



CONFLICT IN THE CITY

Contested Urban
Spaces and Local
Democracy

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PLANNING IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT IN UN-DEMOCRATIC CONTEXTS: LESSONS FROM TWO SICILIAN MUNICIPALITIES

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Conflicts in Formally or Substantially Democratic Contexts?
Reasons for such a Distinction¹

Within planning theory, the disciplinary tradition that is more attentive towards conflicts can be placed in a triangular position between politics, citizens and power, where the different research directions can be identified as studies into the élites, the hierarchy of governance and, last but not least, the role of social movements. Through élite theories and theories of classical pluralism, the reflection on conflicts has been measured mostly against the enigma of 'who is in power' applied to city management, whereas in the sphere of urban economic policy, questions have mainly regarded the objectives, despite their having to come to terms with the limitations of rational choices (Bish and Ostrom 1973). In neo-Marxist urban theory, however, the space dimension of conflicts prevails, linked to principles of social justice and urban movement battles with consolidated reference to the classics written by Lefebvre, Castells, Harvey, and Melucci.² In the last ten years, many conflicts regarding spaces, some of them common, contended public spaces have emerged, in many areas of the world and with different characteristics and reasons (De Leo and Lo Piccolo 2013); among their causes, the increase of injustices in the systems of redistribution of resources (including spatial resources) is viewed as the effect of the mix of neoliberalism and the economic and financial crisis. Classic contributions of some of the abovementioned

authors are consequently being reconsidered and studied in more depth, supporting movements (with somewhat excessive enthusiasm and liberality) that have a completely different relationship with space and the city compared with those of the past (Castells 2012).

Despite a wide spectrum of nuances and theoretical fine distinctions, at the base of this corpus of literature and research there is still the assumption of the classic contrast between elite and participative forms of democracy, either in democratic or in un-democratic contexts. In this regard, a more complex theoretical issue is to analyze the dimension of conflict when (and where) it faces the very idea of democracy in its dichotomy: formal versus substantial. Our own research work (and our daily experience as citizens) in Southern Italy are constant reminders of the difficulties in applying theoretical principles nurtured by promises of deliberative democracy. These principles, for example, are somehow inappropriate for those 'extreme'³ but by no means irrelevant contexts that are exposed to violence and to hidden and illegal abuse, as is often the case where organized crime⁴ is a fundamental agent in the local situation. These, then, are the questions of applicability and transferability of theoretical principles we are trying to explore in the following paragraphs. Applicability and transferability is also a matter of systematically using reflections deriving from such 'extreme', particular, and locally-determined cases. As suggested by Brand and Gaffikin (2007: 284), "hard cases can illuminate the challenges and contradictions involved in a proposition, without laying claim to being typical". Moreover, reflections deriving from 'extreme' cases and contexts can be helpful in order to individuate and discuss some (more general) phenomena that are much more evident – and consequently analyzable – in 'extreme' conditions. Although our following assumption might appear controversial, the role of planning is either crucial or insubstantial in these 'extreme' conditions. In the following paragraph we will analyze this issue in the light of the dichotomy between latent and overt conflicts, which is linked, in our view, to the complex contraposition between interests and values (Lo Piccolo 2013).

Planning and conflict are strictly interwoven, as are planning and democracy. On one hand, "the reason for planning practices resides in the relationship between space control and social control" because "dividing, differentiating, redistributing, are instruments that allow one to exercise control over space for the political aims of social control" (Mazza 2001: 179). Consequently planning, given its nature, normalizes and standardizes, creating structures (in terms of norms and regulations, but also tools and procedures) that inevitably try to stabilize the grounds of the conflict by defining the rules of the game, although, obvious as it may seem, those same rules can, in time, cause the conditions for new conflicting powers to emerge. The ample spectrum of conflicts that involves planning and planners is not of course limited only to those deriving from claims on the use of land generated by "the delimitation and confinement in space" (ibid.). We are increasingly faced with contentions with strong political, social, economic and value implications that have a privileged relationship with urban space.

On the other hand, there are themes and directions that are capable of opening conflicting arenas almost by definition: the localization of “unwanted installations” (Bobbio and Zeppetella 1999) and the realization of great infrastructures; the connection between social movements and environmental issues, that introduce a sort of “generational agreement” or the challenges of citizens’ health (De Leo 2013a), and the overlapping of functions and habits of immigrant and native populations (Lo Piccolo 2008; Belli and De Leo 2011). It is obvious, however, that these issues must be reallocated in meaningful frameworks that are capable of going beyond ‘the syndromes’ and visions of ‘clash as mere opposition’, trying mainly to find the way to define a renewed manner of planning and considering the processes of urban transformation and the guidelines of territorial development.

If, in general terms, we consider the variety in the nature and forms of present conflicts in western democracies, they all seem to reflect in one way or another a general condition of fragmentation and crisis in the substantial notion of democracy, as well as the weakness of the forms of representation within the framework of a larger crisis in which we are immersed. Thus it is crucial for us today to grasp the opportunity to return centrality to planning for its potential capacity of recomposing, albeit only temporarily, the social fragmentation to which we had perhaps grown accustomed. Previously analysed experiences (Lo Piccolo 2008 and 2009; Bonafede and Lo Piccolo 2010; De Leo 2011; De Leo 2013b; De Leo and Lo Piccolo 2013; Lo Piccolo 2015) show the attempts at facing this issue in ‘substantially un-democratic’ contexts, where the institutional sites provided by the arenas of formal planning rarely become key arenas where the conflicts play out. With this research experience background, our reflections will here be developed on the basis of the analysis of two Sicilian municipalities placed under the administration of external commissioners due to mafia infiltration in the public administration. The distinction between formal and substantial democracy on the one hand and between interests and values on the other is essential in order to develop this issue theoretically, in the light of our research experiences in ‘extreme’ contexts, where conflicts are more hidden or latent than explicit and overt.

Latent and Overt Conflicts in the Opposition (and Overlapping) of Interests and Values

The following reflections are based on the research experiences and observations of Sicilian contexts where, due to cultural, social and political specificities, conflicts are more hidden than explicit, including the role and influence of mafia activities as regards the social and political dimension. In broader terms, the theoretical distinction between latent and overt conflicts is appropriate to clarify the difference between formal and substantial democracy, and the consequent role and contribution of planning. In order to reflect on planning and democracy in the case of latent conflicts, and on the ethical as well as operational implications for planners in such circumstances, we will posit the following five assumptions:

1. fundamental (analytical and practical) distinction should be made between values and interests;
2. among values, there are some which should be 'non-negotiable', as in the case of legal order versus organized crime, or the case of citizenship rights versus privileges;
3. the chain linking conflict, consensus and efficiency is not necessarily a valid one; more is at issue, in some way connected to the abovementioned distinction between values and interests;
4. conflicts in planning should be dealt with in this light, making explicit their hidden or latent dimension;
5. when the communicative approach is unaware of or fails to factor in the previous four assumptions, it is destined to failure; an agonistic perspective is necessary and complementary in this regard, in order to make explicit the hidden conflict among interests and non-negotiable values.

Public planning debates have mostly faced the dimension of conflicts by tackling them in terms of opposing interests (Lindblom 1965; Susskind 1987; Forester 2006 and 2009); as a consequence, most of the planning research into 'consensus' (a recurrent theme in the communicative approach) or 'conflict' (a recurrent theme in the agonistic approach) focuses prevalently on the plural articulation and resulting opposition of interests. Considerations as to the conflicting irreconcilability of opposing values remain secondary and in the background.

The two aspects (interests and values) often overlap in the plan of action, and are almost always confused for dialectical and rhetorical reasons. However, they do not coincide on the level of theoretical analysis; results of their reciprocal opposition or overlapping may vary. The 'automatic' correspondence between common values and the identification of the amount of individual interests with the abstract concept of common goods (and interests) has been widely discussed and debated (Lindblom 1977; Young 1990 and 2000; Benhabib 1996; Norval 2007; Campbell 2012), highlighting the hegemonic nature of political procedures that define the common interests, in particular the identification of its practical and operational features. The crucial aspect is connected with the fact that the ethical dilemma of this issue resides in the overlapping coexistence of clashing interests and values. Some of these are or can be explicit, others are or must remain concealed in the public confrontation, since some values are 'non-negotiable' as a matter of principle (that is, in the formal dimension of institutional democracy). If they become negotiable values, this type of bargaining is kept formally concealed in the public confrontation (Lo Piccolo 2015).

It is not by chance that many opposing interests in the urban dimension – or in terms of space at any rate – can generate overt conflicts, albeit with time – and geographic limitations. It is not always the case, however, that opposing values determine explicit conflicts, since some values are formally taken into account as a matter of course, and consequently discussed and/or shared in the public dimension. In the operational declination of plan-

ning practices, the ideal tension that animates the abovementioned considerations can be translated into forms of analysis, interaction, and choice in which the revelation of the values at stake (which stand in opposition and are sometimes irreconcilable) must be placed before the examination of the interests involved. Highlighting the values at stake appears to be ethically imperative and operationally necessary not only for ideological and political purposes but also for their pragmatic and practical implication. In other words, recognizing the values at stake, and their potential irreconcilability, is the first step towards an ethics-based management of democratic practices and of planning, which constitutes their spatial declination.

Among values there are indeed some which should be 'non-negotiable', as in the case of legal and democratic values versus crime values, as well as in the case of citizenship rights versus privileges. In order to clarify the distinction between interests and non-negotiable values, citizenship rights not only represent a framework of reference that is predominantly theoretical, or an abstract body of principles to which to appeal rhetorically, but provide a litmus of daily analysis assessment (Zolo 1994), debates, choices and deliberations that in our ambit of thought and intervention are all specific, minute, practical and tangible.

According to Zolo (1994: 4), the notion of citizenship considers (individual) subjective rights in relation to pre-judicial reasons (and conditions) for political inclusion or exclusion. Consequently, the notion of 'substantial citizenship' can be considered as an indicator of the 'functioning level' of democratic institutions in providing fair and equal access to public life and activities, including urban same (Zolo 1994: 4). If we take the notion of citizenship as the theoretical and political sphere where the (inclusive or conflictual) relations between 'different' subjects are defined (Bobbio 1990), our reflections focus on the relation between (inclusive or exclusive) forms of citizenship, the recognition of these, and urban planning. 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 the democracy of political systems *ex parte populi*, as it adopts a double perspective: both the entitlement and the endowment of rights (Barbalet 1988).

The instrumental interpretation of the notion of citizenship has led some authors to the conclusion that it is necessary to overcome a 'restricted conception' of citizenship, as explained by Held (1987 and 1989), Bobbio (1990), and Kymlicka (1995) in order to gain a more inclusive recognition of substantial (as opposed to merely formal) recognition of rights. The sphere of substantial citizenship rights relates to the dimension of non-negotiable values.

Looking at conflicts simply in the perspective of divergent or opposing interests, one could reasonably object that an agonistic approach is ineffectual or inconclusive, as the 'conflictive dimension', to function as a daily practice, be it institutional or not, requires a 'level of conciliation' without which permanent antagonism implies inertia and inaction (Bond 2011). Examples in this sense are numerous in the technical and political debate, which has traditionally, and sometimes instrumentally, considered it a fundamental element of weakness.

Suffice it to consider the constant debate on the inefficiency of plans or, in broader terms, of planning as a whole (Crosta 2006). On the institutional level and in public discourses, the conditions of conflict are accused of generating involuted processes in the discussion and decision-making arena, with the following argumentation: given the minimal efficiency in the identification of choices capable of solving complex local issues, and the obvious limitation of actions that appear not to be significantly influential in wider political arenas, 'conflictive' practices seem destined to develop in unidirectional ways, leading to harsh and conflicting veto actions.

It is on the principle of efficiency that the major criticism of the approach in the sphere of public decisions is built. While neoliberals criticize it for the encouragement of unmotivated and excessive claims on the State, the 'conflictive' approach is also blamed for producing aberrant localisms and, in short, the paralysis of urban government action (Purcell 2009) by means of the ever-increasing and efficient use of the power of veto as an expression of particularistic interests. A diffuse although debatable opinion is that the main guarantee of efficiency is attributed to the quest for consensus. If, as has been noted, "planning is obsessed by the theme of consensus" (Crosta 1998: 68), conflicts are identified as the main obstacle to efficiency. Crosta also points out, however, that the consensus/efficiency dichotomy does not automatically imply the concept of a shared idea of common interest: theoretical propositions going to great lengths to link the two processes mechanically (e. g. Innes 1996) are not sustainable, insofar as they presuppose the existence of an objective collective interest – thereby assuming as the ultimate goal the achievement of a common good that planning practices do not, in actual fact, necessarily pursue. We argue that this order of criticism actually often confuses the sphere of interests with that of values.

Given the abovementioned assumptions, our critical position inevitably questions the basis of the theoretical, dialogic-communicative approach (Healey 1996), highlighting an ontological weakness of its assumptions against a shared – and still fertile – viability of its methods. In the Habermasian theoretical framework, rationality and ethics rely on the accuracy, integrity, accountability, and sincerity of what participants say in communicatively rational discussions (Forester 2009), and on a planner's duty to construct dialogues and knowledge responsibly, according to truth and rigour (Healey 1997). 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). Discourses have to be 'fair' and 'right', and based on an ethical dimension of justice as well as honesty (Forester and Laws 2009). However, as often happens, discourses, far from being true, are based on rhetorical devices that are instrumental and entirely false. Moreover, the spheres of values and of interests are not clearly distinguished (and consequently faced) in the public discourse.

Although communicative planning theorists consider Habermasian communicative ethics a valuable conceptual resource from which follows the ethical challenge of mediating

conflicts in inclusionary processes, Hillier's analysis of the Habermasian concept of rational consensus formation (2003) evinced its fallibility, describing the possibilities of the permanence of conflict, non-reciprocity, domination and the related power-games which are inherent in planning decision-making. In our experience, the argumentative practice fails if the discursive approach is not based on a truthful and open level of confrontation: it is not just a matter of imbalance of powers, but of making conflictive positions clear and visible, according to agonistic theory (Mouffe 1999, 2000 and 2005), highlighting differences of values and differences of interests.

In order to move beyond the agonistic-communicative divide (Bond 2011) in substantially un-democratic contexts, we asked ourselves the following question: from the viewpoint of either agonistic or communicative and collaborative planning, (Hillier 2003; Gunder 2003; Pløger 2004), how are we to deal with those contexts where conflicts are eluded, implicit or drained (that is, devoid of their oppositional power)? The experiences we dealt with (De Leo 2008 and 2009; Lo Piccolo 2008 and 2009; Bonafede and Lo Piccolo 2010; De Leo 2011, 2012 and 2013b) and the cases of the following paragraph show precisely such contexts, where local residents have passively accepted the absence of public policies in favour of de-regulating and privatizing the public realm, without expressing any particular form of protest and/or conflict.

Contrary to what Healey (2012: 34) properly highlights regarding the benefits of strong local governance institutions in developing an interactive, inclusive approach to rethinking the relations between civil society and the state, the contexts we are referring to differ in two main aspects, namely the weakness of local institutions and the interference (and, in some cases, the predominance) of 'third parties' (such as organized crime) in the relations between civil society and the state. In such circumstances, conflicts can remain hidden, when – as in the majority of our experiences – there is no moral shock, 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 resisting the assaults on their lifeworlds and working for better living conditions (Routledge 2010), but a matter of making conflictive positions clear and visible, in order to be able to deal with them.

Lessons from two Sicilian Municipalities Placed under the Administration of an External Commissioner due to Mafia Infiltration in the Public Sector

In our 'extreme' territories of Southern Italy, structural as well as latent conflicts place themselves and reproduce themselves within the gap between public non-negotiable values and the distortion of private interests, in the forms of corruption, patronage, and un-democratic (concealed) control. These hidden and latent conflicts must be neither ignored nor formally

settled: otherwise, the ethical dilemma concerns the responsibility of confirming the structures of existing powers to the detriment of the weaker parts (Campbell 2012).

In areas marked by a strong presence of organized crime, the (either institutional or illegal) powers are capable of bending the system to support real estate investments encouraging phenomena like unauthorized building ('abusiveness'), corruption, and political 'favouritism' (De Leo 2009, 2010, 2011). As has already been noted (De Leo 2013b), the most insidious causes of these phenomena reside precisely in the capacity of: a) defending and promoting particular private interests, and deliberately jeopardizing public ones; b) delegitimizing the public administration (politicians and professionals), by hook (corruption) or by crook (violence/intimidation), or guaranteeing a general condition of inertia, inaction, inefficiency, and mistrust. There are indeed a number of orders, processes and actions that are beyond or outside 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 organizations. Here we offer another perspective, deriving from the analysis of two Sicilian municipalities in the Palermo hinterland, Villabate and Bagheria, that have been placed under the administration of external commissioners due to mafia infiltration in the public administrative sector. The two cases usefully illustrate (hidden) conflicts between interests and values.

The law against mafia infiltration in public institutions was introduced into Italian legislation in 1991. It envisages the suspension of local administrators subject to investigation and legal proceedings for the crime of mafia abetment or if suspected of belonging to a criminal organization, and is an internationally unique regulatory measure, deriving from the Italian peculiarity whereby the presence of four large criminal organizations entails firstly the compression of democracy into small municipal centers (preparatory activities for mafia organizations prior to their initiating entrepreneurial business), since access to municipal and provincial councils allows criminal organizations to build political, institutional and entrepreneurial alliances necessary for their maintenance and development.⁵ In Villabate the City Council administration was twice suspended due to mafia infiltration and temporarily replaced by an Extraordinary Commission; the Bagheria City Council administration was similarly suspended for the same reason. This suspension for mafia infiltration is – we argue – a case in which hidden conflicts are made explicit, being the conflict between the State and criminal organization in the dimension of non-negotiable values: democracy and legal rights versus crime, corruption, and violence.

As in the previous case-studies on Villabate (De Leo 2012) and Bagheria (De Leo 2009 and 2010), the effect of being commissioned aims at modifying (even if only temporarily) direct relations between criminal organizations (momentarily paralyzed or under the thumb of the courts) and ad hoc, incorruptible institutions which have been appointed with special powers. In these contexts, which normally connive with the mafia as part of their daily practice, inefficient governance and the individual management of interests were

common and frequent occurrences. Furthermore, in these case-studies the possibility of explicitating the dimension of conflict explicit has been crucial (even if only temporary, during the suspension of the city council administrations), since it allowed a new planning approach introduced by those planners appointed by the establishment of the Extraordinary Commissions. At the beginning of this process – with local institutions discredited by the Extraordinary Commissions for Mafia infiltrations – the rather desolate scenario was of disheartened people, adrift from the institutions, with entrepreneurs rendered disinterested and distracted, and a very weak administrative and technical apparatus. Clearly these were not ‘optimal conditions’ to trigger collaboration between citizens and institutions. Despite that, planning was considered by the Extraordinary Commissions a crucial level of intervention if the status quo was to change.

In Villabate, the Second Extraordinary Commission produced a series of planning tools and practices with high technical profiles, building up a new relationship of trust between citizens and public technical offices based on clear rules for all (this becoming a non-negotiable value), expedient action (when possible), and patient and unambiguous explanations of the reasons for denial of planning permissions when they occurred. This approach made a simple but rigorous distinction between legitimate or illegitimate interests, that is, in our analysis, a clear distinction between non-negotiable values, and special interests.

In Bagheria it was decided that one of the ways to significantly change the culture of a city (whose elected officials have been removed because of ‘mafia infiltration’) was to apply for the European Programme of urban rehabilitation ‘Urban II’. This rigorous yet unconventional decision had a certain originality, characterized above all by the importance given to trust at all levels: administrative, human, deliberative, and managerial (Marino 2008). During the administration of the Extraordinary Commission, Bagheria implemented an Urban Program of integrated actions (Urban-Italia) able to activate a network of ‘unexpected’ subjects that have gradually been managing the challenges proposed by the Program itself, renovating several city squares, and promoting cultural and civic events. This happened, above all, during the second phase of implementation (2004-2008), and through a significant renewal of practices, languages, and styles of planning (De Leo 2008 and 2013b). In the words of one of the newly appointed planners, “the Urban Italia programme of Bagheria is a clear break with the past, an obstinate faith that it is possible to: spend public monies with regulatory rigor; improve the quality of public services; allow citizens and particularly women and children to live better in the city, and introduce new opportunities for participation and exchange between people and knowhow” (Marino 2008). This not only allowed the sharing of urban or developmental program objectives, but also allowed the involvement in a project of change that, in order to be such, must be inclusive and include large portions of the population.

The public and explicit explication – through planning activities and encounters – of the distinction between negotiable interest and non-negotiable values helped (although in ‘ex-

treme' and 'extraordinary' conditions) to develop trust between planning technical knowledge and people: trust - not as an abstract concept, or a mere sentiment, but as a real and formal mode of operation throughout the city, which, while never violating the basic forms and regulations of institutional activity, responsibly changed the direction of choices and action (Marino 2008). This, we argue, is the reason for "the success" of these cases in which implemented urban programs have caused the rupture of a condition of prevalent disinterest, de-legitimization and substantial hostility towards public action.

The true significance of the cases examined, therefore, is that intense and rapid processes of change have been activated whereby institutions and residents - largely permeated by logic which seems quasi-criminal and therefore in opposition to processes of change - has, in actual fact, cooperated towards bringing about change in a space that was once inexistent.

The great setback in establishing an urban government is, in fact, given by the consistent irreconcilability and incompatibility of values and aims that can be found between a new institution (oriented by a 'special mandate' to carry out urban and territorial interventions in the name of legality and transparency) and a population substantially adverse and culturally alien to the intervention of urban transformation in the name of public interest or of the value of legality and justice (Trey 1992). During the planning experiences succinctly described here, the value of substantial citizenship emerged and was acknowledged by the sectors of the population involved in the process of project-making.

This means that in the examined case-studies, the overcoming of divergences and conflict occurred on the specific, impervious ground of non-negotiable (but, during the planning process, at least partially shared) values. The explicit dimension of conflict among opposing values was unimaginable before the administration of the Extraordinary Commissions and the consequent planning activities, while it was considered instead crucial in order to activate a substantial transformation process.

As has been discussed (De Leo 2013b), in the examined cases planners were able to:

redefine, through planning techniques, the boundaries of legitimacy of private interests: the enormous size of the shopping mall does not fall within any of the legitimate expectations of local development plans for the area and does not seem useful to the transformation of this urban area and therefore will be not realized; the illegal houses cannot get public funding for the renewal projects until the fines due for the building amnesty have been paid, and so forth;

reintroduce, through planning practices, the value of public interest and citizenship rights: rebuilding and upgrading common spaces for the community and for social purposes that are nonexistent in those urban contexts that have been developed purely in accordance with (legal and illegal) private interests, with no plan of any sort; promoting local cultural events, giving training and equal work opportunities to weaker social groups, and investing public resources in roads and sidewalks.

Beyond this strategy of dealing with divergences of values and conflicts of interests there still of course remains a strong feeling of 'working in a condition of exception' (Agamben 2005), and the past, substantially undemocratic culture can prevail again and progressively, even reabsorbing the outcomes obtained with a substantial democratic planning implementation. In general, all the procedures of degradation and disorder influence the future results of a transformation process, reinstating a condition of the status-quo, producing general mistrust and, again, delegitimizing public action and civic participation.

The guiding principle in the described cases is that whenever it is not possible to share, in a certain phase or under specific conditions, the same values, it is possible and necessary to open a space of interaction, of overt opposition instead of concealment (Lo Piccolo 2015), in order to allow government action. Hence it appears to be useful also to face and to interpret the latent conflict in order to then understand how to locate the common value which will allow us to improve the state of affairs for both parties, even acting jointly with 'the enemy', with those who have different interests but can be led to act jointly. It is equally necessary to bear in mind that in the overall and varied framework of conflicts of this kind it is necessary to recognize that, wherever difficult choices need to be made, clear and equitable references are likewise needed (De Leo 2010 and 2013b); at the same time, the role of planners is crucial with regard to their ways of positioning themselves in a conflict between completely different values.

Conclusions

The present paper argues that as long as conflicts are latent, or as long as the blatant dimension of conflicts is simply about (conflictive) interests, a professional technical approach (striving to be formally neutral and impartial) is a losing strategy. Pruitt and Rubin (1986) classify five strategies for dealing with conflict: contention, yielding, problem-solving, withdrawal, and inaction. The last two are adopted with the deliberate intention of exploiting the status quo in order to avoid conflict and to maintain the supremacy of the elites. The conflictive dimension is in some cases 'implicit', or latent, or hidden, concealed; it involves opposite interests but also different values.

The lesson learnt from the cases of Bagheria and Villabate is the following: the more explicit the conflictive dimension of values (over interests) of a public planning confrontation, the more likely the chance of promoting substantial democracy in 'extreme conditions' (Lo Piccolo 2015), assuming citizenship rights in the dimension of non-negotiable values.

In a review of the role of planning practices in conflictive dimensions, some authors see conflict as a disruptive force causing imbalances in a system of interrelated parties, while others view conflict as a potentially positive force that can promote change, integration and adaptability (Turner 1991) while a third group (Mouffe 1999; Friedmann 1992 and 2011; Harvey 2000; Holston 1999) suggest that innovation arises in a situation of social conflict,

Subsequently, depending on the levels of community political awareness and empowerment as well as on the manipulating strength of dominant interests, planning may take deliberative/interactive forms, which clearly express its political role as a social learning practice. Alternatively it may assume traditional, deterministic models or at best tokenistic and paternalistic participatory forms. But if we look at role, effectiveness and legitimacy of planning knowledge in dealing with conflicts, in many cases we perceive that technical knowledge is in any case weak and frail if there is no clear and explicit distinction between interests and values. In these cases it is therefore important to understand how to return the 'irreconcilable' opposition between different (and divergent) values to a level of democratically lawful and operationally possible discussion.

The suspension for mafia infiltration of city council administrations is, we argue, a case in which hidden conflicts are made explicit, the conflict between the State and criminal organization regarding the dimension of non-negotiable values: democracy and legal rights versus crime, corruption and violence. In a (blatant or hidden) conflictive dimension of opposing interests, the role of values is fundamental, and we agree with Watson (2006: 44) when she states that "introducing questions of value into deliberative processes is not necessarily contrary to a recognition of multiple and conflicting rationalities" 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 and 1989). This commitment, however, assumes recognition of an ethical dimension of planning tasks that is neither obvious nor automatic.

If the main aim of planning action is, in fact, equity and justice, it therefore calls for value assessment and can hence imply a dimension of (more or less mediated) conflict; if, on the other hand, the main aims of planning action are efficiency and consensus, in a dimension indifferent to value assessment and responsive only to the sphere of interests, then conflict appears to be a mere stumbling block or a danger in the worst-case scenario, and a mishap in the best-case scenario.

In conclusion, is conflict irresolvable and, furthermore, nonproductive? No, if the ineluctable passage towards a clear explication of the differences of value (and not only of interests) and the guarantee of rights of citizenship are quite openly the ethical foundation of planning activities. The ethical responsibility and technical capacity of planners are identified with awareness and thus ability to operate in the public sphere, starting from the necessary recognition (and consequent explication) of the conflicting values involved, some of them being 'non-negotiable' in a substantial (and not merely formal) interpretation of democracy.

Notes

- 1 Although the chapter should be considered a result of the common work and reflection of the two authors, Daniela De Leo took primarily responsibility for the first and the third sections and Francesco Lo Piccolo for the second and the fourth section. Corresponding addresses: daniela.deleo@uniroma1.it and francesco.lopiccolo@unipa.it
- 2 A comprehensive review even of the essential references of this body of literature would require an amount of space beyond the restrictions and aims of this text.
- 3 Here the expression 'extreme contexts' is referred to conditions in which organized crime, corruption and 'disorder' (as a result of 'conflicting orders') are structurally concentrated.
- 4 The expression 'organized crime' or 'criminal association' is used in Italy to refer to those illegal groups (Mafia in Sicily, Camorra in Campania and 'ndrangheta in Calabria) which are locally space-based and with strong territorial identity, links and roots, although their (network) activity is on a wider (global) scale.
- 5 The law in question however does not regard only local administrations of municipalities or provinces but also the bureaucratic organs of other local institutions as well as the public healthcare system.

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