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Grosseto. Structure plan and the memory of planning

Paolo Scattoni

The Grosseto Structure plan has been prepared by the internal planning office in collaboration with the Department of territorial and Urban planning (Diptu) of Sapienza University of Rome. Thus if the plan making ended in may 2006 the 'reflection' on the experience is still continuing for the development of replicable methods and techniques.

For the University group involved it was not a traditional consulting activity but an opportunity for introducing methodological innovations within the frame of the Tuscany region planning legislation (Planning act no. 5 of 1995 and the more recent act no. 1 of 2005).

Among others, one of the tested innovations is that of the 'traceability' of the decision making process for plan preparation.

It answers to the principle of transparency that is stated, together with sustainability and participation, by the regional Planning act no. 5 of 1995.

The approach for the plan is based on three simple assumptions.

Firstly the plan making is based on a complex decision process; secondly the emerging conflicts should not be considered as an obstacle; on the contrary they are viewed as a resource because the consequent debate can produce better decisions; thirdly such a process of conflict resolution has to theory of the last years offered an alternative paradigm, emphasizing the importance of the interaction among stakeholders, then the practice has lacked the operational methods and techniques.

Planning theory has too often refused to adequately consider the tools

developed in the 70s and 80s and planning practice is suffering for such a gap, especially in innovative contexts like that of Tuscany.

Right from the beginning it was decided to abandon the classical approach (based on the sequence of aims-objectives, analysis and choice) to opt for an alternative that was based in some ways on the strategic choice approach with the progressive definition of decision areas and options where the system of goals and objectives develops simultaneously and not before the plan choices. Thus if in september of 2000, at the beginning, there were 22 decision areas there were 56 at the end of the process. The 'strategic frames' therefore need to be documented during the whole process.

Participation and the plan window

For the emergence of interests and conflicts, a plan window was organised to collect as soon as possible be 'traceable' and participated in order to show how gains and losses caused by the plan can be made in the interest of the community.

The idea was not new as it had been intuitively anticipated in the '60s by Giovanni Astengo and later formalized by Marcello Vittorini in the plan of Ravenna. The innovation introduced in Grosseto has been the digitalization and processing of the information and the publication on the web in a way that make it possible to detect who and what people are making proposing. During the plan making process, the plan window collected 826 written contributions that were linked to the strategic frames explained above.

The choices

The evaluation of emerging proposals within a coherent

strategic frame has taken place through different means. The Agenda 21 applied to the structure plan had an important role to find agreements for main strategic choices (decision areas). Decisions on more specific and localized proposals criteria were publicly declared by the planners. Furthermore an important role was played by the Evaluation of environmental effects (Vea). The introduction of planning equalization (perequazione urbanistica) was useful for the evaluation. Finally the filter of the co-planning with both Region and Province helped to focus on the decision making.

The research for an accessible traceability

After the final structure plan approval, the work of the University researchers continued. The empirical documentation has been essential for the further developments.

In particular the research work has been finalized by setting up tools for which make documentation of the decision making processes available not only to planners but also to the general public.

During the phase of plan making, the planners were careful to provide traceability by an hypothetical external observer. The publication on the web site of the council has been constant. The statistics for the accesses to the web site have shown huge interest towards the plan making. It is difficult to establish if the accesses were more from the local community or from outside. The published materials offered were readable, but, on the other hand, the publication has shown evident limits. Firstly the documentation is limited to the work of the planners. Other information useful for traceability is omitted (e.g. Local press, documents of political parties or pressure groups, etc.). Finally the

documentation is not so accessible to the general public without the help of an expert in planning procedures.

Therefore the setting up of a dedicated information base raises interesting potentials for research on planning.