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TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE AND PLANNING ACTIONS

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1.

During the last 50 years – and during almost the whole century – planning activities have shown two relevant and seemingly contradictory characters: a continuous and growing process of diversification and specialization,[1] and a slow and uncertain development of the formalized technical knowledge. The diversification process developed both through the spreading of planning activities to new intervention sectors and the incorporating of sectors in which other experts were already operating. Diversification and specialization mark the ripening and the professional success of planning, but make the identity of planners more uncertain than in the past: at times experts assume the planner approach, at times planners end by acting as experts. Experts are inclined to focus on the specific action they are involved in, and sometimes to succeed they take away the action from the contextual influences; experts place the action in frames of reference which are partial and directly functional to their intervention; an approach not excluding the consideration of risks and opportunities offered by the context, but not assuming as a target the transformation of the context according to a comprehensive political programme. On the contrary, the planners' approach is particularly characterized by a presumed capability of locating a specific action within a comprehensive framework, or rather, of

reconstructing a comprehensive strategy proceeding from a specific action and establishing a fertile interdependent relationship between strategy and action.[2] Within this relationship the interaction between planning and politics develops and reconstitutes itself; the interaction becomes more complex and multiform as diversification and specialization increase, and as the technical reference frameworks – however partial in comparison with the political ones – increase with them.

Specialization and diversification processes produce two consequences not irrelevant for theoretical reflection. There are already many reasons for weakening the opportunities of designing grand theories and narratives (Mandelbaum, 1979), and diversification is one more of them. Furthermore diversification urges the devising of competitive theories focused on the theoretical issues of planning specializations, indeed the non-solution of these issues may be an obstruction to the pursuing of the moral ends that planning *should* be instrumental to. Moreover, competitive sectorial theories may avoid the eagerness of a comprehensive vision which hides the specificity of different actions and contingencies, and suggests undue generalizations; where the specificity has at least two basic dimensions, the thematic and constitutional ones, the second being linked to the cultural and institutional characters of each planning system.[3] Besides, diversification emphasizes the slow and uncertain growth of the technical planning knowledge, if by technical knowledge we mean not specific methods and techniques, but a formalized knowledge that is linked to defined theoretical frameworks and leads and affects practices. Surprisingly, we note that diversification and specialization have not been associated with a qualitative and quantitative development of the technical knowledge.[4] For a long time planning theory has been mainly focused on ethical and political issues; even when it faces issues like participation, communication and collaboration, which are directly relevant to practice, theorists hardly discuss the theoretical knots set by the technical planning knowledge and by its role in decision processes, to such an extent that planning theory has been not wrongly accused of leaning towards a sort of de-professionalization of planning (see for example Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998). To acknowledge the importance of specialization does not imply to abandon the theoretical issues which are transversal or common to many or almost all planning fields; whole and/or partial coincidences between specific theories are aimed to feed the design of contingent general theories. But, if there is any meaning in this paper analysis, planning theory contributions should chiefly refer to planning specializations and their theoretical knots understood in specific contexts; this is the reason why, in particular, this article is not about planning, but about one of its sectors: land use planning.

Because of the divergence of planning theory and theories in practice, issues related to technical knowledge have been either relegated to a corner or wholly abandoned. The forgetting of technical knowledge is often explained by observing that planning theorists' interest was more and more

focused on processes, while attention to outcomes was diminishing. No doubt, understanding the importance of the implementation issue had a great influence on planning theory and culture, but I suggest that the main reason of the divergence of theory and practice has to be found in the theorists' rediscovery of the political nature of planning – and in their understandable commitment to face the difficult relationship between politics and expertise – more than in their estrangement from the traditional planning practices.[5]

2.

About 50 years ago an Italian planner and social activist wrote 'planning means social action, or is otherwise only a technique subservient to something else (. . . politics and aesthetics at the worst)' (Doglio, 1953: ii). As social action Doglio meant an action aimed at modifying class and power relations, and building a solidary and cooperative city within the anarchical perspective proposed by Kropotkin and Reclus. So, according to Doglio, there does exist a model of a just society, and planning has a meaning only if it is committed to realize that model through an action that is independent from politics and government, and in competition and conflict with them. Unsurprisingly, he has a disdainful attitude toward technical planning. We may assume that according to Doglio, and many planners who acted and wrote after him, planning theory identifies itself with a radical theory of social action, aimed at attaining social goals defined and developed through a continuous interlacing of action with philosophical and political reflection. Doglio's position may be considered an extreme one – which will find its manifesto and better arguments in John Friedmann's radical planning – and to a certain extent it is symmetrical with the other extreme position which considers planning as a social science capable of leading a technocratic action, autonomous and independent from politics,[6] planning as 'the fourth power' within the governmental system (Gelfand, 1985; Salsano, 1987). But, unlike what Doglio seemed to believe, planners' theoretical and practical positions escape the alternatives offered, a social action or subservient technique. Besides the technocratic position, recurring in the planning history, the planning theorists developed other alternatives and the most diffused in the last 50 years are characterized by a conscious or unconscious will of being not only independent from politics, but also of substituting it, to assume planning either as a reflection and an action parallel to politics, or as an action connecting, mediating and developing the cooperation between the civil society and the political system.

For instance, in 'New Directions in Planning Theory' Fainstein (2000) argues that the theory field should widen its boundaries to include the issue of the definition of a just society, and she points out the possibility 'of consciously achieving widespread improvement in the quality of human life

within the context of a global capitalist economy' as the 'defining question' (Fainstein, 2000: 452) and the 'principal question' (Fainstein, 2000: 470) of planning theory. Since she does not take a just society model as given, but as a research object, she can weaken the strong and exclusive relation to action that characterizes Doglio's position. The just society theme is certainly the core of any social conversation, but it is a theme of political philosophy, and it is so general that any discipline could fruitfully assume it. Therefore, I doubt that the theme may be indicated as the defining question of planning theory, without identifying it almost completely, for example, with political theory.[7] Not casually, in the last part of the article Fainstein faces the issues of utopia, state, and democracy. Planners have to face these issues as citizens, whereas as experts they have more specific responsibilities to account for; then the question is whether these specific responsibilities – rather than political issues of societal conversation – should be the object of planning theory. Again Fainstein writes 'Depicting a picture of a just city puts the planning theorist in the role of advocate – not necessarily the advocate for a particular group, as in Davidoff's concept of advocacy planning – but as the advocate of a program' (Fainstein, 2000: 467). It is not an unusual statement, but it is fit for two objections. The first one is fairly simple: only a generic and harmless programme allows its supporters to be advocate of the programme without being contemporarily supporters of a particular group; if the programme has some political content, the advocates of the programme are necessarily advocates of a particular group. The second objection concerns the possibility of a social legitimization of planners as advocates of a programme. The border between a political programme and the tools to implement it is mobile and vague, and it is easy to understand that; when a social fragmentation joins with a strong crisis of political representation, experts may find it very difficult to escape from acting as decision takers and not only as consultants: in other words, to escape from implementing their own political programme. From an analytical point of view, at least, this condition – which may be at times defined as an involuntary advocacy – should make evident to a great degree the need of finding out the border between politics and planning, elected representatives and experts. In other words, if we agree that, when engaged in political struggles, a planner should be primarily a citizen among other citizens, then we should try to avoid a situation in which planners do not know which role they are developing and what are their responsibilities. For all these reasons I think that Fainstein's defining question is not particularly helpful to both citizens and planners to clarify the social role of planning and the specific role of planning theory.

Similar positions are not new within the planning theorists' world, sometimes theorists have more faded positions than Fainstein's, and do not claim that the definition of a just city has to be the subject of planning theory, but they claim the need of returning to the utopian tradition in planning, or they argue that to recover 'direction, influence, and legitimacy' planning must

reconstruct an explicit moral and political position, or redefine the substantive core and join it to a political agenda (Beauregard, 1990: 213). Facing these positions, the question is not whether planners have a political function, because any professional develops a political function, but whether it is just and useful that planning theory pursues and defines a clear moral purpose and a progressive political ideology, or it is necessary to acknowledge that now planning has become a profession (Foglesong, 1990: 215), whereas before planning and reform movements were almost the same thing. In other words the question is *how* planners must develop their political function, and not whether they have to do it. Many planners would agree with the statement 'the overall purpose of planning is to further the well-being, or the interests, of the public; it is against this yardstick that plans and policies are to be judged' (Taylor, 1998: 64), which is a very general statement, whose deontological character few would be prepared to oppose. If a profession needs a deontology, it cannot just consist of it or of a political programme inspired by a moral choice. A profession needs the tools useful to pursue moral aims – and it must be able to reproduce and refine its tools – the choice of the aims being a citizens' choice, in which planners participate only as citizens. Planners have the professional duty of knowing how to produce political and technical proposals, to argue and inform citizens about them, and, whenever possible, to construct them with the citizens; they also have the civil duty of accepting citizens' decisions and of not urging the delegation to decide instead of the community.

On the contrary, the conscious or unconscious will of considering planning as 'the fourth branch of government' is still very strong within planners of various political and technical ideas – e.g. participation supporters and technocrats, loyal and adverse to ideological claims to objectivity, etc. – and it is often linked to the belief that it is possible to pursue a clear moral aim and a progressive (or conservative) policy without assuming a partisan stand (Bassin, 1990: 217; Brooks, 1990: 220). This is one of the questions raised by communicative and collaborative planning theory. It is a communicative theorists' merit to have shown the importance of interaction and communication in any decision process, and to have extensively applied them to analyse planning practices. The normative implications of their contribution are more arguable when considered in relation to the diversification of planning and the role of technical knowledge. The communicative school seems to be rather indifferent to the planning specialization processes and to offer itself as a comprehensive 'paradigm' for any type of planning. For some years Innes has chosen consensus building as the planner's target, and has defined the planner as 'a professional who assists with consensus building'.[8] Even if consensus is a social science concept and not pertaining to political theory, consensus building is an intensely political activity, especially when, however defined, public interests are at stake. Unsurprisingly, during a crisis of the political representation anyone, who is responsibly involved in the decision process, may try to contribute to the

solution of problems and conflicts even independently of their professional role and the value of their representativeness. But the question is whether, in a reasonably functioning democratic system, it is just to entrust this role to planners. The question is especially relevant when urban policies or strategies of some importance – and not very restricted and specific issues – are at stake.[9]

The decisive contribution given by Healey to the communicative and collaborative school is well known (Healey, 1992, 1997, 1999), but her position is more complex. She does not confine herself to consider the role of interaction and communication, her attention is simultaneously focused on processes and outcomes, and she moves between two equally important themes: shaping the qualities of places and renewing the form of governance (Healey, 1999). Acknowledging shaping places as a central theme, Healey does not divide it from the processes developed by the planning systems, and considers these processes from a comprehensive cultural, social, and economic point of view, and not from a specific and partial one.[10] The place theme does continuously recur in her article, and to stress that places are a social construct is functional to state that 'policy for place cannot be pigeon-holed into a policy sector, dealing, for example, with land use and development' (Healey, 1999: 118). This observation cannot be confuted and it restores a holistic dimension that is belonging to politics – urban history or other sciences – and not to a profession which necessarily assumes specialist and sectorial points of view to try to reconstruct around them comprehensive frameworks of reference. Even if she returns several times to the place theme, and despite her great analytical experience of planning practices, Healey does not seem interested in the technical knowledge which is a determining factor to define the spatial character and order of a place; a specific and partial technical knowledge yielding, for example, an important theoretical knot: how to relate its partiality to the wholeness of the place. I understand that Healey assigns the task of untying the knot to the communicative planning theory whose ambition is 'to contribute to transform governance cultures – to provide concepts, critical criteria, and examples of open and participative governance' (Healey, 1999: 116) and to provide 'a normative approach, grounded in observations of planning practice, to the design of interactive governance processes and the ethics of experts involved'. The project of governance redesign is then the key aim, and to pursue this aim 'it will be important to develop and transform both conceptions of place-relations and conceptions of the relations between experts and citizens in the governance context' (Healey, 1999: 112). Healey is right in implicitly asserting that the move from a technical partiality to a conclusive synthesis may be only the result of a transformed governance – or indeed of a political contribution; even if, as I will write below, according to different cases we may meet different degrees of contribution by technical knowledge to the political synthesis, and it is only understanding these differences that we can critically develop our knowledge. I cannot

agree with Healey when she argues that the communicative planning aims are the reduction of democratic deficit and distance between state and civil society. I share these aims but we have to remember they are intensely political. I believe Healey may agree that these aims, if accepted, could be the background to support a possible planners' deontology, but they cannot become the planners' goals, because they are aims for which all citizens are responsible. A profession which would stand as a candidate for reducing democratic deficit, would define itself as the critical intelligence of the civil society, and then should ask itself what reliability and legitimacy such an ambitious goal may have. It is difficult not to be sympathetic with Doglio's passion and with so many after him who have put and still put ethical and political themes at the core of their theoretical reflection, just as it is difficult not to be involved by the arguments used by Healey to link ethics, politics and places. I think these kinds of reflections have to continue to enliven planning theories, even if I do not think today it is helpful to represent planning as a direct political action, because, as Fischler observes:

> weakening the state and representative democracy may not be such a good idea at a time when central governments already have less power and less desire to compensate for inequalities that result from globalization, intensified competition, and increased territorial segregation. (Fischler, 2000: 365)

3.

The articles I too briefly commented upon represent only some of the theorists' contributions to the relationships between planning and politics, but they are significant articles, and in general it may be argued that the planning theory literature, for different and sometimes contradictory reasons, tends to flatten down planning to politics. This disposition marginalizes or cancels the technical knowledge role, as if decisions would be the product of a dialogue in which the technical knowledge and the common knowledge have an equal weight (Mazza, 1993, 1995). If 'in consensus building, discourse is the "calculation" method' (Innes, 1996: 463), it is however true that in developing the calculation some voices weigh more than others, not because of insensitivity to the democratic ethics, but because they are richer in arguments. The flattening down of planning to politics often produces an excessive simplification of the theoretical accounts of decision processes. In practice the relationship between land use planning and politics, and physical and political dimensions of decisions, is more complex than it appears in the literature. For example, a collective reflection on a planning experience developed some years ago emphasizes above all that land use planning processes have a multiple nature because their goals are numerous and not always explicitly and univocally defined (Mazza, 2002). Close to the formal and substantive land use regulation goal,

other strategic and tactical goals, not formally stated, are in the background. On the one hand, these goals bring into play the perception and the quality of problems the plan is expected to solve; on the other, they include the use of the plan for negotiation and exchange ends, which have nothing or almost nothing to do with the plan's institutional ends, and in so doing they more and more move the plan focus from the physical to the political issues. It is as if plan goals and decision process dynamics stratify on less and less explicit levels moving from redefinition of spatial forms to transformation and redefinition of social relations. This stratification gives more weight and substance to the capability of developing social control through spatial order, even if the stratification itself hides the relationships between order and control. In the developed case study it was possible to identify four levels of goals, seeming to be typical of any planning process, but in other case studies more levels, produced by a greater articulation of the context and process dynamics, may be identified. A first level is the one of the physical project, implemented through the land use regulation (the translation into written and drawn rules of the tridimensional borders ordering the space of places). A second level, still formal and explicit, is the one of the hypothetical representation of new social relations designed by the new spatial forms; this second level is not yet translated into an operational regulation for it is not certain that plan previsions may be realized. A third level is an implicit and informal level where decisions proposed, threatened, and taken in the first two levels are used by the powerful plan actors as means for political exchange and confrontation. A fourth level is the one where the whole plan process is more or less consciously utilized for a learning process exploring and modifying the problem perception, building and weakening networks of meaning and relations, and outlining and devising new policies and strategies. The four levels are stratified as layers to form a sort of overturned pyramid, and it is important to stress that the first level includes the meanings of the following levels; the second level of the third and fourth ones; the third level of the fourth one; but not vice versa. The relationships between the four levels may be interpreted as a move from the physical and spatial to the political dimension of the plan, where at each level the political content is always present, whereas the physical and spatial content decreases from the first to the fourth level. The pyramid has a variable geometry, the width of the first and second level is a function of the consistence of the technical knowledge in use: if the technical knowledge tends to identify itself with the common knowledge, the base of the pyramid tends to reduce in size until it coincides with the axis of the common knowledge – the political discourse knowledge – the axis structuring and connecting the four levels, the axis of politics (Figure 1). In this perspective a land use plan is not only the choice of the rules defining the forms of a space, but also the conscious or unconscious hypothetical representation of the social relations sheltered in the planned area, or the acknowledgement and/or the simulation of the expansion/exclusion relationships between the activities

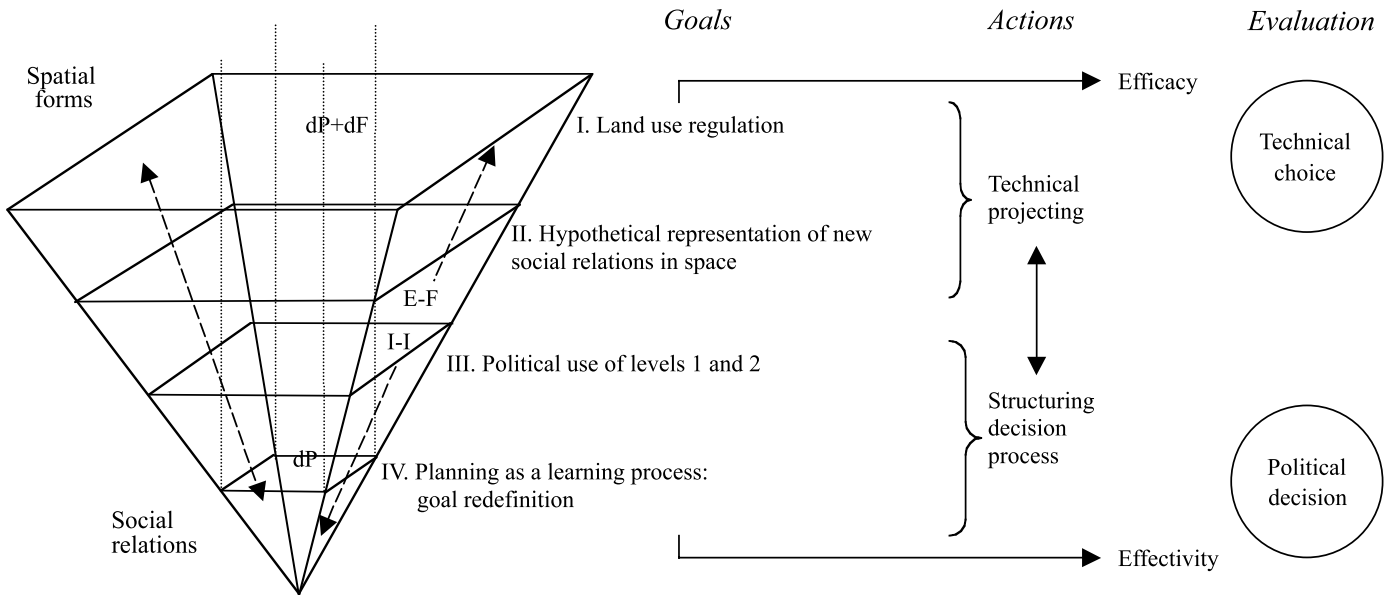

FIGURE 1

The overturned pyramid As drawn by Umberto Janin Rivolin.

Notes: E-F = explicit formal level; I-I = implicit informal level; dF = physical dimension; dP = political dimension.

which, according to the plan, should be located in the area. The mixing of rules and hypothetical representations is the reason why it may be argued that the land use plan has a content both regulative and strategic at the same time. The hypothetical representation of the social relations does not guarantee that the activities foreseen by the plan will actually occupy the space and develop the conjectured relations, but, should it happen, the representation predisposes a system of spatial constraints which to a certain extent condition the development of the activities to be located.

The multiple nature of the planning process is once again a detector of its political nature, because, as Healey (1999) observed, it is impossible to reduce shaping places to one discipline field, but if multiplicity suggests the synthesis may be only a political one – the governance – it does not exclude the relevance of various technical contributions to the synthesis itself. In any planning process planners are involved in two main actions: projecting and structuring. Projecting is in part shared with other experts, structuring the decision process is an action divided within experts and between experts and other actors. Within these relations and confrontations the learning process develops and redesigns the meanings of the plan goals and, to a certain extent, of the whole planning actions. The learning process is possible also because planners' generalist approach feels the need of being mobile between different, formal and informal levels of goals, where other experts, whose technical knowledge is more specialized than planners', are less mobile, linked to the symmetrical relation established between expert specialization, and the supposed or real specific client expectation. In structuring the decision process and in its transformation in a learning process two factors operate: the weakness of planners' technical knowledge, and the strategic uncertainty of political decision takers. The weakness of planners' technical knowledge is produced by two interrelated components: a positive one allowing planners to escape the reduction of problem solutions to predetermined models, and to develop a reflective approach redesigning problems and solutions; a negative one linked to the poor understanding of the relationships between spatial forms and social relations (Figure 2). The weakness of planners' technical knowledge provides an opening for problem redefinition; this opening has two roots. It originates from the will of bringing the individuality of any urban project back to the comprehensiveness of an urban and regional strategy, where it may be less difficult to find out the profile of a general interest. Second, the opening originates in the uncertainty about the consequences produced by a certain spatial form on the dynamics of social relations: a theme still largely unexplored despite Geddes's first reflections almost a century ago.

A learning process is a delicate one, because, putting again in discussion solutions and problems, it debates the power relations among the decisions takers. It is necessary to explore whether the expert involvement in these relations' dynamics is reasonable and legitimate; in particular, if and to what extent it is right to involve planners in the goals of the fourth level, where

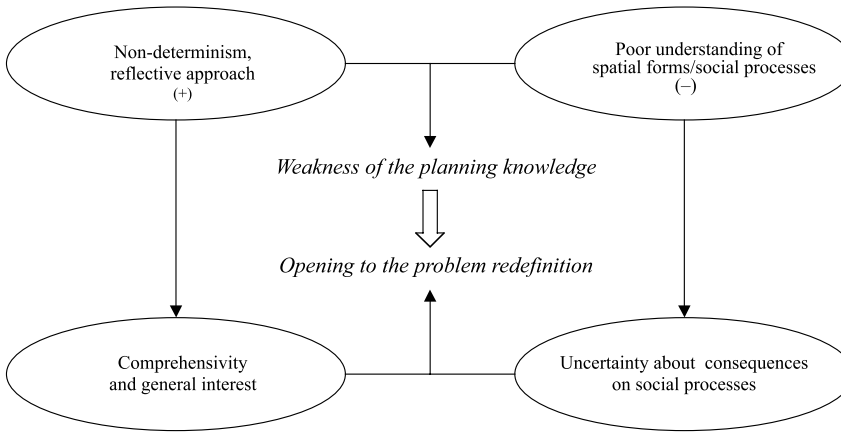

FIGURE 2

Weakness of the planning knowledge and planning as a learning process As drawn by Umberto Janin Rivolin.

the political dimension is a determining factor. It could be argued, for instance, that the involvement in the third and fourth levels is above all a consequence of the weakness in relation to technical knowledge, a way to hide planners' uncertainty about the choices necessary for the first two levels. And it could be argued that if planners' knowledge were a little more solid, planners would stand on the specificity of the first two levels, providing, as other experts do, their exclusion from the last two levels, and leaving them exclusively to their clients. Probably in many cases clients consider the recovery of the informal goals developed by the confrontation within experts and between experts and other actors a waste of time and an improper field invasion. Clients may think the planning process should be finished more rapidly and effectively, and should focus only on specific operational projects and strategies. A reply to this objection is that it would be a mistake and a true sin of omission to lose the opportunity of the plan to promote a more conscious debate on strategies and to construct a new perception of the relationships between spatial and social processes. We can agree or disagree with this justification, but it is a value judgement, and we can propose a more neutral methodical argument. In practice the continuous links of the four levels are particularly intense and tight, only a political choice can decide to interrupt them and to take a decision without considering those links. Therefore, the choice of intervening only in the first two levels, ignoring the last two, is an ideological choice, either caused by the want of maximizing the professional profits (by reducing time and costs and avoiding producing new problems, political or technical) or caused by the fear of producing new problems to the client. A more solid technical

knowledge would not disengage planners from the third and fourth levels, but would more consciously commit them to the four levels, particularly if and when the clients give them the opportunity of deciding, a power they can have only through delegation. The involvement in the four levels is necessary to accept any delegation to decide with an adequate understanding of the political implications of the decision. For example, in the case study referred to earlier the local government had precise ideas about the layout of a new road, and planners could have considered themselves constrained by those ideas, whereas, intervening in them, planners decided to choose among alternative layouts, so that it was possible to give a voice to other clients. The presence of other clients urged a reflective approach, but when the other clients were absent – for instance, they were not interested into the detailed land use choices – and when the technical knowledge was not able to suggest the consequences of the spatial forms on the future social relations, planners were delegated to decide without knowing those consequences and therefore the political content of their decision. In other words, a more solid technical knowledge does not release planners from involvement in the levels of the informal goals – that is methodically impossible – but can make the involvement more conscious, and the border between technical choice and political decision less ambiguous and mobile. The involvement in the levels where the political component of the decision is greater does not mean that experts have a complete power over decisions. A political choice is generally strong only if it relies upon a political and public support, a political decision taken by experts may be even approved, but this does not mean that the decision will be effectively implemented.[11] Planners' contribution to the decision process structuring is not only dependent on their attitude to being involved in the informal levels and goals, but it is also conditioned by the character of the decision process, more or less open to the experts' intervention. Experts may put questions decision takers do not want to reply, or formally reply to, ignoring the question; a behaviour justified by reasons that experts are not always prepared to understand. For example, it is possible that the reply – which may be implied by the question – is politically dangerous or little convincing or understandable, and the expert may not understand it. The extent to which a decision process is open, is not always predetermined, its opening depends on the power relations between the actors and the circumstances where the process is developed. The 'external' planners' intervention may be either expected and/or urged by some actors as a tool for modifying power relations, or allowed because requested by the context and/or by those not directly participating in the process. Usually it is not convenient for the actors to ignore the context-related requests, even when they are discontinuous and confused. It is better to satisfy them, formally at least. Experts' times and ways of intervention are then important to start a learning process. Generally the relationship between experts and other actors and, moreover, between experts and politicians, is a dynamic one,

and experts' contributions are formally functional to their client's aims, but it is well known that in pursuing them, experts may more or less consciously contribute to modifying them in the course of action. Furthermore, experts may give voice to values and interests not represented in the process, and may act in a way not consistent with the client's aims. It is necessary to define this expert behaviour as a virtual representation, because the experts have no mandate and when they intervene in the process, they basically pursue aims that are consistent with their own values. Planners need a code of conduct, which especially takes into account the difference between virtual and formal representation and the different degrees of responsibility and certainty of the two representations; we need it because we intervene in the decision processes, sometimes not marginally at all, without having a formal title to do that (this is the way I understand Healey's call to reflect on the relationships between experts and citizens). But, in the end, what is really important is the quality of the questions addressed by planners, that is the significance and integrity of the technical knowledge that is brought into the play. A 'wrong' question may be as much help as a 'right' one, in as far as the wrong question may produce new useful questions for a reflective approach.

4.

In conclusion, the relative poverty of planners' technical knowledge and the difficulties we meet in trying to enrich it, seem to be the main reasons why many planners identify themselves with political scientists and actors and become involved in the decisions and goals of the fourth level more than of first one. Remarkably, decisions and goals of the first level are considered by many authors as 'technical' issues of minor interest in comparison with the political issues at stake at the fourth level. Those authors seem not to understand or remember that technical issues embody a strong political content, so strong that it influences directly land use planning practices, while the political issues of the fourth level are only opportunities which do not embody any land use planning decision. To be translated into effective decisions these opportunities must reach the first level: the process is a circular one, but the direction from the fourth to the first level is upwards, which is the reason why the pyramid is overturned. To try to unfold the political content of the technical issues of the first level may be a nice theoretical task.

Notes

1. 'Planning is not one "country", but many' (Alexander, 1998) and if planning will be successful we must expect that the 'balkanization' process will continue.
2. This capability makes the planner a communicator, for it gives the opportunity

of offering a comprehensive framework with which even the actors who are not directly involved by the process may interact, while the communication capability is not a sufficient condition for the collective construction of a comprehensive framework.

3. For example, in Britain in the 1980s 'planning was still widely assumed to be essentially a technical, apolitical activity' (Abram, 2000) while in Italy since the 1950s an opposite belief was common with the result of slowing the professionalization and institutionalization of planning. Again, while in Britain it is possible to speak about the marginalization of politicians in the planning process (Tewdwr-Jones, 1996), in the Italian context it would be possible to a certain extent to talk about the marginalization of experts.
4. For example, during the last century the planning manuals, in which the link between theories, technical knowledge and practice does exist and is meaningful, are quite few. In Europe, the first planning book in which a meaningful relationship between knowledge, theory and practice may be found is probably *Town and Country Planning* by Abercrombie (1933/1959); to have another book in which theoretical assumptions are clear, consistent, and relevant for social organization and control produced through spatial order, we must look to *Traffic in Towns* (Buchanan, 1963).The Buchanan report has goals and ambitions quite different from Abercrombie's, but it probably is the last and unique contribution to the technical knowledge produced in the last 50 years. Not by chance it is a sector manual, but it moves from a specific theme to design a comprehensive technical framework for the land use planning. Apart from *Traffic in Towns,* contemporary manuals are generally based on theoretical frameworks which have poor relations with the practices, in the best cases they are intellectual exercises and rhetorical works aimed at representing planning as a 'science', and legitimate planners' social role.
5. In the second half of the 19th century, chiefly in Cerdà's theoretical and practical contribution, the political nature of planning was already a central issue (Cerdà, 1999; Soria y Puig, 1995).
6. The autonomy theme is already present in Cerdà, in different ways, in Howard and Geddes.
7. A similar argument is in Alexander (1999).
8. Innes (1996: 470) acknowledges that planners have different backgrounds, but her contributions suggest collaborative planning is the only significant perspective. See also Innes and Booher (1999).
9. Innes is quite clear in saying that many processes labelled consensus building do not fit with her definition. About consensus building limits, see also Neuman (2000).
10. Even one of the few authors interested in technical knowledge, like Abram (2000), does consider it not as an autonomous subject, but within the planning system theme.
11. From this point of view, the insistence on consensus building may imply the assumption that planners can guarantee a democratic construction of a decision in a better way than politicians.

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