life that must be removed to ensure a serene environment. Conflict is understood, in effect, solely as an indicator of a disorder that could result in violence rather than a natural, inevitable process of personal and collective change that belongs to the very nature of life and the becoming of things. Urban planning has tried to provide norms for the city's growth as a healthy, safe, orderly body by controlling individuals in space (Ingersoll & Tartari, 2005). Resorting to the norm has over time become increasingly prescriptive and constricting, and perceived more as an all-absorbing element than an opportunity for development. Security has become the subject of technical manuals (Nadel, 2004) and a political tool for controlling the territory, immediately identifying certain parts of the city (excluding others a priori), and placing itself as a quality parameter of urban and social analysis. So nowadays an "enviro-motional geography" has begun to be outlined based on a unit of measurement determined by fear, where order has become synonymous with uniformity. For order to be guaranteed it really needs to be supported by the norm, and anything that does not conform should therefore be excluded. In this sense we are witnessing a paradox: while the size of the city has increased more and more and it prevails as the habitat most sought-after by man, on the other hand, the quality of urban life seems to get proportionately worse, since fear becomes a founding part of inhabiting and a structuring element of the planning process. In this framework urban planning operates following a process that divides up the city into ordered parts.

The link between fear and social organisation is, according to the opinion shared by many authors, one of the focal points of the current condition and one of the main bases of the modern political project (Corey, 2005).

The power of authority. Technical knowledge as a disciplinary soliloquy and the top-down approach (norms)

As far as the third interpretative category is concerned, men have power over other men because of the existence of a voluntary willingness to obey, the result of an instinctive need of orientation, of a norm acting as a guide and of the wish to be recognised by others, since "our self-esteem depends on such external confirmations", which generate a series of psychological dependencies (Popitz, 1992). In this sense, the essence of authority lies in its being a special bond, for it translates into a social relationship: he who depends on the authorities is chained to a relationship that actually or imaginatively ties him to the other. At the same time, accepting authority means to develop adaptation to it that goes beyond behaving with simple outward deference, since the criteria and values of those in power are internalised by those who depend on them, even if such adaptation surpasses the possibility to control the holder of power himself. Because of this, the effects of authority are not necessarily tied to the exercise of coercive instruments. The assignment of authority to another actually involves in a certain sense a recognition of his superiority, the granting of prestige which leads to a strong willingness to conform. This availability has varying degrees, ranging from loving obedience to obedience hardly tolerated, which translates from the social bond viewpoint into institutional authority, namely respect for position on the social scale (Habermas, 1981).

In this sense planning has for a long time been based on imposing planning and management tools according to top-down logics that assume a monopoly of learning on the part of technical knowledge and the claim to unconditional acceptance by final users, namely hetero-directed approaches. Such approaches are produced outside the contexts they are intended for and reserve planning choices exclusively for the technical sphere, hindering, or at least, reducing the participation of other stakeholders in decision-making processes (Beauregard, 2001; McGuirk, 2001). So, even when it existed, participation was often limited solely to the acquisition of consensus on project lines or plans already drawn up, in the absence of a genuine desire to meet the requirements of the circulation and democratic nature of information (Arnstein, 1969). Only recently, in fact, have approaches gradually emerged in which there is a clear difference between consultation, participation and involvement since the first two do not necessarily imply an active role of local communities in the planning process. Consultation and participation have, however, often become a mere formality as they have taken place a posteriori to gain consensus on pre-established choices, made with no forms of control or transparency/reproducibility requirements. They have made room for dangerous interweaving between private interests and public duties, excluding the most vulnerable subjects and following a decision-making model linked with the pyramidal hierarchical logic that is increasingly being challenged due to the profound socio-economic changes underway. If social legitimisation is actually understood not so much as the justification of one's own authority, but as the quest for trust and the recognition of a willingness and commitment that go well beyond purely professional ones, then it should be based instead on comparison and open dialogue in which the disciplinary soliloquy opens up to local know-how.

A number of research trends (communicative/collaborative, multi-ethnic and redistributive) have addressed this issue (Forester, 1993; Sager, 1994; Innes, 1995; Haley, 1997; Fainstein, 2000; Sandercock, 2000; Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Woltjer, 2000). It is therefore now widely accepted that a priori legitimisation of technical action is no longer possible. All hetero-determination is in conflict, in effect, with a desire for self-determination which causes power in any form to be inextricably linked with the issue of its own existence.

The power to change reality through technical action. The ethical sense of planning (artefacts)

As for the fourth category, men have power over other men by virtue of their "productive intelligence". The power to create facts is conveyed by the objects it produces. They constitute the materialisation that enables the transfer and exercise of power on users. For it is not a case of the power of things over people but of that of their creator who remains embedded in his product, since what is produced and what produces refer to each other and inextricably involve each other. The product is the idea of its creator that has taken shape and in this sense is an "idea imprinted on an object". By technical action man prevails over the forces of nature, transforms nature into artefacts, also transforming the living conditions of all those who have to adapt to them (Popitz, 1992). From this point of view, all individuals are subject to technical action as they are linked with a world of objects that have been wholly or partly processed, manipulated, and created from others. Thus the relation between subject and object becomes a relationship between subject and subject. Intervening through change, which is a part of creation, man converts things to himself and impresses his intentions on them.

This kind of power interpreted at the scale of the city involves the theme of the ethical responsibility of planners. The choices of those planning the city and territory have a direct, continuous impact both on spaces and the people who use them, since by creating the places and contexts in which activities and social life take place, they affect the way we live, inhabit and produce. The way in which space is designed favours certain practices and limits others. Its organisation is not a purely formal or geometric matter but the reflection of the values, ethics and the ethos of its inhabitants, and of designers, clients and society in general. Planners do not perform simple, politically neutral, technical acts, but determine the conditions of life and spaces of freedom and constraint of many people; they "build worlds for others" and as such cannot but be responsible for the consequences such an act has on those subjected to it. Seen in this way, it is something more than a simple distribution of empty and full spaces, of uses permitted and prohibited, but is rather a set of moral, ideological and philosophical choices. Which are not simply the result of individual tendencies but of power relations and pre-constituted orders that affect them in various, more or less direct, ways. But if this awareness involves for some a sort of reform of the discipline that makes it an instrument to support disadvantaged groups (Friedmann, 1987; Davidoff 1965), for others a commingling of roles needs to be avoided between politics (to which is left the task of determining values to be followed) and planning, which has different, separate functions (Lefebvre, 1972, 1970). So if the results of technical actions are essentially political, the choice of the moral objectives to be pursued must remain with democratically elected political power.

Is it correct to ask where political will finishes and where the will of the planners begins and where the responsibility of one party finishes and that of the other begins? Is planning just the reflection of a political plan that takes shape in plans and programmes drawn up to fit into a framework already marked out? The scientific literature has addressed this issue by dealing with it in various ways, alternating requests to depoliticise urban planning knowledge (so as to re-politicise space) (Lefebvre, 1972, 1970) with the need for some kind of politicisation of the planner (advocacy, radical, communicative or collaborative planning) (Krumholtz & Clavel 1994, Healey, 1997, Sandercock, 2000).

But after the experimental phase and theoretical reflection of the seventies-eighties, which for the first time brought the ethical function of planning into the centre of the debate, the discipline neglected this aspect for a long period, so that the aesthetic factor has ended up prevailing over any ethical intent. Urban planning has abandoned all interest in the social

dimension and has based its existence on marketing operations. The planner has therefore exchanged his idealistic views to adopt those of the technocrat. If in Benjamin's Paris urban spaces seemed to hesitate between conformity and utopia, "a world of goods or of dreams", nowadays the same urban spaces respond to the pressures of an increasingly dominant market "with public dreams defined by private development projects", to which strong economic powers correspond that manage urban space following utilitarian logics. However, the issue is gaining new strength thanks to increased sensitivity towards certain themes and a series of studies that have stressed on several occasions (Harvey, 1989; Mitchell, 2003; Zukin, 1991, Smith, 1994; Upton, 2002) that planning is design mediated between inhabitants and their environment, and as such involves issues inherent in what is good and what is right.

Conclusions

Power relations exist therefore since relations between men are dominated by strength and vulnerability, by the extent to which hopes and fears can be influenced, and by the obligation and capacity to establish norms and transform the world. In other words, power is exercised by acting directly or indirectly on expectations, norms and artefacts. Urban transformation processes are steered according to these same logics so that it is fair to say that the link between planning and power plays a strategic role in the management of space. Although planning interventions should actually be aimed at fair, sustainable development, adopting a role of mediation between the parties involved in the conflicts over the use of space and the material and immaterial implications - for planning is an activity to be conducted primarily in the interest of the public - has often been, and partly continues to be, an activity at the service of the elite only, simply becoming an instrument to maintain power relations already established, and acting in space and on space in terms of access, control and representation, in order to favour one party rather than others (Mitchell, 2003; Smith, 1994). What is often missing in interpretative analyses of the various urban contexts is precisely an interpretation of the power relations in force and their influence on the choices and actions of the planners. How would the city change if these powers were altered?

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