

# Chapter 10

## When Strategy Meets Democracy: Exploring the Limits of the ‘Possible’ and the Value of the ‘Impossible’

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### 10.1 Delving into the Imaginative Gap Affecting Strategic Planning

This chapter is about the diffuse perception of an increasing malaise in the ability to imagine radically different urban and regional developments which currently affects collaborative/relational strategic planning processes (Healey, 2006). Such inability is particularly visible in declining urban areas characterised by a profound socio-economic and environmental crisis. Advocates of the relational approach describe such failures as a result of the inability of local institutional contexts to learn and change thus shifting the model away from the good norms and rules.

Within this narrative on the strategic planning failure, cities in which the replication of successful models of strategic planning do not seem to work properly and the hoped-for success is hard to achieve are often reported as belonging to ‘another age’, or as guilty bodies, with their bodies of local unchangeable stratified knowledge, practices and routines that keep them in a locked-in status. These cities, to paraphrase Bauman (2004), can be thought of as ‘waste places’ unable to align themselves to globalising imaginaries and narratives of a good city and the successful politics they deserves. As such they are relegated to occupy the space of exception to good norms and rules. Consequently, these cities are forced to change not by following their own desires, but by embracing the current feelings of what a good city is and the right way to manage it.

But is this the case? Or as Friedmann (1998) often warns us the narrative of cultural and institutional barriers as a source of the failure of imagination could be considered only one way of looking for what we would like to see happen in cities? Following this doubt, in this chapter, I contrast the narrative of cultural and institutional barriers as a source of the imaginative gap characterising strategic planning episodes with the story of one of many cities which might be judged as ‘unable’ to

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learn and change and argue that the relational strategic planning approach can also function as a governing paralysing meta-cultural frame.<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the chapter discusses the meaning of imagination within the relational strategic planning approach and adopts a Deleuzean cartography to visit the complexity of the everyday urban life. The second part of the chapter concerns the city of Taranto, its stories and suffering, its beauty and irreversible cancer and its plans and desires. This city's everyday life is described either as a complex cartography of engaging, fighting, cooperating, ignoring trajectories of evolution and change (Amin & Thrift, 2002) or as a set of lines of thinking and acting, each of them characterised by its own movement and inhabited by actants (human and non-human), forces and relations (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977). These enclose imaginations of urban futures and models of governance transformation. In their interplay, the trajectories constitute/create the tissues or the relational complexity on which the urban life is articulated. The third part of the chapter argues that strategic planning can offer a comfort zone delimited by the space of possibilities within which socio-economic and environmental crises can be anaesthetised and treated as a set of problems and solutions more or less known.

The chapter concludes by arguing that the difficulties experienced in imagining radically different urban futures in the field of strategic planning figure in its conceptualisation of the imagination as the construction of executable possibilities, which ignores the imagination of the 'impossible'. This prevents the differences/tensions between what is considered possible and impossible emancipatory urban imaginations from emerging as legitimate sources of change.

## 10.2 Strategy-Making and the Narrative of Imagining New Possibilities

Images in urban planning have always played a relevant role as tangible representations of desired perfect future states. At its conception they took the form of a utopic urban form (Sandercock, 1998) embedding the values and techniques to be used to transform the unjust geographies of cities and their everyday lives. These were conceived as transgressive and subversive repositories of hope challenging the status quo and taken-for-granted conceptions of urban life. However, utopian physical images were intensively instrumentally used as a powerful framework for modernising cities seen as fixed and centred (Bridge, 2006) rather than producing in them an emancipatory social change (Pinder, 2002).

Post-modernist critiques have shown the illusiveness of utopian technocratic images since they unavoidably impose and fix a specific space and social order (Harvey, 1996; Hayden, 1995; Rodwin, 1981) thus reproducing existing injustices. These criticisms also reflected the need of changing the idea of a city as a 'fix' into one embracing flows and differences (Castells, 1996; Young, 1990). By the 1990s, urban imagination had taken the form of a process with weak links to spatial constructions. It could be termed the 'utopia in becoming' (Sandercock, 1998) that substitutes the modernist physical image with a political progressive project which

realises itself in the making. "From this perspective any emancipatory politics calls for a living utopianism of process as opposed to the dead utopianism of spatialised urban form" (Harvey, 1996, p. 436). Against the technocratic-utopian planning, radical planning is not concerned about imagining the future. It works in the present to grasp prospective futures of the cities (Friedman, 2002) and fight against injustice by empowering local communities through an unconstrained encounter between expert and experiential knowledge (Sandercock, 1998).

In Europe, the relational strategic planning approach (Albrechts, 2009) seemed to provide a robust theory to a more pluralist and pragmatic conception of utopia in the making. Led by a conceptualisation of place as fragmented (Healey, 1997) and inspired by theories of the deliberative democracy and a relational conception of places (Massey, 1994, 2005), this pluralist-democratic version of strategic planning abandons utopianism and its emphasis on conflict to adopt a conception of planning as consensual practice (Feinstein, 1999). In contrast to the *hinc et nunc* ideal of radical planning (Friedman, 1994), the relational perspective conceives planning as a practice not only aimed at managing existing relations but at imagining and opening up future possibilities for improving the conditions of daily life existence (Healey, 2009). New urban possibilities have to be searched through placed-focused argumentative/consensual/persuasive strategy-making processes (Healey, 2006) aimed at the social construction of a shared vision.

Planning in a fragmented society implies capturing the dynamic and relational 'nature' of places (Massey, 1994, 2005) by means of development of a politics which encounters the actors who populate the multiple networks that the place is embroiled in and provide them with inclusive and collaborative/deliberative egalitarian arenas. Within them discursive struggles can take place in order to change actors' convictions and make them converge in a shared vision for an improved quality of places. A relational strategy-making activity does not only aim at capturing the place's relational complexity, but it also tries to change established and dynamic relations among actors and the relationships between the actors and places. Improving the quality of place "is more than just producing collective decisions. It is about shifting and re-shaping convictions" (Healey, 1997, p. 244). Strategy-making and changes are indeed inescapably linked (Davoudi & Strange, 2008).

The relational strategic planning "invents, or creates, futures – in relation to the context, the social and cultural values to which a particular place/society is historically committed – as something new rather than as a solution arrived at as a result of existing trends" (see Chapter 1, this volume). "A willed future is a clear reaction against the future as a mere extension of the here and now. On the other hand, the future cannot be so open that anything is possible, as though we could achieve anything we want to achieve. Conditions and constraints on 'what is' and 'what is not' possible are placed by the past and the present. These conditions and constraints have to be questioned and challenged in the process, given the specific context of place and time. So, in order to imagine differently the conditions and constraints for the future, we need to deal with history and to overcome history. Therefore, we also need an exploratory approach. The interrelation between the normative and

the exploratory approach, defines the boundaries of a fairly large space between openness and fixity” (see Chapter 1, this book).

Strategy-making is a crucial activity for mobilising and filtering concepts of spatial organisation (strategic frames) having sufficient allocative, authoritative and imaginative force to shape both the materialities and identities of particular places and the networks which transect and give value to them (Healey, 2006, p. 527). The consensual feature prevents the vision from remaining a mere utopia. In this way, ‘permanences’ are created in the dynamic relational dialectics of urban life. From such a perspective imagining a different place quality is about combining an appreciation of the open, dynamic, multiple and emergent nature of social relations with some degree of a stabilising force (Healey, 2006).

Despite the enormous success which relational strategic planning has obtained in recent years its results in terms of improvement of the quality of places have been modest (Gaffikin & Sterrett, 2006; Healey, 2006). As advocates of the strategic planning approach now admit, current endeavours in strategic spatial planning are experiencing difficulties in creating emancipatory spatial imaginations. However, for them, this is firstly due to contextual, institutional and cultural barriers. These are signalled by the persistence of traditional physicalist concepts about spatial order which fail to capture the dynamics and tensions of relations coexisting in particular places and a rhetorical commitment to inclusivity which limits perceptions of diversity and causes deliberate exclusions (Healey, 2006).

Critics have instead argued that the relational approach to spatial planning is in effect unable to generate alternative ways of confronting the consequences of uneven development because of substantive rather than contextual constraints (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009; Flyvbjerg, 1998, 2002; Huxley, 2000; Purcell, 2009; Yiftachel, 1998). The narrative of change embedded in the strategic planning approach is one articulated around the missing link between knowledge and power; the missing link between the planning and the dynamics of urbanisation (Beauregard, 1990) – or as Bridge (2006) has called this phenomenon it is a matter of an ‘urbanism without cities’ – the violence of the consensual logic (Mouffe, 2000, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2009); and a methodological individualism which is unable to face issues and dilemmas concerning the collective action (Monno forthcoming; Young, 2001). I would like to add another criticism to these which, perhaps, is less practised. It stresses the limits of an idea of strategic planning as a practice which, by conceiving the future as something that cannot be so open that anything is possible, delimits the concept of imagination as a possible, executable future. At this idea of future, ‘utopian’ critics oppose the utopia to show how strategic planning traces the boundaries between the possible and the impossible (Pinder, 2002, 2005; Baeten, 2002).

This chapter draws on the utopia criticism but with some differences. It is not so much concerned about the definition of what could be today a utopia. It is, instead, interested in dealing with the relationships between the relational strategic planning and what is considered an ‘impossible’ change. In some ways, it is similar to an exploration of the function of utopia in history (Jameson, 2005), even if it is not concerned with utopia as the ‘Other’ but with imaginations as a framework to see

the difference between what is gained and lost through the planning process. The understanding of the differences/tensions between what is retained as possible (the shared vision) and what is considered an 'impossible' radical change (the imagination which appears impossible to be carried out) might enable citizens to understand the material and immaterial collective 'costs' that the relational strategic planning produces and, thus, help them to make a more conscious choice about their own future.

This perspective draws on a conception of the 'impossible' as an emancipatory imagination which is based on a presupposition of equality: the equality of people qua speaking people (Rancière, 1998). This "is an an-archic equality in the sense that it exists through the inability of any political order to count the communal parts and to distribute the shares of the common between them under the harmonious geometrical governance of some *arkhe* (the principle of Justice, of the Good) without there being a fundamental wrong [le tort] done; a miscount, which is then where the politics begins" (Arsenjuk, 2007 p. 1).

As such the 'impossible' imagination is political. As Rancière explains (1998, pp. 32–33): "nothing is political in itself. But anything may become political if it gives rise to a meeting of these two logics [police logic, which is opposed to egalitarian/political logic]. The same thing – an election, a strike, a demonstration – can give rise to politics or not give rise to politics. A strike is not political when it calls for reforms rather than a better deal or when it attacks the relationships of authority rather than the inadequacy of wages. It is political when it reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relation to the community. The domestic household has been turned into a political space not through the simple fact that power relationships are at work in it but because it was the subject of an argument in a dispute over the capacity of women in the community."

### 10.3 A Deleuzian Interpretation of Cities: Seeing the Urban as a Cartography of Trajectories of Thinking and Action

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. (. . .) The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12).

How to inquire into the relationships between the strategic planning and what is considered an 'impossible' change? What is the conjunction point between the two? I see this conjunction as being the city itself, its everyday life rhythms and flows of nomadic and non-nomadic lives, its 'nature' metabolic (Heynen, Kaika, & Swyngedouw, 2006) and perpetual being embroiled in imagining/representing beyond what already is (Castoriadis, 1987, 1997) within powerful disciplining boundaries (Foucault, 1991). This is a conceptualisation of the city as a heterogeneous place, the troubled coming-together of a multitude of human and non-human agents and their struggle between what it is and their dreams of something different,

which trace the city as a set of trajectories of evolution and change (Amin & Thrift, 2002). This is also a conceptualisation of the urban complexity whose exploration needs to break usual ways of interpretation of urban life. Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, despite its obscure and esoteric language articulated around key concepts which defy any systematised knowledge, can represent a theory enabling such exploration.

Reading Deleuze's and Deleuze and Guattari's writings for a planner is always fascinating since it deals with a question which is at the base of any planning endeavour about 'how might we live differently in a city or in a neighbourhood'? In a world that holds banality to be a virtue and originality a disease, Deleuze's engagement with the question 'how might one live?' continually challenges us to think about what other possibilities life holds open for us and how we might think about things in ways that would open up new regions of life (May, 2005, p. 3). For him this implied thinking the unthinkable (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977): thinking outside the codes to create a constellation of concepts functioning as a toolbox enabling the encounter and experimentation of new possibilities of living together.

At the same time Deleuze's theory of creation rather than of discovery (May, 2005) forces a reader to rethink the cartography of the urban space as oriented not so much to explain the true nature of things, but to know reality through its dynamics. As such, it opens the possibility to an unusual journey into the urban complexity which pushes us to abandon the dualism one/many individual/collective resistance/dominion and rethink the urban as "multitude so that we can cease treating the multiple as a numerical fragment of a lost Unity or Totality or as the organic element of a Unity or Totality yet to come, and instead distinguish between different types of multiplicity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 32). "A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8).

They call the different types of multiplicity 'assemblage': "An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8). Specifically, an assemblage is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes *liasons*, relations between them. These *liasons* link an assemblage's material content (passions, actions, bodies) and enunciations (laws, plans, statements) in a non-linear relation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Thus an assemblage "it is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, p. 69). The reciprocal movement among forces (*liasons*) which operates inside and between different assemblage determines their acting as disciplining or transgressive (out of the order and opening up to a new order).

The concept of assemblage does more than focus on the urban complexity a set of distributed actors and their relationships. Groups, collectives and agents within the assemblage constitute a topography of changing field of forces (*liasons*) that

cross or engage with each other to different extents over time rather than act as a set of static, predefined positions and interests. Within it, there is no single central governing power, nor an equally distributed power, but rather there is power acting as a field of forces or as plurality in transformation (McFarlane, 2009). The assemblage evolves and changes through the practice of reassembling and disassembling which modifies their field of forces (*liasons*).

The Deleuzian and Guttarian cartography of social space is a map oriented at capturing the movement of “the lines that we are” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, p. 124). The line (*liasion* or field of forces) as opposed to the ‘point’ is a dynamic element. It is a true becoming, a turning point between the past and future, always silently working. As such, a line belongs to geography since it is orientations, directions, entries and exits. Thus “the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. (...) A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back ‘to the same’ ” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12).

Though surely trivialising their complex thought, in this chapter I take the Deleuzian and Guttarian cartography as a conceptual tool to inquire into the relationships between the strategic planning and what is considered an ‘impossible’ change. Through this map it is possible to identify the trajectories whose realisation is considered possible or impossible in relation to a specific strategic planning process. Thus I describe Taranto through a map representing the ‘lines’ which city of Taranto is. On the map, Taranto appears as an ensemble of assemblages which, individually, can be represented by means of the line or field of forces characterising each of them. I call the line ‘trajectory of thinking and action’. However, each trajectory is seen in this chapter from a particular angle. It considers only the force of imagination. This is characterised as the experience of future in relation to the memory and the experience of the present. Actors are hybrid. They move inside and through the different trajectories which in some moments represent their feelings and desires. Consequently, each trajectory can be shared or rejected by different actors in different moments. Strategic planning in the map is an event in which the theory meets a tool and a context and materialises itself into a practice. The strategic plan encounters the different trajectories which constitute the tissue of urban complexity because of its necessity of re-defining the borders between the possible and impossible. The map represents the complexity of Taranto through five trajectories: fear, identity, movements, experimentation and planning.

This way of describing imaginations is oriented to understand how and with what trajectories a strategic plan interacts and is intended to evaluate how such interaction shapes the direction of change. In fact, if citizens were able to understand the differences/tensions between what is retained as possible (the plan) and what is considered a radical change (the imagination which seems impossible to be carried out), then they might be able to understand the material and immaterial collective ‘costs’ that the direction of change traced by the plan produces and make more conscious choices about their own future as part of a collectivity.

## 10.4 Taranto: Is this a City Unable to Change?

Taranto, a southern Italian medium-sized city, is well known in Italy as the ‘steel town’. Since the 1960s, the fate of this city has been associated with a large steel plant (ILVA), which in the 1970s employed more than 20,000 workers. Once owned by the state, in 1996 the steel plant was privatised. Even after the huge job cuts during the 1980s and 1990s and following its privatisation, this steel plant is still one of the largest in Europe. Before the financial crisis it employed around 13,000 workers. With the rise of global economy, Taranto has experienced a continuous social and economic decay. The industrial development which would have made the city and its hinterland a wealthy and modern territory has not only failed to promote local development, but it has also reduced both the Taranto and the sub-region into a polluted and isolated area populated mainly by a working class (Barbanente & Monno, 2004).

In 1998 the Province of Taranto was declared at risk of environmental crisis by the National Government (D.P.R. 23.04.1998, GU number 196 30 November 1998) and thus in an urgent need of an environmental plan aimed at cleaning up the whole area. The plan has never been carried out, and subsequent national laws have reduced the area to be cleaned to few scattered polluted sites. Since then, the environmental crisis has worsened, up to the point that Taranto is currently one of the most polluted and polluting cities in Europe. In order to face the social–economic decline of this city and its hinterland, the port of Taranto was enlarged and modernised. And in fact, at the beginning of 2000 it became one of the most important transshipment ports in the Mediterranean. Despite this, it only employs around 500 workers.

The city is characterised by an underequipped public administration, sometimes transacted by corruption, and entrapped in an old logic of political power. Only recently have some local governments started trying to transform a top-down style of government into a more democratic governance-based one. NGOs have flourished around issues such as health and environmental protection and cultural renaissance.

### *10.4.1 Trajectories of Change: Telling Taranto Through the ‘Lines that It Is’*

The map which describes Taranto as trajectories of thinking and action is based on the results of an ongoing research focused on possibilities of a radical environmental regeneration of this city. Its purpose is moving beyond the *habitus*<sup>2</sup> as explanation of its decline to begin to explore the role played out by existing/emerging urban imaginations transecting this city. During the last 30 years different kinds of descriptions have inquired into its decline. Some have explained it as a result of the loss of local identity determined by the industrial culture. Others have emphasised the distorted nature of modernisation in southern Italy (Rinella, 2002). In more recent accounts, Taranto appears as the city of clouds (Vulpio, 2009), the city of dioxin and cancer or of a port city blocked by local and national blind politics. However, these



accounts thus focused on Taranto's urban pathologies tend to think of this city as a homogenous place and identify exogenous forces and a local inability to change its *habitus* as being causes of the decline.

In what follows I abandon this point of view and to describe Taranto as a map of trajectories of thinking and action which draws on the results of a research aimed at identifying the circulating imagination on the future of this city. The research has been grounded on walking and asking through the 'visible city' and its lived spaces. At the same time, it has been based on a series of strategic choice experiments involving students attending my classes and local stakeholders. Interviews have been carried out with the aim of identifying the imaginations flowing into the always in flux "palimpsest of overlapping, coinciding, colliding shifting meanings" (Friedmann, 1999, p. 7) and 'different possible worlds' (Rajchman, 1998, p. 117). The strategic choice experiments have been used as heuristic tools aimed at highlighting the relevant trajectories of change rather than means to construct a future image of the city. Obviously, the map is not intended to give a comprehensive and comprehensive account of the city. It just recounts the trajectories which the research has been able to recognise and meet.

In what follows Taranto is taken as a typical example of a city considered unable to change. As such, this city is seen as a useful case to evaluate whether the failure of strategic planning is only due to cultural barriers or whether it also depends on its concept of the future as a possible future.

#### 10.4.1.1 Fear

Jacques Rancière (2004) argues that what is at stake in politics, just as it is in aesthetics, is the distribution of the sensible. Politics happens not only through the disruption of a certain aesthetic organisation of sense experience but also through the eruption of a distinct aesthetics. "It is thus that the task of politics becomes one of producing and forcing into everyday experience a distinct organization of the sensible, conditioned by a distinct aesthetics" (Wolfe, 2006 p. 1).

In Taranto the colour red of coal represents the local partition of the sensible. This is the colour of silence, of an ecology of fear of losing one's own job, the imagination of the big disaster (Davis, 1999) – the closure of ILVA – which shapes the social, economic and political rhythm of everyday urban life and the production of the nature of the city (Heynen et al., 2006). It keeps people silent even when ILVA threatens new dismissal without notice. At the same time it has the power to free the public landscape from the bad dreams: nothing has changed since the steel plant arrived in Taranto.

The colour red is also the colour of the local population's distrust of in public institutions and its retreat from the democratic life. It is the colour of the crisis of democracy which worries so many scholars. Citizens either delegate decisions, rather than participating, or do not react to the corruption of public administrators. Instead, they try to profit from this state of affairs. Despite the dead sea, the polluted air and the increasing rate of death by cancer, people only protest if someone proposes to close ILVA. Everything else (like dioxin, the opening of a new risky

industrial activity, etc.) leaves the people indifferent so long as it does not threaten their job. This trajectory is a memory of survival and resignation, which thinks about the future through the 'benefit' of the present. Within it the experience of future cannot be disconnected by the constraints shaping current everyday life. The desire of change is looked for outside of Taranto, or in the many myths of consumerism or the social climbing from the working- to the middle-class.

#### **10.4.1.2 Identity**

Identity draws on nostalgia, a word which in politics usually hints at "a problem of the imperfect assimilation of the categories and practices of history, that is, the condition of those who did not have what in modernity gradually became the dominant relationship to the past". Such a definition is based on a conception of history as necessarily emancipatory, progressive and rationally comprehensible. In it a social conflict and injustice are concealed in "idealized representations of the past" (Natali, 2004, p. 10). But at the same time it can be a source of a critical thinking and as such can induce change (Natali, 2004). In Taranto nostalgia operates in both these two meanings. Nostalgia acts both as a sweet paralysing memory of a lost hope and success and as a weak critical thinking.

This trajectory sees the future as the overcoming of the current disillusionments through the replication of the model of Taranto as a growth Pole. The present is lived as a suffering generated by exogenous causes which are beyond the local people's control. The port of Taranto (again a mega-project funded by the state) is seen as a symbol of the lost industrial grandeur of the city partially replacing it with a more attractive and post-modern skyline. It expresses the desire of a powerful economic political coalition to expand to the Mediterranean Sea the influence of Taranto as a city-region. It believes that the ecological modernisation can solve this city's decline. Sustainability, when it is evoked, is usually conceptualised a soft sustainability which subordinates issues of environmental and social justice to competitiveness.

In fact it has also supported the transformation of large Taranto areas into a free-market zone which will attract new capitals, while subtracting further public spaces from the city.

#### **10.4.1.3 Movements**

New 'origins' for a local politics already exist in the city. They are embedded in the everyday experience which contributes to and promotes forms of political action, which question prevalent ways of thinking about the city in the light of a radical future imagination: Taranto without ILVA. Within this trajectory there is no disconnection between the past, the present and the future. Experiencing the future means acting in the present with a critical memory. This has allowed the myth of Taranto's grandeur to be rewritten as a story of death rather than a new progressive life. This trajectory resists univocal integration into emerging hegemonic forms of political domination by practising a form of action which could be termed

cooperative-autonomy. To paraphrase Gandy (2005, p. 33), this trajectory proposes a new kind of human agency to the intersection between technological change and the reformulation of the public sphere inherited from the industrial city.

Taranto Sociale, Taranto Viva, Peacelink, The Committee of Taranto's Blog are as virtual as material alliances which speak a new language based on human flourishing, environmental, economic and social care and justice, and solidarity. Their aim is to connect different people to constitute a new active public in the city and a new way of imagining the city as no longer being necessarily managed by a centralised power which acts as an collective actor. The city is imagined as led by a critical alliance between citizens and institutions. They do not intend to construct a good community but only connect the vital forces of the city to change the passivity, individualism and egoism currently shaping urban life.

These networks are attempting to reassemble the social through a patient practice of knowing and acting which reshapes the force field governing Taranto's decline. In fact their arguments/contestation are always based on a practice of knowing and not intended to be included in decisional arenas. They practice what has been recently described as the 'civic science' (Scott & Clive Barnett, 2009). For this trajectory "there is an inseparability between action and experience: (. . .) every act of knowing brings forth a world" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 26). The networks have carried out many surveys on urban air quality and cancer disease and have denounced and demonstrated how and to what extent ILVA ignores humans and non-humans' right for health. Their civic science stopped a re-gasification plant being localised in Taranto on a site too close to the petrochemical plant thus avoiding the risk of a catastrophic explosion. For these reasons these networks' knowledge claims represent a direct challenge to well-established powers.

#### 10.4.1.4 Experimentation

'Taranto does not sleep', 'Reawakening Taranto' are expressions currently circulating in the city. They are injected into the urban life by a group of people 'PUNTO E A CAPO' who are trying to make the younger generation take a creative approach to urban politics. These kinds of associations can be termed as performing the 'outside' politics or strategies of political engagement after representation, that is, strategies of dis-identification (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006) which are performed by actors who circumvent the ascription of both the dominant trajectories of identity and fear. Perhaps, as Derrida (2001) maintains there is a link between the dis-identification and the forgiving of the unforgivable: dis-identification as forgiving the city for not having reacted to the decline and suicide of the city. After the failure, the city does not need a new vision which risks producing a new collapse of the ability to imagine a different Taranto. This trajectory thinks about the past in a critical way in order to change the city in the present. Instead, what is needed consists in changing its *habitus*. The city needs to bridge the cultural gap by turning silence into action, that is, into a practical coping with the wicked problems of the city through creative writing or other forms of art. The few bookshops existing in a city in which there is not even a theatre have been transformed into the meeting points in order

to enact this creative endeavour. Art can play a relevant role in bringing about a change. These associations represent a shared idea of the city as a laboratory. This is seen as a way both to break the rhythm of routines and to manage stubborn conflicts avoiding direct mediations and negotiation. Facing stubborn conflicts through formal meetings aimed at reconciling adversary interests to solve conflicts is a slow process of everyday action. Forgiveness is eminently an act, an experience.

#### 10.4.1.5 Planning

This trajectory is characterised by a static memory of planning. It has neither a perception nor systematised knowledge of the current needs of Taranto's population. It has no imagination concerning the future of the city and planning opportunities to act and change Taranto's decline. It only tries to use innovative planning tools and opportunities to occasionally obtain funds and manage Taranto's decay. The alteration of institutional memory which followed the industrialisation has even resulted in a refusal to imitate other cities' management practices, giving preference to imitation of one's own past, a phenomenon called *automorphism*, in contrast to the *isomorphism* prevalent in modern management. This leaves the organisation field empty. If it is easy to bring new solutions, it can be very difficult to make them operative (Czarniawska, 2002). This trajectory has been marked by the ineffectiveness, patronage and only a few episodes of an innovative practice. Among these the Rehabilitation Plan of the extremely decaying old city, the participative Poseidonia project which aimed at protecting the Mar Piccolo, the Urban II European Initiative funded by the EU-FESR and an integrated program 'Contratto di Quartiere Salinella'. The master plan was approved in the 1970s is still regulating Taranto's development.

### 10.4.2 Strategic Planning in Taranto

Strategic planning is not compulsory in Italy: it is a voluntary agreement. At the beginning of the new century, following the stories of success of strategic plans carried out in Europe (Barcellona, Bilbao, etc.), different Italian cities started to make their own strategic plans. In this period Taranto too produced its first urban strategic plan.

However, the strategic planning approach spread throughout Southern Italy after the ICEP (Interministerial Committee for Economic Programming) resolution number 20 was issued in 2004. The resolution redistributed Funds for Underexploited Areas (FUA) among the Southern Italian underexploited urban areas in order to contain their decline and peripherisation process in an enlarged European Space. It was specifically aimed at improving Southern Italian medium-sized cities and the infrastructure systems of metropolitan areas to transform them into good European cities competing as nodes or poles of development for larger sub-regional areas in the global economy.

Against an old and inflexible national planning normative apparatus, which still forces cities to plan their development through master plans, the resolution aimed at exclusively funding projects and programmes included in a strategic plan. Due to the absence of any national laws concerning strategic spatial planning, guidelines were drawn up to define a possible methodological approach to the strategic planning. The guidelines define a strategic plan as a voluntary and collaborative effort of strategy-making aimed at balancing different and competing interests in a flexible and open shared vision, which is the result of a governance process among local/relevant actors.

The process is seen as articulated in phases. It starts with the analysis of the context. Next it focuses on formulation of a preliminary vision which represents the main issues to be discussed and renegotiated within governance processes and ends with the approval of a shared vision and a set of projects allowing its implementation. The leaders of strategy-making processes can be only those cities able to play the role of nodes or poles of development.

As far as the Apulia Region is concerned, the Regional Government promoted a competition in 2005 to allocate the FUA funds among urban areas which intended to plan their development by means of a strategic plan. The competition was won by nine strategic plans. Two years later, in 2007, the new Regional Government decided to update this list in order to integrate the FUA funds not yet allocated with the European Structural Funds (ESF) 2007–2013 and promote a more efficient and sustainable local territorialised development. Basically, this updating process added a new strategic plan to the list, changed the urban areas into sub-regional areas and gave a strong economic imprinting to the strategic planning process. Thus, it drew up compulsory guidelines resembling the national ones to help the sub-regions to develop their own strategic plan.

The Taranto sub-regional Strategic Plan is one of the ten sub-regional strategic plans funded by the Regional Government. It includes the Taranto Provincial Government, 28 out of the 29 municipalities of the Taranto Province and is led by the Taranto Municipality, the capital of the Province. In this rural sub-region Taranto is the only medium-sized city with more than 200,000 inhabitants having the economic and institutional qualities required to lead the sub-regional strategy-making process. Most of municipalities are small cities gravitating around the Taranto urban area or rural towns currently trying to profit from tourism. Among them, only four have a population of between 20,000 and 30,000; the others having populations ranging from 1,500 to 20,000 inhabitants. Around 500,000 inhabitants live in the whole sub-region. In practice, the sub-regional strategic plan is a strategic plan mainly aimed at sustaining and promoting the city of Taranto's competitiveness.

The first strategic plan was intended to face the social-economic decline of this city and its hinterland. It was commissioned by the Taranto Municipality to a group of experts. The plan, which was made following the technocratic tradition, associated the industrial image of the city with a lively, post-industrial one: that of Taranto as a port city playing the role of a crucial node in the relational space of the global economy. The enlargement and modernisation of the port of Taranto, which had made it one of the most important in the Mediterranean, was seen as

a feasible alternative to the industrial ‘monoculture’. It would have to favour the emergence of a new regional development path more suitable to the post-industrial and knowledge-based economy on which so many European cities have flourished (Barbanente & Monno, 2004).

Despite the risk that the steel plant could compromise the post-industrial global image of Taranto, none of the relevant stakeholders questioned its permanence in the area. The plan intercepted and strengthened the identity of Taranto as a pole of growth and set up a framework aimed at enhancing this city’s competitiveness. Citizens knew about the plan only when it was officially shown to the city. However, they did not react. In fact, the strategic plan neither changed the industrial monoculture nor did it directly influence the land use since in Italy strategic planning is not compulsory. At that time, the impulse towards experimentation and radical change was weak or almost invisible. Even though the vision promoted a new, more modern image of the city, the strategic plan continued a regional and urban development based on the ecology of fear – the fear Taranto’s inhabitants have of losing a stable job. The steel plant was (and still is) seen by the local population as the only opportunity for a stable job. The plan has never been implemented but its vision, which implicitly accepted the environmental decay in Taranto produced by the steel plant, came to catalyse the new dominant urban imagination.

The second strategic planning process was started in Taranto in 2007. It began after the setting up of the Planning Board (PB) as prescribed by the Apulia Regional Guidelines. The strategy was constructed through a governance process including all the public institutions concerned, a socio-economic partnership representing local needs and interests, and an enlarged public to be informed and listened to through public assemblies.

The governance process was neither opposed by citizens nor by local NGOs. On the one hand, an enlarged citizens’ participation was not organised due to the local under-equipped public administration and also in order to limit the possibility of irresolvable conflicts arising. On the other hand, citizens, even citizens who understood the relevance of a strategic planning process, were not interested in participating in it: “this was business as usual”. As far as NGOs were concerned, most of them were struggling to obtain an environmental monitoring system and a regional law which could force the steel plant to contain the pollution within the thresholds imposed by the National and European Union resolutions and laws. As one of the most well-known environmental activists said to me to justify such an absence: “Although I have been invited I cannot participate in any process.” Citizens and relevant actors belonging to the trajectories of experimentation and radical change were not very interested in negotiating their imaginations.

Analogously no professional organisations contested the strategy-making process. In fact, out of the formal governance process a Technical-Scientific Observatory (TSO) having the role of monitoring the quality of the strategic planning process was set up. It was managed by the Provincial Architects Corporation whose head is the public official responsible for the Taranto sub-regional strategic plan. The observatory included local professionals, academicians and socio-economic actors. Although the setting up of the TSO as a certificatory institution was a decision taken autonomously by architects and the public official responsible

for the PB, neither the policy actors nor the socio-economic partnership ever questioned such a role. The fact that it existed as the node of networks of expertise not directly involved in the strategy-making process which act as supervisor of the goodness of the planning process was a sufficient explanation to legitimise it.

As a result, both the governance process and the vision were proclaimed a success by the PB and policy actors. It had been the result of a consensual innovative governance process which had changed the unfair local decision-making practices and routines. Its consensual character signalled a change in the actors' knowledge frames and convictions. At the same time, it was considered a new fresh imagination of the city. The vision basically proposed the ideal of Taranto as a local and transnational node in the global relational space which well complied with the image of a competitive sustainable and creative good European city fed by National and European funds and the old myth of a regional development based on Taranto as a port city. The role of Taranto had also been rethought in a multi-level (global and local) and multi-functional perspective which exploited the opportunity of present (the steel plant included). This was despite the fact that the vision of the Taranto sub-region as a translocal and local node had not substantially changed the previously one which had been constructed by adopting a stronger technocratic approach.

Once agreement on the vision had almost been reached, thematic forums were organised by the Taranto Board (TB) to mobilise both relevant institutional and socio-economic stakeholders' local creativity and translate the vision into projects. In most cases no innovative ideas came out of the forum, only old projects awaiting funding, such as the regeneration of old Taranto's Navy Yard, the construction of a logistic platform close to the Taranto port and the dredging of the port seabed. The first represented the symbol of a new tourist renaissance, the second, the necessary link between the port and local economy and the third, the necessity to adapt the port to the dimensions of the huge new ships. The only new proposal was presented by a group of academics who came up with the idea of constructing a new scientific-technological pole in Taranto. Since this proposal filled the knowledge gap underlying the vision it was accepted by all the relevant stakeholders and taken as one of the symbols of the Taranto renaissance.

Under the pressure of funding mechanisms, a first call for projects to be funded was announced and almost 400 were submitted by the municipalities and NGOs, plus about 700 hundred by private actors. In order to avoid the choice of projects being compromised by the interference of powerful coalitions it was decided to set up a Scientific-Technical Committee (STC) composed of academics and technicians working in key local institutions. The Committee was to evaluate the projects and select a first group which could be funded in the short-term. It is at this point that the strategic planning process intersects the trajectories of movements and experimentation. Some of the STC technicians and academics had been active in promoting the cleaning of Taranto or the rehabilitation of its beautiful historical and cultural heritage. Some of them as doctors know the rate of death in the city very well. Others had contrasted the possible localisation in the city of a regasification plant, which due to its proximity to the petrochemical plant would be a source of another risk for the city.

What policy actors and the PB expected from this group of experts was a choice based on the result of the governance process. In some way, the STC would be the legitimating-actor for the vision and for some symbolic or 'necessary' projects which emerged in the forums. Contrary to all expectations, the STC decided that the evaluation should be considered as advice rather than a final decision. Thus, after a quick look at the list of projects the STC decided to adopt a simplified multi-criteria evaluation method which could easily be understood by all the relevant stakeholders and an enlarged public. The projects were to be evaluated on the basis of different criteria such as sustainability, integration among projects, coherence with the vision and others. The judgement to be assigned to any project in relation to a specific criteria would be the output of a dialogical confrontation among the experts. This would also favour an intriguing mixture of scientific and professional knowledge. The STC decided to begin by evaluating the institutional stakeholder's projects.

At first, the evaluation process appeared to be characterised by good agreement between the STC and the TB. Yet, as the process proceeded, the agreement slowly faded away, despite the fact that during the many meetings organised to explain the evaluation method nobody had objected to it. The set of projects which ranked high in evaluation did not correspond with those considered necessary by local stakeholders. Projects such as the regeneration of the old Navy Yard, the dredging of the port seabed and many others showed on deeper examination problems of environmental compatibility or poor integration with the overall strategy or lack of coherence with the vision.

The evaluation appeared as a direct challenge to the vision emerging from the governance process. The set of projects selected favoured a diffuse environmental and social requalification based on the development of multiple cognitive capacities engaged in redefining the industrial vocation. It also challenged the idea of a sustainable development of the sub-region as a result of the use of eco-technologies and a practice based on an efficient funding of mega-projects. For example, if the exclusion of the dredging project unveiled the environmental impacts produced by the enlargement of the port, the exclusion of the Navy Yard regeneration project showed the weakness of the vision in challenging the industrial monoculture. Similarly, the inclusion of a deprived neighbourhood regeneration project signalled the social weakness of the vision.

To sum up, by showing that the vision left the sub-regional economic, social and environmental metabolism untouched, the evaluation potentially reopened the consensus achieved for contestation. New actors who up to that moment had not been fully involved in the governance process started to make themselves heard. Despite the fact that the evaluation was to be considered only as advice, its reopening some crucial development options to a more careful examination, determined a new but deeper knowledge controversy among experts and policy-makers. The PB and most of the policy actors rejected the evaluation by arguing that it had no validity since it had not been discussed with them previously. The vision was not changed since it was considered the only possible, executable shared vision. Consequently, almost every project was funded.



## 10.5 Relationships Between Strategic Planning and the Trajectories

Taranto is currently traced by multiple trajectories of thinking and action. Each of them connects the past, present and future in a specific way which gives rise to different imaginations. Among them the trajectories of fear, identity and planning adopt a linear conception of time in which memory, the present and future are stocks related in a sequential movement. Even from different perspectives, these trajectories see the future as a prosecution of the past and the change as a disconnection to be represented as something real and to be controlled by means of the parameters dictated by the present. Difference between the past, present and future is a matter of difference between absolute qualities. Obviously, the qualities of future can be better than the current ones only when they derive from a reasonable mediation between the accumulated experience, the immediate necessities and the future uncertainty. The imagination is constrained by limits and possibilities enclosed in the present experience since the future is beyond control. In this way imagination neither questions the memory nor does it challenge Taranto's urban metabolism and pathologies as necessary costs to be paid to get ahead. Concepts such as sustainability, tools such as strategic planning or occasional funds offer the looked-for/desired solution to this city's problems, a safe path showing how things should be done in order to go from here to there.

In contrast to these trajectories, the movements and experimental lines are based on a conception of time as not linear. Past, present and future are always interconnected and reciprocally shaping each other. The future is conceived as an experience in the present based on a critical memory. The nebulous future permeating the experimental trajectory induces people to question their urban story. This one, together with the impossible imagination of 'Taranto without the ILVA', has rewritten the memory and slowly de-constrained the future by freeing it from the limits of a present so strongly compromised by the fear of losing one's own job and acceptance of whatever health and environmental damage ILVA produces. These trajectories ask: how can we live differently in this city? How can we reconceptualise the city in which we live? What kind of urban development can avoid injustices and violence? What kind of city are we going to live in together? What does socio-economic and environmental justice mean, and how are they related? What are the forces shaping the city? In asking these questions, inequalities and power relations, far from being something 'out there' or 'out of control', became visible forces and relations that can be discussed and acted upon. At the same time, imaginations such as 'Taranto without the ILVA' challenges citizens to imagining a life lived and not yet lived. This creates a stream of connections that allows citizens to feel for a moment not what a better world might look like, but what it might feel like, and how that hopeful utopic sentiment might become a motivation for social change (Dolan, 2005). By mixing a critical thinking with the imagination of a life lived and not yet lived, these trajectories come to represent a horizon of action which allows future changes to be given a meaning, evaluated and oriented.

The two strategic plans are the result of the tendency of strategic planning to dialogue only with trajectories which consider the future as being not so open that everything is possible. For this reason strategic planning has to pre-filter the multiplicity of imaginations circulating in a city and ignore those which resemble a utopia or appear too disordering. Under these premises, in Taranto the two strategic planning processes easily intersect and incorporate the trajectories of fear, planning and identity; but in doing so, they exclude any appreciation of the values embedded in the movements and experimental trajectories. They offers a comfort zone to fear and identity by delimiting the space of possibilities as that within which socio-economic and environmental crises can be anesthetised and treated as a set of problems and solutions more or less known. The first strategic plan deliberately excludes everything which is beyond the local economic and political imagination and constructs a future which re/dis-orientes the public interest on a new already existing place of work: the port. This offers an escape from the nightmare of unemployment as a negotiated dream among fears, opportunities and existing solutions to urban decay.

The second strategic planning process is more akin to what that Weiner (2009) has defined a form of hegemonic imagination. This is one which has the power to condition our waking dreams by claiming that it allows an infinite variety of thoughts, ideas, dreams and visions to be produced, while in practice it limits the freedom of considering the future as radically open. The first step of this strategic planning which consists of a technical diagnosis of pathologies affecting Taranto function as the tracing of borders between what is possible and impossible: the absence of alternative sources of jobs to ILVA excludes both the trajectory of movements and experimentation. The former is considered unrealistic because of its being concerned with reimagining Taranto without ILVA, while the latter is seen as lacking of any ability to design the future. Thus, analogously to the first strategic plan it intercepts the trajectories of fear, identity and planning. Yet, in contrast to the first strategic planning process it is the result of a mediation rather than a mere negotiation. The planning process tries to change the *habitus*, but it does this by adopting the burden of the present and the limits of what can be executable as the horizon to construct the future. Again it changes the aesthetic image of the city – the current partition of sensible – without changing the logic and power underlying it.

The controversy which emerged between the PB and STC shows the borders between the possible and impossible traced by planning as grounded in social and individual established categories of the real and thus their synchronism with the present. In this strategic planning process the “change is possible at the level of representation, but transformative discourses that operate at diachronic levels are dismissed as vulgarly utopian. Fantasising rather than imagining is the muscular technology of the imagination and, as such, escape and/or adaptation becomes the only sanctioned response to repression” (Weiner, 2009, p. 149). At the same time it shows how, despite its not being considered realisable, just like another utopia, the impossible imagination has slowly intruded inside the social context and has started orienting the small and big changes which have occurred in the city. By selecting the projects which are coherent with the idea of Taranto without ILVA,

the evaluation produced by the STC gives a framework of action to the impossible imagination against which the official executable/possible vision can be evaluated and thus contested as nothing more than the reproduction of the present. The Taranto experience shows how strategic planning can also act as a paralysing meta-frame.

## 10.6 Conclusions

This chapter has tried to see if the relational strategic planning can also act as a paralysing meta-cultural frame which, instead of liberating energies, is constrained by its conception of the role of the imagination as a social construction of a possible future. It states that the future cannot be so open that anything is possible. In this way strategic planning traces the boundaries between the possible and the impossible. Specifically, this chapter has analysed the interactions between the relational strategic planning and what is considered the 'impossible' change in order to understand to what extent the definition of such boundaries limits the real change. What has emerged is the necessity not to pre-filter the concept of impossibility but to grasp its embedded value.

Following Deleuze and Guattari's theory (1987), this chapter has described the city as a heterogeneous place, a coming-together of different trajectories of actions and thinking each of them characterised by its own imagination of the future. This has allowed an analysis of how and with which trajectories the strategic plan interacts in order to evaluate the direction of change should take. This way of description is not only concerned with the inclusion of hope within strategic planning or the necessity of an agonistic mediation (Gunder & Hillier, 2007; Gunder, 2003), which will return to the anaesthetisation of imagination. It is thought to take the concept of difference as a variation of tension rather than an absolute quality. At the same time, the impossible imagination is not only conceived to explore desires and possibilities with the potential of disrupting political horizons (Pinder, 2002). This way of description is thought to allow an understanding of the differences/tensions between what is retained as possible (the shared vision/strategic frame) and what is considered a radical change to arise. This could reposition planning into the political field and smooth its obsession with executable politics.

The value of the impossible lies in its representing and embedding the instances of change and its strength in its ability to highlight and stress the differences and the tensions between what has been gained and what has been lost. These differences and tensions can be the motivation for a collective action, especially when environmental issues are at stake. In such situations, it becomes crucial to define what kind of model of development we are going to carry out. Moreover, this could become much more crucial in contexts in which the resilience to change is too easily considered to be caused only by cultural and institutional barriers, rather than the strategic planning itself. More specifically this could highlight when the resilience is caused by the inability of strategic planning to give the right value to the 'impossible' imagination. In fact, if we as citizens, so embroiled in the lines which trace a city, were

able to understand the differences/tensions between what is retained as possible and what is considered a radical change, then we might be able to understand the material and immaterial collective ‘costs’ that the direction of change of a strategic frame produces and make a more conscious choice of our own future. “[D]emocracy consists in this, that society does not halt before a conception, given once and for all, of what is just, equal, or free, but rather institutes itself in such a way that the question of freedom, of justice, of equity, and of equality might always be posed anew within the framework of the ‘normal’ functioning of society” (Castoriadis, 1990, p. 87).

The Taranto case might be an example of how the idea that strategic planning can also act as a paralysing meta-frame. The impossible imagination of ‘Taranto without the ILVA’ and that of dis-identification have rewritten the memory of city in a critical way and slowly de-constrained and freed the future from the limits of a present so strongly compromised by the fear and the obsessive search for a future linked to mega-projects. This impossible imagination has slowly intruded inside the social context thus orienting the small and big changes which have occurred in the city, despite the fact that it was considered an utopia not realisable.

If the imagination of an ‘impossible’ change is ignored, then there could be the risk that relational strategic planning will always act as a paralysing meta-cultural frame. Furthermore, the relations between the demand of a change and planning could tend to become exclusively mediated by power. A possible consequence could be an increasing retreat of citizens from participating in planning and make planning something superfluous to the most effective power games.

## Notes

1. A meta-cultural frame mediates people’s sense-making (Schön & Rein, 1994).
2. *Habitus* is the system “of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53).

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