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Simone Tulumello

Fear, Space and Urban Planning

A Critical Perspective
from Southern Europe



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Foreword

The intention—and the value—of this book is to foreground the more opaque instances of fear in the urban dimension, opaque, i.e. from a mainstream or media perspective, the instances which do not make the news or are taken for granted as part of the routine of public debates. In order to do so, the author adopts a critical perspective on fear and urban planning, raising significant issues and questions about a wider range of theoretical implications and drawing on his research and his experience of living in Southern Europe.

Given the context-based research field and the places in which he lives and has lived, the author experienced difficulties in applying normative principles that are nurtured by promises on behalf of deliberative democracy. These principles are somehow inappropriate for those contexts that are in some ways ‘extreme’¹ but not irrelevant, and those which are exposed, for example, to violence and to hidden and illegal abuse, as is the case with organised crime. The contents of the book and its reflections uncover further, and broader, issues in the field of planning theory. It is worth highlighting that, according to the author, the cases should be considered ‘explicit’ more than ‘extreme’ (see, for instance, the conclusions in Chap. 3). This, it will become evident, is the point at which the perspectives of this foreword and of the book are partially divergent. In a nutshell, the goal of this foreword is to make use of a slightly different perspective as a way of complementing and furthering the discussion of the issues of planning theory explored in this book.

The ‘denied citizenship’ represents the *fil rouge* of the book and still remains an open question. If we assume the notion of citizenship as the theoretical and political sphere where the inclusive or conflictual relations between ‘different’ subjects are defined (Bobbio 1990), the contents of this book can be read in the light of the relation between inclusive and exclusive forms of citizenship, and the recognition of these forms in urban planning. According to Zolo (1994, 4), the notion of citizenship puts into perspective individual subjective rights and pre-juridical

¹Here the expression ‘extreme contexts’ refers to conditions in which organised crime, corruption and ‘disorder’ (as a result of ‘conflicting orders’) are structurally concentrated.



reasons and conditions for political inclusion or exclusion. Consequently, the notion of ‘substantial’ citizenship can be considered an indicator of the functional level of democratic institutions in providing fair and equal access to public life and activities, including the urban ones (Zolo 1994, 4). In other words, to analyse democratic institutions and their activities, planning included, under the perspective of substantial citizenship allows us to measure and evaluate the level of democracy of political systems *ex parte populi*, as it adopts a double perspective: the entitlement of rights and the endowment of rights (Barbalet 1988).

Contrary to that which Healey (2012: 34) properly highlights about the benefits of strong local governance institutions in developing interactive, inclusive approaches to rethinking the relations between the civil society and the state, the contexts we are referring to differ in two main aspects: (a) the weakness of local institutions; (b) the interference, and in some cases predominance, of ‘third parties’—and not just organised crime, but also family and/or religion, or a mix of all three!—in the relations between civil society and the state. In fact there are some orders, processes and actions that are beyond or out of the state’s control. Most policy and planning analyses consider the state area of intervention, underestimating the role of other institutions, such as family, religion or illegal crime organisations.

The effects on planning as well as on urban dynamics are significant: in areas where there is a strong presence of organised crime, their powers are capable of bending local governments to support real estate investments, encouraging phenomena like unauthorised building, corruption and political patronage. The most insidious causes of these phenomena reside in the ability to:

- defend, reconcile and promote particular private interests, deliberately jeopardising the public ones; and
- de-legitimise the public administration, the politicians and professionals, by hook—corruption—or by crook—violence/intimidation—or guaranteeing a general condition of inertia/inaction/inefficiency/mistrust (De Leo 2011, 2013).

The rhetoric of fear is one of the instruments being used to enhance mistrust as well as to influence public opinion. As a consequence, the right to the city is ignored or neglected. From Lefebvre (1968) to Mitchell (2003), many scholars (see Friedmann 1992, 1999; Harvey 2000, 2003; Purcell 2003) have discussed how the right to the city must be defended if we want to live in a diverse, just society, as the very idea of citizenship rights is fundamental to protecting the ideals of liberal democracy. Consequently, citizenship is the theoretical and political sphere where conflicting relations between different subjects are defined. Whatever the explicit or implicit aims of any planning decision—whether favouring functional, economic or aesthetic reasons—every planning initiative contributes to a redefinition of the boundaries of citizenship, consequently shaping spatial or non-spatial forms of social control (Lefebvre 1974; Yiftachel 1998; Hillier 2002). This continuous process of redefinition by means of planning initiatives and decisions may occur directly or indirectly, with intentional or unexpected effects, either wittingly (often) or unwittingly (rarely). A redefinition of the boundaries of citizenship, in other



words, the rights to use the city, will always exist as an effect of the redistribution of resources derived from planning decisions, whether or not it is a matter of economies, spaces or rights.

The possible ‘extensive’ or ‘restrictive’ interpretations of the concept of citizenship—as they are described by Kymlicka (1995) and Held (1989)—have some relevant consequences, because they show, theoretically and practically, what citizenship may include or exclude (Lo Piccolo 2010). The recognition of the differences and the guarantee of an effective equity both imply a reconsideration of the idea of citizenship. Nowadays, the characteristics of citizenship status, both legal and political, prevail due to a paradox in history and a process of involution.² If compared with the political civil struggles and juridical recognition of the 1970s, democratic rights and justice claims are much more threatened by neo-liberal capitalist globalisation and its effects upon the development and planning of cities (Routledge 2010). In other words, the recognition of citizenship by institutions has recently ignored most of the capacity or, indeed, the potential willingness to encounter and engage with differences.

While a static concept of citizenship, considered as a guarantee of the acquired rights, is widely prevalent, a dynamic concept of citizenship, considered as an activity and a political practice where recognition, defence and plural articulation of the rights are taken into consideration (Kymlicka 1995), is rarely promoted. Citizenship as a status thus creates new geographies, distinguishing between centres and peripheries of the right holders (Roche 1992); and in this way juridical inclusion/exclusion has repercussions for spatial inclusion/exclusion.

Healey and Gilroy (1990) highlight, as one of the critical ingredients of people-sensitive planning, the importance of an ethical consciousness, but how to nurture and defend such consciousness still remains an open question. In the Habermasian theoretical framework to which they refer, rationality and ethics rely on accuracy, integrity, accountability of and sincerity in what participants say during communicatively rational discussions, and on a planner’s duty of responsibly constructing dialogues and knowledge according to truth and rigour. This requires planners to be aware of the nature of the knowledge they use, how it relates to the knowledge used by others, and the kind of ‘validity claims’ brought forward (Healey and Gilroy 1990, 26). But there is an additional problem and one peculiar to some undemocratic contexts. When individuals and/or groups are not substantially recognised, there is no longer room for representation, as in the metaphorical

²Bobbio (1990), describing the increase in the number of the spheres of rights, highlights how now more than ever rights cannot be ascribed to an abstract category—the generic human being—but rather to different and peculiar categories—the specific human being—according to the characteristics and the privileges of the various social statuses. As status, e.g. family status, the status of the free citizen, the status of the legitimate child, etc. was in the past. Today citizenship is an instrument for the differentiation—and consequently the separation and the discrimination—of some subjects within the social body from others; hence, the status of citizenship is a privilege. This phenomenon is more evident in the urban dimension, especially if we consider the inability of the contemporary welfare-state to cope with ‘a more demanding citizenry, more conscious of our multiplicities’ (Healey 2012, 23).



figure of *homo sacer* used by Agamben (1998) in order to describe those circumstances when hegemonic power suspends the law with the intention of excluding, depriving of rights and marginalising within the juridical order.

Agamben (1998) in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign and Bare Life* examines the relation between the exception and its devastating consequence on human life, which occurs under the guise of the law. He describes the status of *homo sacer* in ancient Rome: persons that may be killed (without this act being considered murder) but not sacrificed. Agamben uses the metaphorical figure of the *homo sacer* in order to signal the existence outside the law, in terms of exclusion and deprivation of rights. Agamben traces this history to theorise the continuous production of the status of *homo sacer* in contemporary societies; although the *homo sacer* phenomenon disappeared, it can be found nowadays when hegemonic power suspends the law: this implicates exclusion and marginalisation within the juridical order. The point that Agamben (1998) wanted to highlight is that those who are banned from juridical considerations, are consequently the embodiment of the *homo sacer*; Agamben also highlights that the ban (suspension of juridical order) allows bare life to exist and to be maintained in contemporary society.

In such circumstances, conflicts can arise or just remain hidden, when, as in most of our experiences, there is no moral shock, there is no room for representation, 'local voices' are disappearing, powerlessness is not contested by the powerless, and protests are latent. It is not just a matter of imbalance of powers (Hillier 2002; Hoch 1994), or of progressive and radical urban movements involved in resisting the assaults on their life worlds and working for better living conditions (Routledge 2010). Rather, it is a matter of making conflicting positions clear and visible in order to have the opportunity to deal with them. Whether on the side of collaborative planning or of the agonist (Hillier 2003; Gunder 2003; Pløger 2004), what about the contexts where conflicts are eluded, implicit or drained, i.e. devoid of their oppositional power?

One solution can be to move towards a more diverse and often, less-formalised governance activity, as suggested in the 'network governance' idea (Healey 2012), though some pre-conditions are necessary:

1. The existence of the space of democracy, according to Arendt (2005), to have a space in which to be allowed to talk and to be listened to, to enable and foster those qualities that Healey (2012, 31) individuates as some of the essential requirements for moving towards more people-centred governance and politics.³
2. The adoption of a normative perspective to make latent or hidden conflict as visible and as publicly debated as possible, instead of just relying on merely technical knowledge and expertise.

³Recognition of multiple identities; respect for different arguments, positions and feelings; 'intelligent' multi-sided discussion of issues-learning and reasoning in public; rich, responsive and respectful interactions.



In a blatant or a hidden conflict situation of opposing interests, the role of values is fundamental; we agree with Watson (2006, 44) that, ‘introducing questions of value into deliberative processes is not necessarily contrary to a recognition of multiple and conflicting rationalities’. It is not easy to bring the ‘irreconcilable’ opposition between different and divergent values back to a level of democratically lawful and operationally possible discussion. The reference parameter can be found in the ambit of rights and their acknowledgement, in their spatial declination and how this translates into being ‘operational’: in other words, citizenship rights (Lo Piccolo 2010; Lo Piccolo and Thomas 2001) in their substantially extensive interpretation as described and explained by Kymlicka (1995) and Held (1987, 1989). This book, though investigating a specific urban phenomenon, gives some insights into the predominant value of citizenship rights as a key issue in the effort of moving from professional-technical knowledge to a socio-political and ethical dimension of planning knowledge.

When considering the issues of citizenship and status, we should highlight the political role that planning may have for minority groups and individuals, representing a potential political arena for them through the micro-practices of democracy-in-action: ‘small struggles which hardly seem to make a difference may sometimes, if built on in the flow of time, lead to major changes in political cultures’ (Healey 2012, 20). The appropriation of spaces and the construction of new uses for and practices in them, in ‘institutional’ or ‘insurgent’ forms, provide a guarantee of the claims of those rights of citizenship that often are denied at the political and/or juridical levels. Local actions of participation, formal or informal practices of coexistence in urban space, as well as inclusionary planning initiatives, become all-significant for a redefinition of the category of citizenship with respect to the substantial changes (and plural articulation) of the social corpus in the contemporary city (Lo Piccolo 2010). According to Healey (2012, 28), ‘this, however, demands a changing ethos and practice from those working in the public sector’.

The Habermasian (1981, 1989) substantive norm, which is at the base of Patsy Healey’s work, sometimes fails not just because of the gap between its theory and practice (Gunder 2003) or because it represents a restrictive model that does not apply to most decision-making processes (Hillier 2003). In some cases, such as those referred to in this book, it also fails due to the absence of a basic level of access to citizenship rights that are the indispensable ingredients—as we would say, pre-conditions—for Arendt’s (and hence Habermas’) space of democracy, which is the physical and metaphorical arena where ‘reasoning in public’ practices can really take place and flourish. According to Arendt (2005), the public space of democracy can be defined as the ambit where all the discursive issues can show their many-sidedness and people can freely show their own plurality by acting on and expressing their plural opinions. Thus, the public space of democracy coincides with the political space of freedom. The sense, but not the aim, of politics is the freedom of plurality. Therefore, understanding a political situation means acknowledging a large framework of different viewpoints and positions from which the situation can be considered and judged.



We previously highlighted (Bonafede and Lo Piccolo 2010) the need for the existence of political spaces where conflicts can take place fully and agreements emerge through discursive and dialogic approaches, using some concepts as developed by Arendt (1958, 2005). In this approach, a substantial precondition for any form of ‘public reasoning’ is the existence of political spaces such as Arendt’s idea of a discursive and active ‘infra-space’: the tangible space of the *agora* and the metaphorical space of democracy. This exists among equal individuals freely debating. Wherever this active and conversational freedom is lacking, a proper political space does not exist (Arendt 2005). The case studies of this book strengthen the above-mentioned assumption, being the rhetoric of fear an obstacle to free and independent debates.

Accordingly, citizenship rights do not only represent a framework of reference that is predominantly theoretical, or an abstract body of principles to which to rhetorically appeal, but are a litmus of daily analyses/assessments (Zolo 1994), debates, choices and deliberations that in our ambit of thought and intervention are all specific, minute, practical and tangible. This commitment, however, assumes recognition of an ethical dimension to the planning discipline that is neither obvious nor automatic. Healey (2012, 28–29) suggests a changing ethos and practice from those working within the public sectors, in the face of the current weaknesses of elite democratic practices and the protests and/or challenges against the ‘technocrats’ as the source of authority.

The role of informal networks is consequently a major issue, but in which ways do the formal and the informal levels cope or clash, even frequently, with the other, especially in very latent conflicting and substantially undemocratic contexts? According to Arendt (1958), without the existence of a common space—both physical and metaphorical—initiatives fail or do not even take place. In planning terms, without a common and sincere place of debate, there is no space that is also efficacious for informal networks, because of the patronising attitude of the political actors and the subjugated condition of all the other subjects. Also for this, fear is the first threat to be fought, and this book offers a number of reasons and reflections for achieving this goal.

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