

Chapter 3

Idea Competitions: Contemporary Urban Planning in Urban Regions and the Concept of Trading Zones

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Abstract This chapter presents some thinking about two recent European idea competitions. Both cases, which date to the first decade of the twenty-first century, allow us to reflect upon the way in which contemporary urban planning is experimenting new ways of facing problems of communication and coordination in large urban regions, thus moving beyond the limits and boundaries of statutory planning and the administrative limits and the traditional definition of the city. Reading these cases through the lens of the trading zone approach seems to reveal some interesting elements for interpretation which will be summarised in the fifth paragraph dedicated to general conclusions. In fact, in an attempt to discuss and probe Galison's *trading zone* approach within the field of spatial planning, the chapter explores the role that idea competitions play in contemporary planning processes. The hypothesis is that, given the disputed nature of planning in a complex, multi-cultural, uncertain and fragmented urban condition, idea competitions can act today, implicitly or explicitly, as innovative planning devices that can face new problems such as those of communication and coordination, in particular in challenging contexts, like those of large urban regions. A second hypothesis complements this first one: idea competitions can be analysed as challenging places for both the production of knowledge as well as public decision-making. In this sense, the trading zone approach offers positive support to our understanding of the complex function that the production and exchange of knowledge (expert and tacit) plays in spatial decision-making processes, given today's general crisis in the legitimacy and efficiency of traditional models of public action.

Keywords Public decision-making • 'Transactive' planning • 'Political' planning • Planning tools • Role of spatial representation • Transcale question

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3.1 Introduction

Idea competitions have a long tradition in the field of spatial planning: architectural, urban planning and design competitions have been promoted at different times by local and nonlocal governments – as well as by private subjects – in order to produce and circulate hypotheses, visions and perspectives concerning the future of a specific area or an entire city. In truth, the role and nature of competitions have deeply changed over the centuries almost as much as urban planning has, both in terms of practices and theories. Nonetheless, they have always maintained an important position and function. This chapter presents some thinking about two recent European idea competitions. In an attempt to discuss and probe Galison's *trading zones* approach (Galison 1997, 2010) within the field of spatial planning, it explores the role that such a tool plays in contemporary planning processes. The hypothesis is that, given the disputed nature of planning in a complex, multicultural, uncertain and fragmented urban condition, idea competitions can act today, implicitly or explicitly, as innovative planning devices that can face new problems such as those of communication and coordination (Galison 1997, 2010), in particular in challenging contexts, like those of large urban regions. A second hypothesis complements the first one: idea competitions can be analysed as challenging places for both the production of knowledge as well as public decision-making. In this sense, the trading zone approach can support our understanding of the complex function that the production and exchange of knowledge (expert and tacit) plays in spatial decision-making processes, given today's general crisis in the legitimacy and efficiency of traditional models of public action.

The first section in this chapter will present a framework for reflection, proposing a general reading of the contested and uncertain conditions of contemporary planning in light of the tz approach. The second will provide a brief reconstruction of the role that idea competitions have played in planning history with a specific focus on the last two centuries. The third and the fourth section will present two selected cases: the first, the 'Grand Pari(s) de l'agglomération parisienne' consultation in Paris and the second, the 'Bando Città di Città' in Milan, Italy. Both cases, which date to the first decade of the twenty-first century, allow us to reflect upon the way in which planning is experimenting new ways of facing problems of communication and coordination in large urban regions, thus moving beyond the limits and boundaries of statutory planning, as well as facing problems of scale having to do with the complex process of change in the contemporary city that has moved beyond administrative limits and the traditional definition of the city. Reading these cases through the lens of the trading zone approach seems to reveal some interesting elements for interpretation which will be summarised in the fifth section dedicated to general conclusions.

3.2 Planning as *Trading Zones*?

Addressing the complex nature of urban planning, John Friedmann, in his well-known 1993 article, 'Toward a Non-Euclidean Mode of Planning', focused on the specific nature of such activity, essentially based on a close and complex relationship between

knowledge and action. ‘Normative’, ‘innovative’, ‘political’ and ‘transactive’ planning based on a social learning approach is what Friedmann proposed at the time as an answer to the problems and the crisis in traditional planning approaches (Friedmann 1993, p. 483). On the one hand, this kind of planning works on principles whose political nature is undeniable. On the other hand, *transactive* planning is designed to consider the relationship between ‘expert knowledge and everyday local knowledge’ (ibidem, p. 483) in the belief that problems can only be understood and addressed through social learning processes in which different forms of knowledge can meet and be exchanged. Finally, there is planning in which the local dimension – situated in time and space – is increasingly important, despite global processes, since all planning activity occurs in a specific and context-relevant condition.

In what sense can these founding arguments be read in the trading zone perspective proposed by Galison (and discussed by others, see in particular Collins et al. 2007) and explored in this chapter? In our interpretation, we can find some major and closely connected points in which trading zone approach can interact with some of the core issues raised by Friedmann and others after him.

The first is linked to the ‘political nature’ of planning (see Kanninen, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo in this book). Planning, in fact, cannot be conceived merely as a traditional technical field of expert knowledge since planning decisions are tied to a ‘political’ dimension (Mouffe 2000), not only because power is always exchanged in planning processes but more generally, and interestingly, because planning always has to do with the ‘problems of the public’ (Dewey 1927) and how the ‘public’ is continuously formed¹ and reformed through what is locally and eventually – in time and space – considered to be ‘in common’ (see Arendt 1994; Cefai and Trom 2001; Thevenot 2006; Crosta 2003; Tagliagambe 2008).

Can the trading zones approach help us face the political nature which is increasingly problematic in our contemporary, fragmented and plural society, reinterpreting the idea of ‘working on principles’ proposed by Friedmann? Although the trading zone approach was developed in the field of the social studies of science (where, in any case, the exchange of power plays a considerable role), we believe that it can provide some interesting insights into the field of planning as well. *Trading zones, in fact, as described by Galison*, as spaces of coordination and communication between different subcultures, are particularly inspiring concepts for developing an innovative understanding and treatment of the ‘political’ nature of planning. In particular, the trading zones approach explores the processes of the ‘constitution’ of ‘in-between’ spaces (material and immaterial) to which people enter with different languages, cultures, interests and goals to discuss (materially and immaterially) *problems in common* which require some form of ‘communication and coordination’. When, in fact, Galison states that ‘*trade* focuses on coordinated, *local* actions, enabled by the *thinness* of interpretation rather than the thickness of consensus’ (Galison 2010, p. 36), he offers planning practitioners and theorists some useful perspectives for moving beyond some of the debated limits of participatory theories (Sager 1994, 1997, 2009) to experiment innovative ways of facing the difficult nature and constitution of public arenas² around public problems,³ which we consider to be one of the major issues of contemporary planning. In fact, it proposes a different perspective on ‘working with principles’ and being ‘political’.

The second is linked to the ‘transactional’ nature of planning, dealing with the exchange between different forms of knowledge. Transactional, in our interpretation, subsumes at least three different dimensions:

1. All planning processes refer to several technical dimensions which require the interaction of different disciplinary fields. If we go back to the foundation of spatial planning as an expert field of knowledge in a national context (all quite recent), we find differentiated attempts at conferring scientific status upon planning along with a statute based on different assumptions regarding the nature of this field. Even from different perspectives and with differentiated roles (coordination, synthesis, etc.), in most cases the planning field has been regarded as a place of interaction and transaction between different disciplinary fields.
2. Planning, by definition, lives in the interaction between expert knowledge and everyday local knowledge. As planning theory has shown, planning processes must take into consideration the knowledge shared and produced by actors that are not necessarily experts and not necessarily only technical or professional experts Atkinson et al. (2010).
3. Planning processes are spaces for the transaction of different agents, which ‘constitute’ Cefaï and Trom (2001) into actors in the planning process throughout the interaction regarding a problem or interest they have in common; their values, ideas and perspectives contribute to the construction of the common problem and cannot be identified as stable and pre-existing in nature. Also ‘usable’ knowledge is therefore not pre-existing (Lindblom and Cohen 1979) but is produced by the interaction of actors (or according to Dewey and Bentley 1974, by transaction, thus also stressing the transformation taking place throughout the exchange) around a problem to be solved (Crosta 1998).

In all such cases, the trading zone perspective could be helpful in two different senses. The first regards the exploration of how this exchange comes about and what (and if) it is able to produce (‘jargon’, ‘pidgin’, ‘creole’, in terms of ‘interlanguage exchange’ or ‘inter-operational capacities’ as well as ‘boundary objects’, Galison 1997, 2010). The trading zone approach could contribute to understanding the space of ‘intersection’ between forms of knowledge that are central and strategic in terms of producing legitimacy and efficiency in planning processes. The second regards the necessity of dealing with the instable nature of the agency. In fact, in thinking about some of the critiques made to his approach, Galison made it clear that the ‘pure nature of cultures involved in trading zones is far from being acknowledged’ (‘I chose the idea of intersection quite deliberately’, Galison 2010, p. 32): ‘there is no stable entity of who (and what) comes into (and out from) the trading zone. No predefinition in fact can be taken for granted, both of cultures and individuals, agents, which are relevant only insofar as they enter in the trading zone’.

The third and final point is related to the ‘local’ nature of planning. The local dimension, in fact, has remained a central issue and challenge in planning despite globalisation, as anticipated by Friedmann more than 15 years ago (see Sfez 1977; Crosta 2003; Magnaghi 2000). At the same time, the contemporary urban question has been identified as a transcale question (Brenner 2000), in which it is increasingly complex to define the

form and boundaries of the contemporary city (Soja 2011) and as a result the territory of planning and the meaning of 'local'. In this perspective, when Galison looks at the locality of trading zones (Galison 1999, p. 138) and, as proposed by Mäntysalo et al. (2011, p. 261), to 'local infrastructures of shared concepts and instruments that had enabled such an exchange' (Galison 2010, as well as Collins et al. 2007, p. 658, which define trading zone as 'locations in which communities with a deep problem of communication manage to communicate'), he provides some interesting argumentations regarding the persisting importance of the local dimension as a central, as well as challenging, question within the planning debate (Cefaï and Trom 2001).

As a conclusion to this brief and partial introduction, we might advance an important hypothesis: not only can planning theory draw some interesting suggestions from trading zone theory, but, more in general, we might argue that contemporary spatial planning could be regarded and discussed as a process of continuous production of 'trading zones' if not as a 'trading zone' itself. Insofar as it always has to do with coping with problems of coordination and communication (Collins et al. 2007) between plural and fragmented communities and cultures, planning is, in fact, increasingly exposed to the necessity of producing in-between spaces for 'trading' among different points of view, languages, ideas, forms of agency, forms of knowledge and finally among different forms of understanding of the local dimension.

In this sense, idea competitions, as we will argue in the next paragraphs, might be interpreted as devices designed and promoted in order to produce new 'zones for trading' around 'problems of the public' in conditions in which traditional planning tools and devices have shown their limits and aporia.

3.3 Idea Competitions: History and Role in the Planning Field

A simple and quite clear definition of design competitions can be found in 'Towards an Urban Renaissance', the final report of the Urban Task force, chaired by Lord Richard Rogers of Riverside and promoted by the UK government (Urban Task Force 1999, 2002, 77–78). The paragraph dedicated to design competitions presents well-established arguments and hypotheses relating to their role in contemporary planning. The first concerns their capacity to select quality ideas that can improve regeneration or development processes. The second concerns the idea that they can promote inclusive and participatory processes involving different experts and stakeholders. The third is related to the idea that, over all, they can be efficient tools for producing urban change, since high-quality expertise and broader public involvement are seen as vehicles for fostering efficient urban regeneration.

Aside from this well-established and shared description, the report proposes a list of different forms of design competitions: 'competitive interviews' in which experts are asked to provide their points of view on a certain project; 'two- or three-stage design competitions' in which invited experts are asked to produce projects and ideas, with the final selection of one idea; and finally 'open anonymous

competitions' in which participation is completely open and a jury chooses among the best ideas provided by the candidate experts. In all cases, however, experts are asked to provide their professional visions, and architects are the specific experts normally involved, along with urban planners.

This definition is almost always at the base of the many urban and architectural design competitions currently promoted by cities. Of course, this is the result of both a long historical tradition and of more recent factors. In their different forms, design competitions have been promoted in the past by local administrations for different reasons: for the renewal of a specific site as well as for the foundation of a new city or in order to think about its process of growth or restructuring in a specific critical moment. Despite the fact that the role of the participation of archi-stars as a way to attract public attention has been recently become even more evident than in the past, architects have always been the central actors in these events. Nevertheless, design competitions have often tried to produce a broader public debate about cities in historical moments; even if they have been mainly limited to intellectuals, politicians and experts (see the Canberra competition in 1911, but also Milan's for the reconstruction of the city in 1945 after the damage caused by WWII), they have had the role of taking advantage of a larger consultation in which different perspectives and ideas can come together and produce learning and sometimes innovation. Of course, different examples and interpretations of idea competitions based on this quite traditional model can still be found – with different degrees of innovation. While, for example, Chinese design competitions for new cities are still quite traditional in the interpretation of their role, others, like the one launched by Canberra under the name CAPITethical (promoted as a celebration for the 100-year anniversary of the capital, inviting experts to rethink the founding moment of the city and think back what difference it would make today to plan the city in relation to today challenges)⁴ or by Helsinki with the name of 'Greater Helsinki Vision 2050' (launched in 2007 in order 'to find new and open-minded residential, land use and transport solutions for developing the region'), deal more with the idea of using expert knowledge to produce broad public debate about the future of the city in the face of significant processes of change.

More innovative forms of design competitions can be found with some in-depth research.⁵ Several experiences in fact could be cited that show how idea competitions are taking on a different role. They may be open to different experts or non-experts, in particular local residents. They can ask about physical transformation, but they might require simple ideas rather than complex technical products and can be developed not only by public administrations and cities in particular but by social foundations – NGOs, for example, as well as by private subjects. They might promise very small monetary prizes but nevertheless aim at promoting high public visibility. They might foster public imagination or social activation and empowerment, or they might think about a specific site, but more interestingly, they might question a broader context. In this respect, we are now experiencing the emergence of a new role for urban design competitions, transforming the more common requests for qualifications into open idea competitions, which has to do with some of the planning problems that we cited in the first section (see, in this regard, the history of IBA, International Building

Exhibitions in Germany, which turned from architectural exhibitions to broader occasions of reinventing the city).⁶

In the next paragraph, we will present two cases selected among others⁷ in order to better highlight the nature of this shift in the role and meaning of competitions: they will be analysed in a trading zone perspective in order to highlight the elements relevant to a general conclusion about planning in light of the trading zone approach.

3.4 Cases

3.4.1 *'Grand Pari(s) de l'agglomération parisienne'*

3.4.1.1 The Process and the Context

In June 2007, celebrating the opening of the new air terminal in the Charles de Gaulle Airport, the President of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy reminded the public that 'Paris est la seule agglomération de France a ne pas avoir de communauté urbaine' (Paris is the only French urban agglomeration that does not have one "communauté urbaine"). At the same time, Roger Karoutchi, state secretary, 'chargé des relations avec le parlement', announced the preparation of a law concerning the 'organisation of the Paris region' opening a dedicated website. Just a few months later in the same year, Sarkozy launched a 'nouveau projet d'aménagement global de Grand Paris' through an *international consultation* dedicated to the future of Paris. A two-phase invited competition was then organised, and multidisciplinary architect-coordinated teams were invited to reflect upon two topics: the future of the city and the upcoming challenges in light of the Kyoto protocol. On the basis of the slogan, 'the project first and then governance', the competition's declared aim was to leave space to free imagination, leaving in the background the operative dimension and government and governance problems which had for a long time the city in facing problems and thinking about its future. In fact, no mention was made in the call about the problems of territorial governance of the Paris area. Despite the fact that the title itself contains the issue – 'Grand Pari(s) de l'agglomération parisienne' – the call asked participants to concentrate essentially on the city's future in a sustainable development perspective.

Ten teams were asked to draw up further projects which were presented to the public in an exhibit held in March 2009 in the renewed *Cité de l'Architecture*. The event, followed by a lively debate, was a great public success both among citizens and experts. After this first phase, the new agenda called for a second one with teams working together within the common framework of the 'Atelier International Du Grand Paris' to design projects regarding different specific themes and selected sites. On the one hand, they were asked to produce new ideas; on the other hand, this second phase was to be dedicated to discuss these ideas in a public arena with a governance perspective, thus returning to the original intention of facing operative

problems and public debate after the results of the consultation. At the same time, this new phase would proffer some new hypotheses regarding the role of planning: (1) 'planning by objectives, rather than regulation'; (2) on the social role of architecture and its centrality in urban planning; and finally (3) an 'appropriate government solution' (see official documents).

This, in brief, is the history of a process that is still under way⁸ and that has also generated different results among which is not only a large public debate on the future of the city but legislative reform regarding local government in France approved in June 2010 together with a special law for Paris focusing on a regional-scale infrastructure project that was quite controversial. The Atelier International was established and on October 2011, a new event was held to celebrate 4 years of the initiative.

In keeping with our hypothesis, this process can be read not only as an apparently traditional launch of an expert consultation (see the reports in several architectural journals) but also, more interestingly as the construction of a trading zone, as an opportunity to face problems of communication and coordination in a complex urban region that, for quite some time, had been seeking a new system of governance and a planning framework and in which the 'central state' was losing its role in favour of the 'local state'.

In fact, the history of this competition could be better interpreted if read together with a second history, also recent, but somewhat longer, that is, the history of the governance process and debate launched at the beginning of this same decade by the Paris city mayor, Delanoë, and by his councillor for inter-municipal cooperation, Pierre Mansat. In fact, since 2000 the municipality of Paris experimented and promoted the reinterpretation of the contemporary city, producing a sizeable and interesting set of ideas and projects which provided new urban images and interpretations. They portray a city that has grown beyond its walls Gilli and Offner (2009) and that is attempting to leave behind a policy, and a governance approach, relating to traditional *intra-moenia* sovereignty and territoriality – an attempt to promote forms of public action that can intersect a new 'territoriality', defined by everyday social practices in relation to which administrative boundaries and institutions have lost their meaning as well as their efficacy and legitimacy. This process, animated by different tools and operations (exhibits, debates, projects, institutional acts), had already produced several results at the time of the launch of the Grand Pari(s) consultation, in particular that of the constitution of a sort of a common framework for debate and action on the metropolitan scale, at that time less institutionalised than it is today, called 'Paris Métropole', a voluntary form of alliance and discussion between Paris and its surrounding municipalities. If viewed in the light of centuries of contraposition and institutional failure, this could be viewed as true innovation built on an incremental project-by-project approach.

As a matter of fact, this entire second process in itself could be read as the constitution of a trading zone. In fact, Pierre Mansat's action could be seen as a set of operations that could produce a 'space of exchange' between different actors – those composing the fragmented institutional landscape of the Paris urban region, sharing a new space of interchange, despite different visions, images and ideas about their roles and how to cope with problems of coordination and communication. All this

came about despite years of the city's isolation policies and opposition from the surrounding municipalities. The production of studies and maps, exhibitions, launched or envisaged projects and low-profile institutional form could all be seen as a series of 'boundary objects', devices that could help make the construction of the 'Paris Metropole' trading zone work.

How did the Sarkozy competition fit into this process? It created a new trading zone, constituted by similar but also different 'boundary objects' from those available in the one promoted by the city of Paris; they were similar insofar as they sought the sharing of the same space of action and language, but different because of the style and goals of the trading zone created by the idea competitions. We could anticipate in fact, in conclusion, that what might seem to be quite a traditional design competition – old style if compared to the innovation which could be read in the city of Paris' trading zone created by the councillor in charge (and as treated by many observers) – in the end behaved exactly like a device that could put the central state in a position to redefine its role and position and come back into the process in which it had lost relevance and function, in terms of communication and coordination of action. In this sense, it provides a typical example of an attempt to introduce a new space for exchange between different ideas, visions, cultures and forms of power.

3.4.1.2 The Idea Competition as a New, or Reframing, Trading Zone and the Production of 'Boundary Objects'

The 'Grand Pari(s)' consultation was the object of broad public debate based on different languages and forms of knowledge and action; it opened a space which can be regarded as an interesting and 'designed' trading zone.

Beyond the more superficial interpretations of the architectural images produced, from a first point of view, in fact, the initiative can be read as a somehow remarkable elaboration regarding the 'city' itself (see Fedeli 2010). What is at stake, both in the name of the idea competitions and in its contents, is a definition of the city, a definition of Paris: Grand Paris is, in fact, a way to rename Paris and provide a renewed space of action through this rewording and retitling. In this sense, what it is more interesting is that the trading zone created by Sarkozy by Grand Paris (as well as the one created in other ways, through other 'boundary objects', by Mansat with Paris Metropole) is a tool to cope with a major challenge in contemporary planning: how to describe and treat a new urban fact, which seems to be increasingly difficult to grasp, understand and govern, thus derives the necessity and the efforts to produce new knowledge and understanding of it, shown by the large disciplinary production as well as by widespread plan production.

From a second point of view, it must be mentioned that the initiative was deeply contested by many local actors, insofar as it proposed an interpretation of traditional expert knowledge on the abilities of a specific disciplinary field and expert knowledge between planning and architecture to produce a vision for the contemporary city, providing technical solutions to be implemented or, in the best case scenarios, acting as a framework for further political and social thought and action. This was actually

in the premises of the consultation which seemed to reproduce a traditional relationship between politician and expert based on the availability of technical solutions for the contemporary ‘urban question’ (Secchi), placing faith in expert knowledge which not only appears rather traditional but also tricky in its rhetorical and functional use. Nevertheless, what is quite interesting in the materials produced is the important contribution made to collective imagination and debate. Gilli and Offner commented that this kind of expert consultation seemed to react to a situation in which ‘actors needed a transactional object to talk with each other, to gather around a table’ (Gilli and Offner 2009, p. 95). Whether or not these were the presidency’s initial intentions, the result obtained is that the consultation produced a large set of ‘boundary objects’ (in which the role of maps and project drawings was central) in order to allow exchange between different actors and the return of the state into the context. On the other hand, it produced an exchange of ideas about the city which goes well beyond the original intentions.

Following this line of reasoning, the consultation launched by Sarkozy can be regarded as a case of the deliberate production of a trading zone in order to foster communication and coordination in a large urban region where territoriality, sovereignty and agency are at stake. Whether the judgement is positive or not (and this is another story that also faces problems of power that we are not able to address in this chapter), at the end of the day, the use of this space and its animation through several ‘boundary objects’ (the title and topic of the consultation, the maps and images produced by the teams, the public exhibition, etc.) allowed the state to reenter the arena and propose a language of exchange and trade. It is a fact that each institutional actor (city, region...) consequently decided to publish its own book, selecting what it considered relevant and useful from the competition, thus trying to become part of the exchange despite being hostile or sceptical towards the process; at the same time the central state introduced (in a nonneutral way, it must be noted for the final conclusions) two new elements through this designed trading zone. They are the reform of legislation concerning local autonomies and an infrastructure project for the Paris area which probably could not have been introduced without the trading zone deriving from the competition. It was an imposition rather than an outcome of a true debate, but the role of the Grand Paris competition in trying to foster these two main goals of the presidency was central and debated quite animatedly on the local level.

3.4.2 *‘Città di Città Strategic Project’ and ‘Ideas and Projects Competition’*

3.4.2.1 **The Process and the Context**

Between 2005 and 2009, in collaboration with Politecnico di Milano Department of Architecture and Planning and Milano Metropoli (the public local development agency), the Province of Milan promoted a *strategic planning* process (see Balducci’s

contribution in this book). With the title '*Progetto Strategico Città di Città*' ('Strategic Project Cities of Cities' (Provincia di Milano and Politecnico di Milano – DiAP 2007, 2009), this process was designed and developed as an important occasion to interpret and discuss ongoing processes of territorial transformation and to experiment possible innovations in the field of public policy, territorial governance and local development⁹ in Milan. In this sense, the underlying challenges of this second example can be compared to those of the first: a changing urban region with significant problems of coordination in which traditional planning seemed unable to produce substantial results.

In particular, the *Strategic Project* focused upon three main families of activities and related research hypotheses:

- Producing and offering new interpretative frameworks for social, economic and territorial processes of change in the city and the *urban region*, regarded as a composite territorial context whose complexity requires new ways of describing, interpreting, planning and governing contemporary cities that go well beyond the current models of governance and planning (like that of the 'metropolitan area' and the provincial territorial plan, both regarded for a long time as necessary answers, but in the end never implemented. The first, the institutional framework for the *città metropolitana*, was never instituted or never considered important despite an existing law; the second, the territorial plan, is far from being able to deal with the complexity of an urban region despite having been drafted at different times since the 1960s).
- Enhancing the rich, plural and differentiated resources of local societies, trying to treat the problem of the fragmentation of decision-making typical of contemporary metropolitan contexts as a resource for the project, based on the hypothesis that the 'intelligence' of society (Lindblom 1965) can contribute to renewing forms, modes, contents of public action and, more in particular, planning. In fact, the local debate recognises that, over the last decades, Milan has been characterised by increased and widespread construction and activation of social capital, by-and-large more innovative than the available institutional capacities – in other words, the ability of local public institutions to innovate policies and ways of acting.
- Creating and discussing a vision based on new strategies that can couple the imperatives of competition with those of the quality of life and social/territorial cohesion, promoting, selecting and fostering projects to improve the *habitability*¹⁰ of the urban region. The central idea was based on the perception of the need to restructure local policy agenda in order to face the persisting and unresolved problems that have afflicted the urban region for many decades and which do not seem to have obtained any real attention by public subjects.

The 4-year process based on these hypotheses can be viewed as the construction of a sort of *multiple trading zone*. In fact, it was essentially based on the idea that the general context was mature for change in terms of both interpretative and operative frameworks, that the resources for producing change were available and finally that what was necessary was a space for common thought and action different from those already available. The focus of the entire process, in fact, in a possible *ex-post*

reading, can be seen essentially in the construction of this space and devices that can activate coordination and communication between actors, interests and cultures in innovative ways.

In effect, the process was cultivated through the use of several devices and tools: *white papers* (proposing interpretative images of the context published to be discussed with a broad and differentiated public on the local level); *processes of interaction* (through different idea competitions aiming at intercepting new projects and ideas for the *livability* of the urban region, as we will see, but also accompanied by forms of more traditional encounters with different actors); *screening of the province's ongoing activities* to create a more livable urban context and the *selection and construction/promotion of pilot projects* to foster policy innovation in a more operative dimension (with the idea of intersecting the province's spaces of competent action with the emerging design capacities of social actors); and finally *occasions for public discussion* (fostered by debate promoted within the framework of a public exhibition illustrating the main issues of the planning process and questions regarding both research and action).

Two concepts were placed alongside these devices at the heart of the process, animating it:

- The issue of *habitability* as the main urban challenge for the public agenda: it was assumed that the Milan urban region had a deficit in terms of livability understood as a multifaceted qualitative concept concerning all dimensions of inhabiting a place and that any planning process or project should focus on this deficit going beyond the well-established rhetoric of simple competitiveness and attractiveness.
- The idea that Milan cannot be seen and governed as a city within its administrative boundaries since it is part of a large *urban region* – a more extensive conurbation in the northern Italian region and a field of interaction of different territorial and social configurations (*cities of cities*) in which proximity and mobility, belonging and rooting are always at play in a continuous process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of territories that also redefine and challenge the condition of citizenship. In this sense, the ‘city of cities’ is the city of multiple resources, practices and problems; at the same time it alludes to an idea of governance that goes beyond the traditional idea of metropolitan government widespread throughout Italy.

These two concepts – at the same time dense but thin in their expressions (‘habitability’ and ‘city of cities’, complex but at the same time quite comprehensible to non-experts and catchy as slogans) – were kinds of ‘boundary objects’, insofar as, in the multiple meaning they contain and allude to, they created a space of simplified exchange among the subjects who participated in the process. Not only did they *de facto* remain the two major keywords (maps and data were used to illustrate them in order to render them visible and usable for communication and coordination among actors who used them in different ways and with different goals) around which a space of exchange, communication and coordination was built and implemented, but they also were central to one of the plan's core operations that obtained great public success and that can be described, in our perspective, as a sort of ‘trading zone’.

3.4.2.2 The Città di Città Competition of Ideas as a Key Trading Zone

The 'idea competition', conceived by plan promoters (both consultants and the province), was based on some important assumptions: traditional ways of facing problems of communication and coordination in the Milan context had created poor conditions of habitability. Plans, as issued by institutions or sets of experts in a traditional approach to coordination, were not able to change the situation nor could simple government reform. Therefore, it was necessary to find new ways of planning; in particular it was considered important to promote more widespread active participation in planning activities, activating society's recognised capabilities to produce innovation. In this sense, the fragmentation of actors could become a resource to bypass problems of how to produce a participative process in an urban/regional context.

Placing an idea competition at the centre of the strategic planning process was fundamental from this viewpoint, reinforcing the idea that a competition for projects and ideas might constitute an opportunity to create new dialogue between society and institutions, involving society at large both in the debate on the future of the urban region and on the formulation of policies to improve habitability. Rather than organising a traditional participation process, coming from the academic world, the consultant tried to create a dialogue based on projects and ideas that could trigger action and help the key word habitability 'travel' through society (Healey 2003) at the same time.

The competition was organised and designed as a two-phase open competition. It challenged every kind of subject, singly or organised with others, to propose original ideas to be further developed (first typology) or ongoing projects (second typology) to be publicised and reproduced in order to enhance the habitability of the entire urban/regional context. The prize was small in monetary terms and was to be devoted to producing a feasibility study for the implementation of the idea or for the communication and diffusion of the projects already under way. However, it was accompanied by the province's promise and commitment to recognise valid proposals with a sort of 'brand' and to collect them in a list of best practices to be acknowledged or supported by the province and other actors in the immediate future. After a first response to the call, all participants in the second phase were sustained by a support group composed of members of the university department (DIAP) and the MM local development agency to further develop the initial idea and to join other subjects who were advancing proposals in the same field.

Essentially, the first phase was conceived only as a very simple selection, while the idea of an accompanied second phase was central because it was used essentially as a space for the co-production of projects and ideas among candidates.

Despite the small amount of prize money, a large number of proposals was received and participated in the second phase. The success of the competition was unexpected (in quantitative and qualitative terms) and can be explained in different ways. In general it bears witness to the interest of society in taking part in a new design dialogue for the region's future. The topic to be addressed was in fact that of 'habitability'. After the first phase of individual participation, the projects were required to be developed in cooperation between actors, in keeping with the 'City of Cities' concept. Both concepts paved the way for the constitution of a fertile trading

zone in which different cultures and ideas could find, in these simple but meaningful concepts, the space for their different expectations, resources, abilities and interest in cooperation. In fact, by proposing their projects in the competition, candidates were asked to show in simple words and images how they might contribute to the challenges implicit in the expression contained in the plan's various official documents but also as they understood and interpreted the challenge in terms of material and immaterial design ideas.

Essentially, each project proposed an operative interpretation of these ideas. There was no theoretical discussion about these different interpretations, and this fact was central to the initiative's success. A document was also produced along with a database in which all ideas and projects could be consulted and could continue showing their evolution and interest in maintaining communications or promoting coordination with the others. All ideas and projects were presented, along with the entire process, in a public exhibition in one of Milan's most important cultural institutions. Actors participating in the competition were also offered the possibility to organise and manage workshops and presentations of their projects in a special space (the so-called theatre) hosted within the exhibition venue for its entire duration. This way of using the results of the process was designed by the promoters at the very beginning of the operation. In fact, the competition was considered by the designers as a 'governance episode' (Healey 2007, pp. 21–22) but also a cornerstone for a new culture of governance. Broad participation in the competition and in the 'theatre' reinforced the initial working hypotheses and led to further use of competitions by other province departments and by the strategic planning department which launched two more editions, recognising them as models for promoting forms of involvement of society in the production of public policy and in innovating governance culture. In this sense, the idea competition introduced a very different approach to public action in terms of facing problems of communication and coordination in planning urban regions.

By using the competition as an opportunity for dialogue, we, as consultants, tried to consider what Lindblom (1975, 1979) proposed in his writings which we have cited several times in our reconstruction of the process regarding the idea competition as a way of producing knowledge through interaction which, according to Lindblom, is the only constructive way to produce usable knowledge in planning processes. Drawing from his lesson, we also assumed that democratic discussion is not given and processed as a cooperative search for solutions on the basis of pre-shared values but on the basis of the interaction of those participating in the process with their different partisan positions.

Thus, it is possible to define the entire competition as another designed trading zone in which some strategic 'boundary objects' were used to foster it. Moreover, it could also be affirmed that the design competition was the core trading zone for the entire project, since it was the space for experts, as we were, to provide interpretations and hypotheses and to explore them in an open way. For the province, it was a way of facing the need to find operative spaces for action as well as a new role. For the public, it was an occasion to play a role in resolving the problems of a large urban region with its own resources, culture, language and ideas. Working on the 'thinness'

of interpretation rather on the thickness of consensus, the 'Città di Città' idea competition promoted a local space of exchange and interaction that could promote innovation in planning.

3.5 Conclusions

If we try to reach some general conclusions about the two cases, we can highlight some common points that are relevant to discussing how a trading zone perspective can be useful in terms of understanding and interpreting, as well as designing, planning processes.

As we have seen, both cases dealt with enormous problems of coordination, in particular with long-term unresolved problems of cooperation and communication in what are traditionally defined as metropolitan contexts. In fact both the 'Grand Paris case' and the 'Città di Città' case can be read within the general difficulties that the two cities have in adopting a logic of cooperation in order to think, plan and govern in the face of important metropolitan issues. Both the city-regions of Paris and Milan have been, and are, suffering the lack of either a metropolitan government or a metropolitan governance perspective; at the same time, they are quite evidently urban situations that go well beyond the traditional definition of cities. In this sense, both idea competitions were designed to play innovative roles in producing communications and coordination within these new plural and fragmented urban realities in which traditional planning tools and government arrangements were no longer effective (Ghorra-Gobin 2008). As a matter of fact, in both cases, the cooperation problem was not presented as the first focus but it did lay in the background. And no dense attempt had been made to manage the governance dimension in a traditional way. In this sense, we might argue that the role of trading zone played by the idea competitions was that of facing problems of communication and coordination through 'thin' descriptions rather than consensus. In this view, they were both innovative ways of exploring the political dimension of planning insofar as the creation of public arenas regarding common problems in both competitions produced a public arena concerning the problem of interpreting the nature of the contemporary city and addressing the complex problems that such large urban regions must face.

Of course, it must be stated that the way in which the two idea competitions were launched varied significantly, as did their nature and outcomes. In fact, the Paris competition was launched by the President de la Republique, while Milan was launched by the Provincial Administration. In the first case, the competition was for experts while in the second it was open to any subject. In the first case, widespread public debate was underscored by the competition. In the second, local society was mainly involved but media coverage was limited. In the first case, the topics to be addressed were officially the future of Paris in the light of Kyoto protocol which is quite a technical topic, while in the second, the main issues concerned the need to improve the habitability of the Milan urban region, which is more of an everyday topic. In the first case, experts were asked to envisage possible futures and projects

and only later was public debate held; in the second, ‘everyday makers’ (Bang 2005), as well as organised and institutional subjects, were asked to propose ideas and projects for a better city and to join forces in order to do that. These different targets generated different kinds of visibility for the two competitions and different outcomes. However, we understand that the two competitions were based on different perspectives regarding the transactional nature of planning and the role of expert knowledge and local knowledge. Nevertheless, both idea competitions played a significant role in creating innovative spaces for the exchange and production of knowledge, based, of course, on different political and theoretical assumptions and positions. In both cases, the need for planning to innovate according to the nature of the planning processes is also evident.

In both cases, the production of forms of exchange in terms of language and ‘boundary objects’ were central in facing problems of coordination and communication. As we recalled, according to some scholars, the competition launched by Sarkozy produced an important outcome as an alternative to the expected one: increasing public debate about the metropolitan government which had, during that same period, been quite developed within institutions, perhaps with even more innovative approaches by the municipality of Paris. The role of the competition and the controversy it raised made the issues at stake more visible to everyday citizens. In this sense, scholars say that the architectural renderings and maps produced in the competition provided exceptional material for discussion among different agents in a context in which there had been no real established interchange language (Mongin 2009). The role of spatial representation (from maps to diagrams to architectural design) was, in this sense, particularly interesting and again raises the question of the role of the expert knowledge of planners in planning processes. This can also be stated for the ‘City of Cities’ competition and process. The success of some of the images and concepts used in the project bears testimony to the role that this kind of expert knowledge plays in stimulating the trading zone. At the same time, as a conclusion, if the languages of ‘thin’ descriptions were made available in both cases allowing the trading zone to be created, these ‘thin descriptions’ were nevertheless the outcome of ‘thick’ intentional processes of cultural elaboration. Can this help us in thinking about a methodological point of view regarding the role that we, as planners and therefore experts, can play in the construction of trading zones (see in this sense the reflections proposed by Mazza 2009; Healey 2008; Throgmorton 1996)?

As a final general conclusion, we might state that in both cases planning was in question, although in different ways. In the first case, the final goal of the competition launched by the president was also to produce innovation in the field of urban planning. In the second, the competition was conceived within a process of strategic planning, questioning traditional approaches and innovating them radically. Moreover, in both cases, one thing is clear that due to its political and transactional nature, planning is seeking new and innovative ways to address the contemporary ‘urban question’. In this perspective, the use of the trading zone approach to read and interpret these cases reveals significant added value. At the same time, it can help produce further innovation in the contemporary planning field, suggesting that, even more in general, planning is by definition a ‘trading zone’ and has to deal with the design and production of trading zones.

Endnotes

1. See Cefai and Thom (2001), p. 49, 'Dans la lignée pragmatiste de J. Dewey, le problème public est plus que le produit d'un « étiquetage collectif», c'est une « activité collective » en train de se faire'.
2. See Cefai and Thom (2001), p. 58, 'L'arène publique ne pré-existe pas telle quelle à la construction du problème public. Elle se constitue transversalement a différents champs d'institutions, se joue sur diverses scènes publiques, relève de multiples « sphères d'action publique », où des acteurs spécialisés usent de stratégies, "font des coups", recourent à des savoir-faire et à des savoir-dire, appliquent des règles et des réglementations, jouissent de compétences et de prérogatives, se meuvent dans des registres de discours et d'action distincts'.
3. See Cefai and Thom (2001), p. 51–52, 'Les « problèmes publics » n'existent et ne s'imposent comme tels, qu'en tant qu'ils sont des enjeux de définition et de maîtrise de situations problématiques et donc des enjeux de controverses et d'affrontements entre acteurs collectifs dans des arènes publiques'.
4. See the website opening page www.caphithetical.com.au.
5. New York City, for example, has been the stage for some interesting initiatives. The most recent was promoted by IfUD, the Institute for Urban Design, which asked residents how to improve the city's public realm. The 550 ideas received were collected in an open call and turned over to experts ('practicing and student landscape architects, architects, planners, urban designers and artists from the city and everywhere', source: website) who were asked to 'respond to the challenge and present some design proposals (...). Designers are asked to 'define a site' based on any idea from a New Yorker and then create a brief proposal (...). IfUD writes in the brief that the proposal was not be 'too technical – the goal is to find great ideas that can capture the public imagination and start conversations, so even a single rendering qualifies; have fun with it!' All submissions were to be published in an 'Atlas of Possibility for the Future of New York'... 'which will provide a record of the vision the world's designers see for the city'. The expert jury selected the ten best ideas to receive a small prize of \$500, which were included in an exhibition hosted during the first Urban Design Week festival held in New York City during September 2011.
6. See the website http://www.iba-hamburg.de/en/03_ausstellung/6_erleben/ausstellung_iba_at_work.php
7. For other interesting cases, see the following websites: www.metropoolregioamsterdam.nl; www.alternativefutures.bc.ca; www.thekakartapost.com/news/2008/7/14/public-participation-key-vibrant-city.html; http://web.mit.edu/CIS/jerusalem2050/just_jerusaem/winners.html#tab_2
8. See the website: www.legrandparis.net/ and www.mon-grandparis.fr and www.ateliergranparis.com.
9. The author has been involved in this experience, together with Prof. Alessandro Balducci, as member of the DIAP group, responsible for the process. See in particular Balducci et al.(2011) for complete description of this experience. The direct involvement of the author in this experience makes it possible to produce a specific account of the process, insofar as it also provides an insight regarding facts, events, etc., that is, of course, not neutral.
10. The concept of *habitability* (in Italian the word sounds *Abitabilità*) was firstly developed, inside our research group, by Arturo Lanzani, one of the components. Among other scholars (Bernardo Secchi, Patrizia Gabellini in particular), he has mainly contributed in introducing this concept in the Italian debate (see Lanzani et al. 2006, *Esperienze e paesaggi dell'abitare*; Lanzani and Pasqui 2007). The word 'habitability' is adopted in order to translate the Italian term, preferring it to the term 'livability', in order to mark some difference from it: 'the term habitability is used to refer to a complex and multidimensional, qualitative and functional property of a geographical context. The concept of habitability originates from a different and more elaborate idea than that usually referred to in ordinary language (where the word "to live/inhabit" means basically to "reside"). It is not a static but a process idea which includes many

forms of social and spatial interaction, different ways of ‘using’, occupying and organising the environment by citizens and enterprises, residents and non residents’ [translation from ‘*City of cities. A strategic plan for the Milan urban region*’, Provincia di Milano- DIAP 2006, p. 41]. See for this Balducci et al. (2011).

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