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SHAPING EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING: HOW ITALY'S EXPERIENCE CAN CONTRIBUTE

Abstract

Despite increasing debate in recent years, it must be admitted that a shared definition of European spatial planning still remains uncertain. As a concept that emerged following the acknowledgement of the progressive and concrete involvement of the European Union in territorial and urban matters, European spatial planning established itself in the making of the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP), undoubtedly the most significant evidence of a new deal for planning throughout Europe.

Italy did not play a primary role in the ESDP drafting process. Nor has ESDP seen exemplary 'application' in this country so far. Nevertheless, the important changes that have occurred in Italian planning practices in the past decade seem to owe much to the innovations introduced by EU intervention. These experiences would seem to lead to the sharing of a wider framework for European spatial planning, perhaps necessary also to achieve a brighter future for the ESDP.

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1. ESDP in Italy: a toy for few

1.1. European spatial planning led by no planners

In the last valuable work on 'the making of the European Spatial Development Perspective' (ESDP) by Faludi and Waterhout (2002), Italy makes its appearance at the very first stage, hosting the Turin meeting in 1990 (the second after Nantes in 1989, when the process began) during its six-month European Presidency. Within a rather critical comment about the event (pp. 38-41), the authors point out especially: the hosts' 'reluctance to use maps' preferring 'verbal analysis' of spatial features; their simplistic and 'one-dimensional view of Europe' (core against periphery), also in contrast to the more diversified vision just proposed by President Delors in Nantes; and, finally, their undefined argument 'for a combination of classic regional policy and what they called 'territorial planning'".

Nearly embarrassed, but solidly supported by the most well-known Community literature (CEC, 1994; 1997a; 2000), the authors explain the event by recalling that, because of 'the urbanism tradition', in Italy the 'emphasis is placed on local planning and design', so that it is possible to conclude that 'Italy has no national spatial planning'. Finally, they alert the reader that, as spatial planning is 'not a priority' in Italy, during the entire ESDP process the 'attitude of the Italian CSD delegation would continue to be fluid' (CSD standing for Committee on Spatial Development). And so it has been.

Faludi and Waterhout are keen to identify the weaknesses of the Italian position with respect to the then nascent European spatial planning. But their explanation only partially covers the true reasons of those weaknesses, simply because they cannot be precise on what even among Italian planners is still now virtually unknown: who exactly produced the ESDP for Italy? (Notice that no Italian is mentioned among the many 'contributors' recalled by the authors at the beginning of the book, pp. XVII-XX.)

While one could hardly contest that planning in Italy is not a priority (at least not a declared priority), it seems questionable instead that Italy has no national spatial planning. Intending to come back on this later in detail (§ 2.1.1), here I would simply like to highlight that during the years 1994-97 – right in the middle of the ESDP process – the Directorate-General of Territorial Co-ordination (DICOTER, *Direzione Generale del Coordinamento Territoriale*; CEC, 2000, 36-37) of the Ministry of Public Works (now the Ministry of Infrastructures and Transportation) involved about a hundred of researchers from sixteen Italian universities in a 'Survey on the Transformations of the National Territorial Structures' (ITATEN, *Indagine sulle Trasformazioni degli Assetti del Territorio Nazionale*); the survey was conceived as the first step towards the constitution of a 'Permanent Observatory for the Monitoring of Territorial Transformations' (OSSTER, *Osservatorio Permanente per il Monitoraggio delle Trasformazioni Territoriali*). Significantly, no mention in the ITATEN survey is made of the ESDP, just as no mention was made of ITATEN within the ESDP process, even at the Venice meeting, the second held by the Italian Presidency (PCM, 1996), when the first results of the survey were just being sent to press (Clementi, Dematteis and Palermo, 1996).

The point here is that, in Italy, the ESDP was kept apart from the national spatial planning competencies up to 1998, a few months before the Potsdam approval.

Initially raised as an 'informal' and rather hybrid topic, half related both to Community regional policy and to national Foreign Affairs (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002, 35), the ESDP responsibilities in Italy were hardly removed from the Department for Community Policies Co-ordination of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (nowadays, and sometimes in the past, a Minister without portfolio for Community Policy Co-ordination). Therein, intended as a 'special' technical issue within the whole national competencies for Community policies, the ESDP (together with the Community Initiative Interreg and the Pilot Actions under Article 10 of the ERDF, European Regional Development Fund) was entirely managed until 1998 by one senior official and her trustworthy expert, an architect, and therefore with sufficient experience in spatial planning.

It may be of interest to notice how the latter, having later had the chance to talk about her 'learning-by-doing experience', describes the origins of the ESDP as the need, following the decision on the completion of the Single Market, 'of a new forum for multilateral discussions, grouping in a non-hierarchical model the Member States and the Commission' and taking place (almost occasionally, one would understand) 'in the field of spatial planning' (Rusca, 1998, 35).

Increasing the prestige of the ESDP and of spatial planning within the EU policies (with the related political complications; Faludi and Waterhout, 2002, 24-28 and passim; see also the keynote address of this Congress by Faludi), stronger became in the years also the attitude to 'defend' these competencies at national level by the ones who came upon them, often turning to mutual gain alliances with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this light, the 'fluid' position of the Italian CSD delegation is perhaps more understandable and Italy's options about any single decision should be interpreted for a better comprehension of the events: for instance, during the multilateral consultations in September 1997, the claim for locating the permanent secretariat of the forthcoming European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON) neither in Brussels nor in Luxembourg (where later assigned by a joint decision), but in Rome, as the original idea was launched at the Turin meeting, that is to say on Italian soil! (Présidence Luxembourgeoise, 1997; MLP, 1997).

However, what is important here, albeit paradoxical, is that spatial planning (the national structures concerned, namely the DICOTER, but also, more widely speaking, the bothersome and worrying curiosity of planners) was kept at a distance from the ESDP for a long time in Italy. This provides further explanation (and some regret) for the minor role played by Italy within the ESDP drafting process. This was possible, after all, thanks to the inattention of Italian government officials for whom, traditionally, planning is not a priority.

1.2. The harmful jealousy of bureaucracies

Under Romano Prodi's government, Paolo Costa, a professor in urban economics, was appointed Minister of Public Works in late 1996. In just a few months, he came

to an agreement with the Department for Community Policy Co-ordination and obtained from the Presidency the responsibility for European spatial planning (ESDP, Interreg and ERDF Article 10 Pilot Actions); the senior official and the expert formerly responsible came to be hosted, also physically, within the Ministry cabinet since 1997. In the meantime, the Minister nominated Roberto Camagni, also a professor in urban economics (and editor of the chapter on urban development within the Italian Presidency's document at the Venice meeting; PCM, 1996, 91-158), Chief of the Department for Urban Areas asking him to co-operate on European issues. One of the declared reasons of the handing over was the increase of financial engagement and technical tasks for European spatial planning, given the imminent start of the Interreg IIC Programmes and ERDF Article 10 Pilot Actions, so the staff was enlarged at the beginning of 1998 with another four experts (the author of the present note was among them).

The situation might appear unblocked, but the delay proved to be serious. When, in the framework of the national consultations established after Noordwijk, Minister Costa invited on 19 February 1998 the Presidents of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces to discuss the official ESDP project (MLP, 1998), none but simple regional officials attended, at last welcomed by the junior Minister in a rather anonymous debate. Nevertheless, in June 1998 Italy could be represented at the Glasgow meeting, for the first time since Nantes, by its Minister *actually* responsible for spatial planning. In addition, European spatial planning issues slowly began circulating within the academic debate.

A new change occurred following the downfall of the Prodi government in October 1998. The new Minister of Public Works did not confirm professor Camagni's responsibility for the Urban Areas and handed the European spatial planning portfolio over to the DICOTER, after keeping the senior official responsible in the dark: she was informed while participating in the CSD Seminar in Vienna (Austrian Presidency, 1999) and, driven to despair, decided to leave the meeting to return urgently to Rome and try to make up for the event; but it was too late.

Once within the DICOTER, however, the ESDP seemed to have found its proper institutional framework in Italy as elsewhere, just in time for its final approval. Yet the new managers showed soon to interpret its welcome essentially as a removal of any 'external' presence around it: the declared proposal to bring finally European spatial planning 'into the cradle of the public administration', rather, ended by increasing the existing problems due to lack of publicity and participation. Even the Interreg expert staff (albeit not a financial burden for the administration, being fully remunerated by the technical assistance funds) was kept for no more than another year, just to ensure an effective hand-over. Looking at the vocational training of some 'internal' expert in European spatial planning, different officials were each time delegated to the CSD meetings after Potsdam, apparently following their willingness to travel on business and their ability to speak foreign languages.

The constant attempts by the Ministry for Community Policy Co-ordination to take back 'its' competencies could help to explain, although not justify, that questionable attitude both in terms of efficiency and of public accountability. Only once foiled those bureaucratic controversies, and under the pressure of the decisions to be taken to

join the ESPON (2001; Decree of the Minister of Public Works no. 217/Segr./DICOTER, 30 May 2001), a change might finally appear to be in sight, when a National Committee on Spatial Development was established with representatives of all the Regions and Autonomous Provinces and other local authorities (Decree of the Director-General of DICOTER no. 205/UE, 9 July 2001).

Yet practical evidence shows that there is still difficulty launching substantive change and the decision making process concerning the ESDP and its future developments remains in Italy a sort of 'black box', which only few privileged national and regional officials can look into. The weak hope that the commitment to the ESDP Action Programme decided in Tampere (Finnish Presidency, 1999), if effectively put into practice (see § 3.2), could bring about a slight increase in awareness on European spatial planning possibilities, seems to have definitively failed with the coming of the present government, which has decreed that the new Ministry of Infrastructures and Transportation has other priorities to be pursued.

2. Much other business besides the ESDP

While the little edifying events just described were happening , and – it needs to be said – despite them, however, there is evidence to assert that planning has been progressively and substantially changed in Italy by the arrival on the scene of the European Union as a new institutional player. This does not mean institutional change imposed on the planning system obviously (there is no Community prerogative in this field), but a sort of *creeping material innovation*, triggered as if by contamination through planning practices, and leading partially, also, to institutional changes (Janin Rivolin, 2002a, b).

Although mutual influences play a crucial role in this process, the best way to understand it is to describe the principal changes as they can be singled out at the principal levels of territorial governance: central, regional and local level.

2.1. Central government

2.1.1. A sudden return to the stage

When the authors of the *EU Compendium* on Italy conclude that in this country 'territorial planning is practically non-existent at the national level, merely orientative at the regional level, and implemented at the local level' (CEC, 2000, 97), they clearly adopt an purely regulatory approach to planning, totally excluding its strategic dimension. But, as we know well, to limit our perspective to such a vision would empty any discourse on European spatial planning too (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002, 27-28; see also the keynote address of this Congress by Faludi).

In fact, they admit that the state 'is only responsible for deciding the general direction of planning, and for coordination. In particular, it prepares guidelines for the layout of the national territory' (p. 97). To be more exact, we should not omit that the

fundamental national Planning Law no. 1150/1942 originally stated that 'in order to orient or to coordinate urban planning activity in given parts of the national territory, the Ministry of Public Works has the faculty, on the recommendation of the Higher Council for Public Works, to draw up territorial co-ordination plans' (art. 5, cod. 1, translated by the author).

It is true that, as years went by, the Ministry never exploited its 'faculty', but that is another kettle of fish. The political and even cultural indifference for the strategic value of planning (for which Italian planners may have some responsibility) is, after all, a primary reason why, still today, 'at national government level there is no official territorial reorganisation strategy to refer to' (CEC, 2000, 97).

Nevertheless, not only because of the launch of the ITATEN survey (§ 1.1) and despite its early stop, the impression is that national planning structures have begun to increase their weight and awareness of their role since the 1990s. If an origin of this process can be found, it lays on the innovations introduced after the 1988 reform of Structural Funds (SF), 'which have favoured a progressive alignment between national and European regional policy' towards intervention that 'also largely involves territorial criteria' (CEC, 2000, 98-99; Grote, 1996). A decisive institutional provision in this direction was Law no. 488/1992, by which Italian regional policy was transformed from 'extraordinary' state intervention in favour of the *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy) to a proper planning policy dealing with territorial imbalances throughout the whole nation.

A recent development of this 'new deal' for national planning has been the so-called *Nuova Programmazione* (New Programming), 'which assumes the territory as a reference for development policies' (MTBPE, 1998, 10, translated by the author). That slogan was adopted after 1996 when, under the Prodi government, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (the current President of the Italian Republic, former Governor of the Bank of Italy and himself a notorious supporter of European integration) was nominated Minister of the Treasury, Budget and Economy: a Department for Development and Cohesion Policies (certainly not an accidental name) was then specially created to plan and manage SF, regional policies and the new development tools (Gualini, 2001).

In order to plan the Community Support Framework (CSF) and SF for the period 2000-06, the new Department launched and co-ordinated a quite innovative negotiating process, based on the activation of 'regional tables' and of seventeen 'sectorial tables' at national level, respectively oriented to produce regional and sectorial 'interim reports' (CIPE, 1998). Their integration led to a synthesis report (CNFS, 1999) and to six 'priority axes' of intervention, which constitute the essential structure of the 'Southern Italy Development Programme', in its turn articulated in national and regional 'operational programmes' (CIPE, 1999). While the procedure described may appear quite usual in other European countries, it constituted a radical innovation for Italian customs.

2.1.2. Between 'negotiated programming' and 'complex programmes'

The Community influence on national planning changes in Italy is perhaps even more evident if we examine the recent evolution of methods and forms adopted to implement economic development. Using the leverage of the 'local systems' model characterising the tradition of economic, urban and even institutional development in Italy (Goodman et al., 1989; Sforzi, 1999; Putnam, 1993), 'it was not until the middle of the 1980s that initiatives such as the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes (IMP) started to stimulate integrated local development' (Gianfagna and Bonomi, 1997). In fact, Italy was one of the few member states (France and Greece were the others) benefiting from those first Community co-ordinated development actions for European southern regions (6.6 million euro in 1986-92 to counterbalance the impact of the enlargement of the Community to Spain and Portugal), which would become a model for the 1988 SF reform.

Thus, even before the launch of the Community's Territorial Employment Pacts, Italy created its own *Patti Territoriali* (Territorial Pacts) and *Contratti d'Area* (Area-based Contracts) (Budgetary Law no. 662/1996), assigning to the territory an explicit role within 'negotiated programming' of local economic development and providing a first experience for the forthcoming European tools. These also constituted models for more recent 'experiments' at national level, such as the *Patti di Pianificazione* (Planning Pacts) and *Patti Agricoli* (Agricultural Pacts), both adopted by specific decrees in 2000 and representing attempts respectively to link employment and spatial planning policies and to implement similar actions within agricultural policies. 60 territorial pacts (9 'European' among them) are currently being implemented in Italy, plus 18 area contracts and 18 agricultural pacts. The latter, particularly, can flourish on the basis of the experience of about 200 'Local Action Groups' which have been implementing the Leader Community Initiative since 1994, under the supervision of the Ministry of Agricultural Policies.

For its part, in a rather similar way, the Ministry of Public Works appeared to be a quick learner of the first Urban Pilot Projects (UPP) under ERDF Article 10 (Genoa and Venice were selected among the 33 UPP in 1989-93, and Brindisi, Milan, Naples and Turin were added among the 26 in 1997-99) and the Urban Community Initiative (16 Italian cities among the 118 selected in 1994-99, plus 8 involved in Urban II 2000-06). Initially, the *Programmi Integrati d'Intervento* (PII, Integrated Intervention Programmes) were introduced (Law no. 179/1992, art. 16) to overcome the urban complexity of action policies for public housing and were adopted soon, in many regional legislations, as ordinary implementation plans. Subsequently, reiterated Ministerial Decrees (MD) advertised specific competitions to assign national public co-financing funds to local authorities willing to implement: *Programmi di Riqualificazione Urbana* (PRIU, Urban Regeneration Programmes; MD 21 December 1994); *Programmi di Recupero Urbano* (PRU, Urban Recovery Programmes; MD 31 December 1995); *Contratti di Quartiere* (CDQ, Quarter Contracts; MD 20 May 1998); and, finally, the so called PRUSST, *Programmi di Riqualificazione Urbana e di Sviluppo Sostenibile del Territorio* (Programmes for Urban Regeneration and for Sustainable Development of the Territory; MD 8 October 1998).

While at the moment 372 PII, 72 PRIU, 283 PRU, 65 CDQ and 78 PRUSST (up to 870 urban regeneration actions, in addition to the 28 European ones!) have been or are being implemented throughout Italy with a national investment of almost 2.3 billion euros (MLP, 2000, 165-182), the highest stage of evolution of the 'complex programmes' is now represented by the PIT, *Programmi Integrati Territoriali* (Territorial Integrated Programmes), assumed as specific tool for urban policies within the CSF 2000-06.

2.2. Regions

2.2.1. Growing attention to spatial visions

Almost as if it were a disease inherited from the national government, a trend in lack of spatial visions seems to affect the 'new way of doing politics', carried out in Italy after the institution of regions in the 1970s (Putnam, 1993). The fact in itself that territorial policies, which since then have been assigned to regional governments, 'rarely go beyond the coordination of planning carried out by different local authorities' (CEC, 2000, 100) leads Italian regions to be worryingly less emancipated and uncertain in their strategic horizons within the context of European inter-territorial competition.

Yet for some time now it has been possible to see the re-blossoming in the words and images of decision-makers and actors of original and broader strategic contexts of reference and self-recognition, tending to be open to taking a glance over the border. Despite the minor impact of the ESDP (§ 1), regional subjects appeared increasingly intrigued by new perspectives and opportunities (as well as risks) emerging from the new 'geographies', however traced at EU level: from the Trans-European Networks (TEN) to the cross-border and transnational areas under the Interreg Community Initiative.

Since 1990, typical border regions such as the Alpine ones (namely Friuli - Venezia Giulia, South Tyrol, Valley of Aosta, plus the mountain provinces of Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto), which are historically linked to cross-border macro-regions, but were artificially separated by political border and reduced to a peripheral position within the national space, seem to have found a 'new centrality' and self-awareness in the construction of the European space. The lengthy life of the cross-border strand of Interreg thus also contributed to a progressive re-equilibrium between 'central' and 'peripheral' Italian regions in terms of initiative and organisational capacity.

After 1996, the fertility of a spatial approach to co-operation has been transferred in part to wider strategic areas, under Interreg IIC and ERDF Article 10 Pilot Actions. With many possible consequences for their future strategies, all Italian regions are currently involved in four transnational co-operation areas looking at the different cardinal points under Interreg IIIB (2000-06): *Alpine Space* (the entire Alpine Arc in the north of Italy, from the French Côte d'Azur to Austria and Slovenia); *Archimed* (the southern part of the Mediterranean Sea, between Southern Italy, Greece and Northern Africa); *Cadses* (the regions linked to Eastern Europe, from the Baltic Sea

to the Ionian Sea); and *Western Mediterranean* (the area of the so-called Latin-Mediterranean Arc, from Sicily to the Portuguese Algarve).

2.2.2. 'Forced training' in mutual agreement

Also thanks to Interreg, and despite the major difficulties that emerged in implementing its transnational strand (Janin Rivolin, 2000; 2001), the need to elaborate joint co-operation programmes between extra-national administrations, starting by drawing up rules valid in different and not always compatible legal contexts, seems to have triggered practices of 'forced training' of state and regional bureaucracies in inter-institutional negotiation. The change is certainly not proving easy in a country where, traditionally, institutional disagreements are unceremoniously subjected to judicial proceedings. But the acknowledgment that, under Community Initiatives, the absence of mutual agreement simply prevents co-financing is quickly producing its effects.

So this has somehow provided a major opportunity to put into practice and understand in depth the principles and tools of inter-institutional partnership introduced in Italy at the beginning of the decade. For instance, the *Accordo di Programma* (Programme Agreement; Law no. 142/1990, art. 8) and the *Conferenza dei Servizi* (Conference of Services; Law no. 241/1990, art. 14) are negotiation procedures to co-ordinate actions taken by institutional administrations or agencies; the *Accordo di Programma Quadro* (Framework Programming Agreement; Law no. 662/1996, art. 203) is currently the most advanced contractual model for public/private partnership.

On the one hand, implementing new forms and models of strategic, co-operative and bargaining actions to stimulate local, non-local, public and private actors in integrated territorial projects can be a suitable way to institutionally capitalise the Italian 'civic traditions' (Putnam, 1993). On the other, it could reveal itself as the most profitable way to benefit collectively from a 'territorial recomposition' of the spontaneous diversity and variety of the thousand local systems of which Italy is historically composed (Governa and Salone, 2002).

2.3. Cities and urban planning

2.3.1. Emerging new paradigms for territorial governance

At the local level, starting with the urban areas affected by the new Community and national regeneration programmes and through the fertile dissemination of best practices and the desire to stand out (in turn favoured by widespread confidence in the 'EU brand', in a country which had taxed itself in order to embrace the euro...), seems in many ways more willing to metabolise the innovation in progress, so much so that one can foresee the possibility of 'new paradigms for actions of territorial governance' (MIT, 2001).

Not only where, as in Piedmont, a so-called 'Urban method' has been explicitly adopted to implement regional programmes for urban regeneration (Cavallo Perin,

2002) or where, as in Bari, an 'Urban effect' on the institutional capacity is carefully investigated (Barbanente and Tedesco, 2002), a growing and spreading awareness of urban governance possibilities is giving a great impulse to the 'Europeanisation' of the Italian urban system (Bonavero, Dematteis and Sforzi, 1999). A 'governance approach' is beginning to overcome the traditional (and often proven ineffective) 'government approach' to urban policies at two complementary levels of innovation (Padovani, 2002).

On the one hand, the impact brought about by the EU's key principles (subsidiarity, integration, partnership, sustainability etc.) on the technical and administrative culture of local authorities is remarkable. This apparently led to overcoming a sector and hierarchical orientation that has traditionally characterised public policies in Italy, through new forms of co-operation, collaborative and negotiated activities between the various sectors and levels of public administration. In particular, important implications have flowed from the involvement and participation of voluntary committees, associations and citizens in the development of action programmes, allowing fuller use of 'social resources' available for urban policies and a strengthening of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the actions taken.

On the other hand, EU urban programmes have generated specific 'practices' which produce precise effects. For example, the emphasis on distinct portions of the city or territory (run-down neighbourhoods, deprived urban areas, places of excellence etc.; Cremaschi, 2002b) has intensified a process of deconstruction of solid concepts like 'urban system' or 'city planning'; also generating, of course, a problematic rapport with the comprehensive and a-temporal character of ordinary planning tools. Another example is the promotion of thematic networks and programmes, which has facilitated an increase in the individual and collective actors involved in urban policies, with a strengthening of their capabilities of self-organisation into aggregations that are mutable according to specific themes or situations. Their contributions have led to learning processes, better understanding and the capability of defining problems and proposals which have also been developed in wider contexts than local ones.

New institutional actors, social practices and operators are thus now crowding the stage of Italian planning: the risks of confusion and distortion appear, as things stand, more limited than the solutions experimented, the models of action invented or the occasions triggered for genuine product and process innovations in the methods and styles of urban and territorial governance. In this perspective, urban planners have become involved in the design and implementation of innovative 'plans', not only in the sense of a new interpretation of the urban planner's traditional work (Laino, 2002).

2.3.2. Changes for 'urban planner's jobs'

'How urban planner's jobs are changing in Italy' was the significant title of a dossier presented by the *Società Italiana degli Urbanisti* (SIU, Italian Society of Urban Planners) at the Turin National Conference on 5 December 1997. That document expressed the results of a survey based on 23 interviews with urban and regional

planning professionals and institutional and research bodies for and on 10 'summaries' on new institutional forms of planning and policies requiring new professional competencies or determining new conditions in the planning profession (Balducci, 1998).

Half of the dossier's interviews referred explicitly and repeatedly to Structural Funds, Community Initiatives and European integration perspectives, while three summaries were specifically dedicated to Interreg, Urban and Life-Environment Programme (a further three concerned national developments of European cohesion policy actions, already mentioned, namely *Patti territoriali* and *Contratti d'area*, PII and PRU; § 2.1.2). In brief, the SIU dossier in 1997 was suggesting, albeit covertly, what is now appearing much more evident: EU intervention can be attributed with a fair amount of the 'changes' that have begun to be seen in 'planner's jobs in Italy'.

These are linked, based on the emerging paradigms of urban and territorial governance, to the rise of planning practices as *local development strategies* instead, as was traditionally true, always and only as an 'administrative duty' or as 'designer projects'. In fact, Italy's planning tradition took shape rather recently: the urban historian Guido Zucconi (1989) has been keen on representing its origins as the result of a 'struggle' among different disciplines on the technical 'right' to plan the cities, which architects finally won around the 1930s. It would be not misleading to summarise the subsequent evolution of planning culture in Italy as a permanent oscillation of planners' attention between the administrative duty, more than technical awareness, of land use regulation (Campos Venuti, 1967) and the search for new poetics for urban design (Secchi, 1989).

During the past decade, instead, we have seen in Italy a progressive shift of technical focus from city plans (and their designers) to urban policies (and to the cities). Without any institutionalisation of new planning tools, then, in the last three/four years a dozen Italian towns of large and middling size – some of them important, like Rome, Milan, Turin, Florence and Genoa, but also spontaneous aggregations of small municipalities, have started to adopting 'strategic plans', adding to, substituting or integrating the institutionally adopted local plans (Torino Internazionale, 2000; ASNM, 2001; Comune di Milano, 2001; Comune di Genova, 2002; Provincia di Firenze, 2002). A great debate on this new 'planning season' is now open in Italy and the fact in itself that the new plans show themselves as so different in terms of aims, methods and styles suggests many possibilities of integrating 'urbanism' traditions, regulatory needs and the strategic dimensions of planning.

3. Italy's contribution to European spatial planning

Despite considerable appreciation in the European planning debate of the many forms of EU intervention in territorial and urban matters, it must be admitted that, with a few exceptions (for instance, Williams, 1996), the attempts at more comprehensive reflections on EU spatial policies remain weak. In recent years, more lively discussion led to the acknowledgement that proper 'European spatial planning' was taking

shape but, quite understandably, it has been attracted by the 'top level' of its creation, especially the events concerning the ESDP and the alike (CSD, ESPON etc.) (Faludi and Zonneveld, 1997; Bengs and Böhme, 1998; 1999; Williams, 2000; Faludi, 2001; Bengs, 2002; Faludi and Waterhout, 2002).

Albeit exciting, a European planning discourse only or mainly focused on the ESDP runs at least three major risks:

- to remain a hostage to formal and institutional conflicts, above all the 'competency issue' (a section in the keynote address of the Congress by Faludi is dedicated to this theme), since one only is the subject to contend for;
- to have to accept a dichotomy between *land use regulation* planning and *strategic* planning as ineluctable and irreconcilable (the price paid to try to resolve the competency issue);
- to overlook planning practices, which are instead the 'litmus paper' to verify the effectiveness (and even the existence) of European spatial planning.

After all, what Italy's experience shows is that, in spite of there being little national consideration of the ESDP, European spatial planning has proven alive and effective (in a strategic sense) in triggering fundamental changes in planning practices at all the levels of territorial and urban governance, even in a country where a regulatory planning approach is traditionally adopted. Another suggestion that emerges from the Italian experience is that comparative reflection on the overall impact of EU spatial policies on national planning practices could be a useful task, in order to fill the gaps of a discourse which still keeps European spatial planning and national planning systems as separate options.

3.1. The need for a 'multi-level governance' oriented framework

Following the current developments of the EU political debate (CEC, 2001), one could also assert that a conceptualisation of European spatial planning should deserve a 'multi-level governance' oriented framework, able to take into account its different features and instruments from Community to local level.

As a preliminary outline within such a framework, the ESDP – technically 'a set of labels for desirable things, indubitably good but vague and wide open for definition' (Bengs, 1999, 9-10; Palermo, 2000) – represents above all how European spatial planning has made itself an institution by itself, in spite of the original shortcomings in the Treaties. More than its 'policy aims', its development process and the related 'informal' constitution of a European Council of Ministers for Spatial Planning is one of the greatest demonstrations of how the concrete needs of a community can trigger institutional changes in practice and, with the possibility of giving real shape to Europe's 'economic and social cohesion' (one of the fundamental principles after the Single Act), show how deep the aspirations of the European Community to become a Union are. This is the main reason why opposition to formal acknowledgement of European spatial planning among (or above) the regional policy tasks, with shared competencies and official relations with other European policies (specially Environment and TEN), would simply appear to run against history; but, for the same

reason, an unsolved competency issue will certainly not be able to prevent what is already a fact.

After the 1988 reform, the Structural Funds have become a primary Community means for economic and social cohesion. It is no chance if since then SF have begun to be directed towards 'eligible areas' (regions and municipalities), to tackle 'priority objectives' valid for 'programming periods' of six/seven years: one would say even a sort of 'continental zoning'. In any case, although a spatial orientation of the 'mainstream' of SF might appear almost subliminal, the Italian example of the *Nuova Programmazione* (§ 2.1.1) demonstrates that it is not without a certain effectiveness in the long term. Currently constituting 37% of expenditure in the Community budget (213 billion euros), SF could rightly become the 'pot of gold' of European spatial planning (Williams, 1996, 114), if only national, regional and local authorities in Europe felt themselves fully represented by the ESDP.

A trend towards spatial orientation, able to contribute to innovating even the 'old' Community Agricultural Policy (CAP), has been much more visible in the development of Community Initiatives during the past decade: especially after the reduction, entering the 2000-06 programming period, from 13 to 4 initiatives, among which 3 are specifically directed at spatial interventions (Interreg III, Urban II and Leader+, altogether granted almost 7.6 billion euros of co-financing, 73% of the assigned amount). Constituting only a minority share of SF in financial terms, the specific instruments of European structural policy can nevertheless indicate two clear strategies for multi-level spatial planning action:

- inter-institutional co-operation for spatial development, basically through Interreg and following what was progressively added in the documents *Europe 2000*, *Europe 2000+* (CEC, 1991; 1994) and the ESDP; and
- the promotion of exemplary processes of urban and rural regeneration, respectively through Urban and Leader, and based on the Communications of the Commission *Towards an Urban Agenda* and *Sustainable urban development in the European Union* (CEC, 1997b; 1998), as well as the CAP guidelines.

On the one hand, a dozen transnational strategic spaces plus 60 cross-border co-operation areas and, on the other, about 260 actions in European cities (including UPP) and more than a thousand rural Local Action Projects (LAP) represent the essential evidence of the state of things. Particularly, urban actions prove to cover a great importance for the making of a European spatial policy (Cremaschi, 2002a) and, seen in this light, the shareable demand for an 'EU urban policy' (Atkinson and Dühr, 2002) could rather and more effectively be directed at focusing attention on urban policies and local actions within European spatial planning.

Within such a wider framework, national planning systems find their place as the main institutional tools of European spatial planning, obviously fully autonomous in their legal proceedings and cultural traditions, but jointly and consciously oriented to achieve the economic and social cohesion of Europe. In this perspective, what has been said about Italy so far could prove nothing else than the fact that, once again, in such a community-rooted process as European integration, practices speak louder than words.

If such a perspective can be accepted, a necessary task for European planners would be to verify its trustworthiness through comparative reflections and soon make it evident at a political level.

3.2. 'ESDP Audit': a practical proposal

After due consideration, the 'ESDP application' commitment (CEC, 1999, 37-48; Finnish Presidency, 1999) can offer a valuable opportunity to test the possibilities of multi-level oriented European spatial planning. To interpret the 'application' task as a *challenge* for the ESDP in facing the instituted national planning policies seems also the most effective way to increase its political strength.

Within the problematic Italian background regarding the ESDP, the above assumption constituted the basis of the proposal called 'SDEC Audit' (the French acronym was employed because of the irksome pronunciation of the Italian one: SSSE), presented to the DICOTER in the framework of consultancy for a 'critical reading of the ESDP with respect to national territorial policies' (Dematteis and Janin Rivolin, 2001). There is need to clarify that what will be described below about this idea has not gone beyond the proposal state so far and, for this reason, by no means could be regarded as evidence of the application of the ESDP in Italy (which would appear in contradiction with the report in § 1.2). Rather, it is here offered to the reader as simple methodological suggestion on the possibility to put a multi-level oriented European spatial planning at work.

The basic idea of the 'SDEC Audit', subtitled as 'Project for the practical testing of the ESDP through inter-institutional networks within Interreg III', was to involve national, regional and local authorities (and the European Commission) in transnational co-operative processes of verification of the ESDP within the Interreg IIIB strategic areas (the project was originally conceived for the four areas involving Italy; § 2.2.1), hinging the possibility of mutual agreements on a more detailed redefinition of the intergovernmental document according to emerging local themes (including the local implementation of SF, Community Initiatives etc.) against an adaptation of local policies to the European perspective.

As a model, an ESDP audit should take the form of an Interreg 'umbrella project' (or strategic project) in each transnational co-operation area, including possibly all the national and regional authorities concerned, and a selection of local authorities strategically positioned in the area and willing to participate. Each transnational project thus envisages a three level *inter-institutional network*, assisted by a two level *research network*. The tasks and responsibilities of the former are: general coordination and organisation, information merging and dissemination of results at the level of the national authorities network; animation, specific initiatives and relations with other institutions at the level of the regional authorities network; collecting information and relations with local subjects at the level of the local authorities network. The latter would be composed by a transnational Scientific Group (universities, research institutes), contributing to the formulation of the work, its management and monitoring; and by a related Technical Group (professional researchers) for the collection of material and elaboration of data and information.

Seven phases are envisaged in the space of four years and for an average total cost of about 20 million euros per area (Definition of relevant themes; Dissemination in the area; Launch of a transnational debate; Definition of audit indicators; Local audit; Report; and Transnational Conference, with the signing of possible agreement protocols), altogether aiming at four main expected results:

- Articulated and ‘clever’ dissemination of the ESDP in the co-operation area;
- Launch of a structured and locally-oriented transnational debate on the ESDP;
- Local audit action to test the application opportunities of the ESDP policy aims in the co-operation area;
- Shared proposals to:
 - a ‘subtler’ redefinition of the ESDP for the specific themes concerned;
 - a reshaping of national, regional and local planning policies and tools in the scope of the ESDP.

Summarising, an ESDP audit aims at a multi-level set of targets:

- at the EU level, to experiment common methodologies for ESDP dissemination and application;
- at the transnational co-operation area level, to test the ESDP policy aims referring to common spatial characters and problems (including the local implementation of SF and Community Initiatives);
- at the national level, to consider the reframing of spatial policies in the scope of Community perspectives;
- at the regional and local levels, to increase technical and institutional capacities as part of trans-European ‘laboratory networks’.

In so doing, further opportunities could emerge to establish new networks for exchanging information, methodologies and good practices. Particularly, concrete contribution could be given to each Interreg IIIB programme implementation; to lay the foundations for appropriate integration between national/regional spatial planning and the ESPON; to strengthen and finalise to a European approach relationships between public authorities and scientific institutions in the field of spatial planning.

In conclusion, the idea of an ESDP audit was conceived as a virtuous way to combine in practice both research *for* and *on* the ESDP (Bengs, 1999, 11), directly involving European public authorities responsible for spatial planning (including the European Commission for what concerning the SF and Community Initiatives). Soon after its delivery to the DICOTER, the newly instituted Italian Committee on Spatial Development (§ 1.2) considered its contribution ‘extremely important’ and ‘fully agreed’ on its aims, but stated that ‘it hardly appears to be a feasible proposition as a single project in all four Interreg IIIB co-operation spaces’ concerning Italy (CNSS, 2001, 2). Nevertheless, the proposal was presented at the ‘Alpine Space’ programme’s transnational seminar in Strasbourg, 4-5 October 2001, attracting interest especially by the representatives of the French DATAR (*Délégation à*

l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régionale) and of the Austrian Federal Chancellery. But, apart from that, nothing happened.

4. Conclusions

An ESDP audit remains a simple proposal, though. The very conclusion of this note is that there is evidence to assert that European spatial planning, driven as it is by the shared political principle of 'economic and social cohesion' and in spite of its natural institutional difficulties, is suitable for introducing innovative paradigms for territorial governance and planning practices in Europe. Seen in this light, it might even appear to be the trump card to allow EU and national governments to increase Europe's competitiveness on the worldwide scenario. If this view can be accepted, a joint effort is needed by European planners in order to patiently discuss and share reasons for, features and expectations of European spatial planning, and to make them evident to a wider public.

Following Italy's experience, one would say that EU intervention in territorial and urban matters contributed to take quickly bringing out both the 'two relevant and seemingly contradictory characters' which, not only in Italy, have characterised planning activities during the last 50 years: 'a continuous and growing process of diversification and specialisation, and a slow and uncertain development of the formalised technical knowledge' (Mazza, 2002, 11). To waste such an opportunity to redefine the roots of a common discipline, which cannot do without valuable planning traditions, would simply be a shame.

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