



INTRODUCTORY REPORT WORKSHOP 3

Urban planning instruments for sustainability

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The papers submitted for WS3 cover a broad range of different planning situations, conditions and cultures - from the most advanced realities of governance to the very poor availability of adequate planning instruments. This requires a global vision of the current topics faced worldwide. However it makes it difficult to provide comprehensive answers taking into consideration the workshop topic. Proposed deductions have thus been taken considering the heuristic methodology used in assessing the papers' content.

The majority of the papers submitted for this workshop start focusing on the ongoing urbanization trend. Many authors highlight that more than 50% of the world population live in urban areas. This consideration is often taken as a basis in order to emphasize the centrality of urban questions: from the pure "tools related" to those connected to "town planning" problems' identification. At the same time, with the exclusion of several papers, the attention of planners/authors, by virtue of this predominant tendency, has completely been driven to urban areas and they are not considering a more general relationship between the city and its surroundings. Often the city is treated as an isolated and abstract "object" and domain of investigations and as a "tools lab". Its territorial complexity, in terms of being a node for a broader system and of networks involving rural and "rurban" areas as well, has frequently not been sufficiently considered. This could be a first proposition to deduce from WS3. There is a need to contextualize and to spread urban physical and instrumental demands in a broader territorial scale of action. The city does not exist as an auto-sufficient reality, not even as an abstract object to be studied. In other words, at the local level, it should be pointed out that the critical role for cities is in being the main actors of transition towards sustainable development. The link between regional and global levels and the territorial systemic governance for sustainability are insufficiently developed.

Sustainability continues to be a fundamental benchmark/milestone for town planners. None of the papers is questioning the concept of sustainability (definitely sustainability is a resilient concept, particularly when connected with substantive "development"). However all the

authors make relevant efforts in order to define its multiple aspects in the urban environment. What sustainability is, what its ends should be, and how these objectives are going to be achieved is, naturally, completely open to analysis and clarification, but one result is granted by the workshop: the categories of sustainability are changing and increasing. The classical domains of economy, environment and society remain. However there is a fair a number of ideas underground “fermenting” among researchers and practitioners. The immediate and generally acknowledged link between “sustainable development and quality of life” is going to be achieved through the invention of innovative local approaches/concepts to sustainability in urban planning. Among these, it is worth remembering that two domains are getting more relevance in defining the sustainability “existence set”: the cultural (in terms of working with inhabitants and communities through participative approaches, recognizing and protecting their identities, identifying the ways of life of different ethnic groups in urban areas (deprived and not), to shape proper public spaces connected to local needs and habits of residents, and so on) and the political (in terms of practice of democracy, justice, equity and interchange of opinions). We can deduce from WS3 a second relevant proposition: there is a need to reconsider, re-design and further develop the classical triad founding the concept of sustainable development, to go over it.

The complexity of achieving sustainability animates the debate on planning instruments as well. The available “box of tools”, with rare exceptions, never seems to completely satisfy and confront the real urban needs, and of course, never completely gratifies the town planners. One generalizable thought, nevertheless is that urban tools, independently on latitude, share the issue of the difficulty of being enforced, both the regulatory/statutory ones than the more strategic. This is probably one of the few generalizations that are possible to put in place. From the papers submitted, a clear point that emerges is that there is a relevant difference in availability and quality of urban planning instruments between the most advanced countries and those belonging to the “developing world”. Integrated and complex approaches, innovations in planning processes, GIS-based information and territorial data availabilities are privileges of the few well-known rich countries. In reading the papers coming from the LEDCs (Less Economically Developed Countries) it clearly emerges how the urban problems’ “order of magnitude” faces astronomical figures (in terms of demographic change, migratory movements, demand for housing and land...) and that the available instruments are insignificant (very old and unconnected laws, plans based on anachronistic principles, planning systems based on command and control functions...) in comparison with the relevance and critical mass of the questions to solve.

It seems that really in these big differences it is easier to find another strong tie between the instruments and the features of sustainability. Sustainability, as seen before, comes into play in urban planning as a function of several variables: environmental, cultural, economic, institutional, social, and even as the ability/capability to manage complex processes. However we can affirm, as a starting point for WS3, that there are changing sustainabilities, which assume different significances in diverse places. Whereas sustainability in developed countries looks for advanced green technologies and the maximization of the eco-city principles; Sustainability in many African (but not just African) cities means how to give an urgent answer to weak economies, high unemployment rates, high poverty levels, low life expectancies, endemic diseases, absence of basic infrastructures and the lack of the idea for

public spaces and connected urban amenities/facilities. Then, a third proposition coming out from WS3 could be that sustainability is a resilient concept. While it assumes place by place different significances it is amply capable of providing a shelter to distant and different urban problems.

Moreover, the contents provided by this workshop open the field to other professional demands: the quantity and the interrelation of the urban planning instruments. Even this question has no unique interpretations and answers. It is commonly accepted in advanced economies that the idea that having more tools for planning can facilitate the management of urban transformations (from urban regeneration, strategic planning, to proper urban development), while the planners attention is fixed on improving both the design of policies/projects and the way to make them synergic (governance). LEDCs, on the other hand, suffer the redundancy of obsolete, but still operating, urban tools. In this case many tools does not mean major operability and efficiency, but it just gives an occasion to have a major arbitrariness in solving land use management related issues. In both cases, and as stated in completely different socio-economic contexts, it is recognizable that there exists a hiatus between the expectations related to urban tools and real phenomena of urban transformation: there is a major necessity to pay more attention towards the coordination and renewal of urban planning instruments.

Finally, urban planning instruments seem too often, and for different reasons (contextual and/or procedural), to be distant from the real urban and territorial necessities. The results show us that there is a need to pay more attention towards the design of planning processes and policies, as it is not sufficient to provide tools without thinking of their possible synergic interaction with other sectoral initiatives taken at urban/supra-urban scale. The analytical and monitoring ones (indicators, GIS...), the regulatory/statutory ones (land use management, technical regulations...) and the perspective ones (strategic plans, territorial and urban strategic agendas...) have to be reunited to real practices happening in cities (at different scales, from the neighborhood to the metropolitan/regional scale): they have to be more "local rooted", in terms of being near to citizens' needs, but even having the capability to adapt to the rapid change of urban practices. One question arising from WS3 could be:-

How do we make urban tools more dynamic and adaptable to the velocity of changes in urban practices?

Sustainability, in the end, seems that it is not having a completely unambiguous relation with the planners "box of tools". The tools continuously call for sustainability. However sustainability seems that it can easily continue to survive as a concept or as a benchmark beyond the planning instruments. This is not bad at all, because we can state that an interesting paradigm is in fieri: the "planning/planners ideas" are stronger than the "planners' instruments".

In other words a concept like sustainability, important not for what it is, but for how it looks like, as it appears and works, is going to be the "adhesive" keeping together pieces of incremental urban and territorial evolutions/developments. The many urban practices give us a wide range of representations of sustainability as well, while urban planning instruments remain in between, in a sort of semi-operational oblivion.



Urban planning instruments too often run after transformations instead of being the mediators, the catalysts, the drivers of sustainable urban and territorial development. This workshop opens many questions connected to the current powerlessness of planning instruments to shape the urban domain and its multiple needs. Definitely, there is a necessity to re-modulate urban planning instruments more with what is happening in real urban practices, to strengthen the liaison between transformations and policy/instruments design, taking into account all possibilities related to new technologies, but above all the question is in not losing the capability to negotiate sustainable development with the final receivers of its advantages: the citizens.

Workshop 3 raises the following **inspiringly fundamental questions**:-

Empowering the concept of sustainability and making it more effective in practices, bringing explicitly cultural and political aspects into the game of policy design:

- Beyond the three circles (Society, Economy, Environment): how do we renew and re-launch the concept of sustainability at a more comprehensive and “practice oriented” level?

Providing more tools based on negotiation and partnership, diminishing the impact of statutory plans (enforcing policies and adapting plans):

- How do we make urban tools more dynamic and adaptable to the velocity of changes in urban practices? Could less statutory plans and more negotiated and complex policies be the way for having a more sustainability-oriented land use management?

Enlarging scales of planning and action, providing tools working among rural, urban and urban; breaking the wall (or giving continuity) between rural and urban “way of planning categories”:

- How do we organize the many variables defining sustainable planning approaches in more comprehensive and large scale urban planning instruments? Why not design urban development keeping in mind rural transformations and vice versa?