

Chapter 23

Wiki-Planning: The Experience of Basento Park In Potenza (Italy)

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ABSTRACT

Today, 2.0 information technologies undoubtedly represent the most important media. The main innovation is the transition from a one-way approach where citizens are only informed, to a two-way approach where citizens can express their opinion in a wiki-way, where a strong interaction among citizens can lead to a production of important ideas and opinions substantially influencing choices. Great part of planning documents are produced adopting hidden agendas, favouritisms, unclear agreements, ambiguous administrative acts; thus, citizens are not able to find a suitable location to denounce responsibilities and to seek for remedies. Generally, citizens do not believe in participatory activities, because they have poor trust in institutions, especially in this period; they suppose that decisions have been already taken before a meeting. The typical approach to participation generally can be located at the lower levels of Arnstein Ladder. In this field, social platforms played a crucial role in the experience of Basento park in Potenza (Basilicata, southern Italy). Starting from a project designed by architects and engineers, Facebook and Twitter blogs were the means to discuss among citizens and between citizens and administrator in order to improve the project and to better explain its basic idea.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic participation to planning process is just an integration of traditional approaches, adopting the internet to ask citizens for opinions concerning possible choices or to vote about which is the

best solution. In wiki-planning approach, citizens, probably unconsciously, face many of the typical steps adopted in planning process, reaching the higher level of levels of Arnstein Ladder. Generally, a group of citizens denounces the most critical aspects occurring in an area (analysis of problems),

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another group defines a set of objectives, another group prepares a list of alternatives and after a lot of discussions a huge part of a community proposes an idea, a project with the great support of public opinion. Social platforms become the main place where producing and developing ideas. Also, newspapers, which generally are more influenced by economic lobbies than by individual ideas, can support a project, if it is supported by an important opinion movement.

Since 1960s several experiences developed in the U.S.A. highlighted that a low level of life quality was strictly connected to a limited capacity of a community to influence decisions concerning their city (Jacobs, 1961). Strong roots of residents towards the place where they live is a key factor in determining the quality of a neighbourhood or a city producing a great desire of inhabitants to participate to the decision process concerning a particular area. More particularly a dirigiste approach to planning produces urban renewal policies, mainly based on private capitals and interests, that generate a decrease in quality of social life in cities. Very frequently, decision-makers ignore planners suggestions facilitating interests of particular stakeholders. In this scenario a movement called advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965) has grown with the main aim to improve urban environment and quality of neighbourhoods. Many planners, frustrated because of their inability to meaningfully influence decision-makers in addressing social and economic issues, supported citizens in organizing advocacy organizations. Everything has mainly developed at neighbourhood scale representing a sort of advocate of neighbourhood quality at municipality scale. This experience represents the first attempt of a wider citizens involvement in planning process. How citizens have been involved in planning process and the effectiveness of this involvement has been classified by Arnstein (1969).

Advocacy planning can be considered as a part of a wider approach called Community-based

planning adopted in 1960s in several cities of USA focused on social problems. The concept of community is based on a set of inhabitants and economic operators who live and work in a portion of city sharing this place. Community-based planning considers this local community as a natural partner in tackling common problems and encouraging a wider participation in decision-making.

In subsequent years social learning theories have been developed which together with progressive planning movements represent the bases of communicative planning theory (Forester, 1999).

Forester wished close cooperation between planners and citizens in order to foster greater understanding of the contents of choices and decision making processes contributing in helping the most disadvantaged communities. *Communicative planning* pays more attention to qualitative aspects provided by citizens interpretation of the place where they live, avoiding to consider only technical and socio-economical analysis based on experts knowledge. A participated plan has more probability to be faithfully implemented, because its goals are part of an idea of the city strongly supported by its inhabitants, but despite a great number of experiences, the typical approach to citizens participation to planning generally can be located at the lower levels of Arnstein Ladder.

Generally citizens do not believe in participatory activities, because they have poor trust in institutions, especially in this period; they suppose that decisions have been already taken before a meeting. Great part of planning documents are produced adopting hidden agendas, favouritisms, unclear agreements, ambiguous administrative acts; thus, citizens are not able to find a suitable location to denounce responsibilities and to seek for remedies. Another criticism of the traditional participatory approaches derives from the poor ability in engaging citizens in public assemblies (Forrester et al., 1999) and from the fact that the sample involved in the process is often unrepresentative of the population of the whole city.

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