

The planning of strategy: A contribution to the improvement of spatial planning



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ABSTRACT

The spatial planning is under pressure. On one hand, it is the economic and financial system that requires fewer constraints on the reproduction of capital and, on the other hand, or perhaps because of it, there is a deletion of the regulatory capacity of the state over land use and, and overall, on the occupation of the territory. The need for flexibility in managing territorial took some time to appear on spatial planning but now it is more evident than ever. We propose a method of adjusting the classic process of spatial planning so that through a clearer operational and strategic component integration, it shows greater capacity to adjust to the new situation. This methodology has been successfully applied to the municipal master plan of the municipality of Almada, located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon. Therefore, it is believed that flexibility can be well achieved by keeping the importance of land use planning and, more generally, spatial planning as a key instrument to regulate the demand for a scarce as is the territory. At the same time, this methodology allows the convergence of private and public actors, towards a collective future desired.

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Introduction

Spatial and land use planning are the answer to “the problem of coordination or integration of the spatial dimension of sectoral policies through a territorially-based strategy” (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2006:91). But spatial planning is also the result of the application to the territory of a wide-ranging set of values of a specific society in a specific moment in time, as many authors have shown, both from a positive perspective (Alexander et al., 2012; Friedmann, 2011; Davidoff, 1965; Harper and Stein, 2006) and from a more critical viewpoint (Fainstein, 2010; Yiftachel, 1998).

This spatial planning is then followed up in the urban management policies, which in turn return to the society the consequences of the decisions it itself takes (Fig. 1).

In this historical and social trajectory between the definition of rules and the perception of the difficulties involved, awareness of the need for change does not emerge during the tendentially conservative planning process (Alexander et al., 2012; Santos, 1998; Moroni, 2010), but in the moment in which the inefficiencies, perversities and inadequacies generated by the process become intolerable (McClymont, 2011). Spatial planning thus reveals itself

as the imposition of a socio-spatial order that is continually challenged by the tensions it creates for the various stakeholders involved.

But these questions on the principles and processes of spatial planning have not emerged out of the blue. The world has been marked, albeit unequally, in recent decades by the passage from a regulated economic and financial system to a different form that is highly flexible and in which the states' power of control over financial processes is greatly reduced. These financial processes in turn take on the role of influencers of policies (and politics), society and the economy (Harvey, 2000, 2010; Jessop, 2008; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004).

This generalized change has manifested itself in various areas and spatial planning has not been an exception. The linear and pre-determined future proposed by the rationalist paradigm has lost credibility and, with it, the spatial planning that was associated with it, understood as a process that was continuous (development, execution and assessment) and cyclical (restarting at the end of the period of validity or due to structural changes in the objectives or the context) (Pereira, 2009).

The shift away from a Keynesian social model to a Neoliberal model that has been abundantly characterized elsewhere (Harvey, 2013; Waley, 2013; Kamel, 2012; Albrechts, 1992), is reflected, in spatial planning terms, in the changes in terms of the content, methodology and objectives of planning instruments (Sager, 2011; Prato, 2007).

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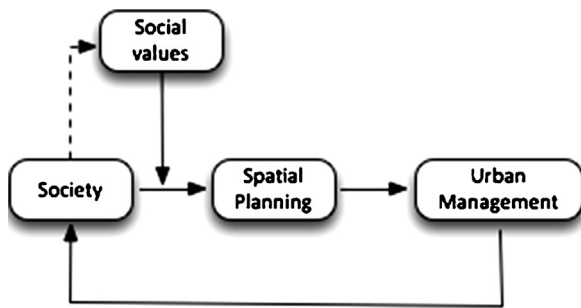


Fig. 1. Relation between society and urban management.

Thus, it is common to find references to the current weaknesses of the public regulated spatial planning system and the emergence of trends that seek to reformulate it. Lovering very clearly stresses that the “‘Neoliberal turn’ was reflected in, and in turn encouraged by, the reinvention of planning as a service to special interests, especially property owners and boosterist politicians. Discursively, this led to a new orthodoxy focused on the vacuous (but politically useful) concept of ‘competitiveness’” (Lovering, 2010:1).

There would thus seem to be no doubts that land use management that once derived from rationalist, technocratic and regulatory planning (McLoughlin, 1969; Faludi, 1973) is today subject to enormous pressure as a result of the diminished role of the state in relation to the power of employment and competitiveness that is only guaranteed, in the Neoliberal view of things, by the market and the private sector (Pereira, 2009).

This increased competitiveness is essentially achieved by bypassing the traditional planning processes, which are considered too rigid and formal, in order to achieve better capital turnover rates (Peck et al., 2010). There thus begin to merge more clearly the principles of change, first and foremost the idea that planning should be a circular (continuous), participative (open) and prospective process (the future as uncertainty and construction) (Fernandez-Guell, 2006).

In the following the three principal sets of strategies that have been developed to achieve this are identified:

- i. due to limited resources, there is an openness on the part of the public system to the possibility of developing some planning instruments with the active participation of the stakeholders, both in terms of financing the processes and conducting them (Moroni, 2010; Waley, 2013; Lovering, 2010), whilst requiring compliance with all the legally imposed rules and, in particular, the monitoring, appraisal and approval by the relevant public authorities;
- ii. the development of instruments for spatial and sectorial planning that are not regulated by any legal framework. They are therefore not subject to any rules other than those defined by the developers and partners. Given these characteristics, it has become common to refer to his trend as alternative planning (Ferrão, 2011; Gonçalves, 2010). Indeed, the restrictions applied by the classic spatial planning process, which is very much marked by the capacity for leadership and realization by the public sector, has rendered it necessary to come up with alternatives expeditely and, at the same time, to bring to this new context the stakeholders that can conduct it and, more importantly, implement it. Strategic plans are perhaps the instrument that best illustrate this form of “tailor-made” planning by the partners involved in their development, but several others can also be identified (De la Espriella, 2007; Todes, 2012). In this process usually exists, beyond stakeholder’s involvement, an intense citizen participation to inform, validate and

legitimize the plan. Throughout its implementation by stakeholders the community should be informed of the degree of implementation of the plan and there are regular public sessions for strategic plan monitoring and evaluation.

- iii. the increased incorporation of the strategic component in spatial planning carried out by public authorities, which now also has increased legitimacy by means of a process of consultation and participation of the agents of change in diverse areas of local life (Albrechts, 1992, 2006, 2013). This is a hybrid spatial planning model in which the general principles of the development of strategic spatial planning instruments (particularly with regards to their methodology for defining targets and the discussion and perfecting of them together with the local private, associative and public stakeholders) are retained. Citizen participation in spatial plans is usually confined to special moments (before the beginning and end of the plan) although there are cases where municipalities lead the discussion of the strategy to the inhabitants. It announces the transition from a hard planning process (one that is very regulated and centralized) to a soft planning process (i.e. consensus-based and agilized).

We must call attention to that between (ii) and (iii) there are very important differences that can never be undone. Firstly, because the strategic plans are indicative only, depending on its implementation mainly on the willingness of its promoters. In the case of spatial planning their rules have to be strictly respected because it is binding. Secondly, strategic planning can only be achieved over a wide time scale (15, 20 or more years) through a good and sectorial integration (social, environmental, territorial and economic) supported by local and sometimes regional and national stakeholders. In spatial planning we cannot see this dynamic because it is traditionally a more passive process. Finally, a very important difference relates to the obligation to draw up the special plan unlike the strategic plan that is optional. Therefore, in the absence of a strategic plan to support the spatial plan is very important to strengthen this strategy.

Given these differences we do not intend to discuss how to replace or transform one type of plans in others but how to improve prospective analysis to enrich the spatial planning with a future vision to guide the urban planning decisions.

The tensions that generate change, the principles that characterize that change and the forms it takes seem to configure the emergence, in Healey’s (1997) view, of a systemic institutional design for collaborative planning where it is possible to integrate the role of the stakeholders (soft dimension) into the already existing formal planning system (hard dimension).

For this reason it is likewise necessary to take into consideration the practice and legitimacy of governance, which is understood as a set of mechanisms and relationships between public and private entities and associations capable of generating and managing policies and actions for the territorial context (Ascher, 1995). It is evident that the openness of the public bodies and the level of development and commitment of civil society will have an effect as to the difficulty or ease of applying this more cooperative system.

Hence, in awareness of the need to make changes to the spatial planning processes and to find a common basis for these changes, this paper seeks to contribute to developing a methodology for a participative and integrated strategic approach to municipal planning. The methodology is applied to a specific municipality and is accompanied by a proposed set of basic concepts considered essential for establishing a common language for various stakeholders in the process.

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