



# How can we plan and manage together our cities as a commons? Civic Art, Applied Anthropology and collaborative planning. Adriana Goñi Mazzitelli

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## ABSTRACT

Our daily territories are built by traditional planning that not only use sophisticated methods of decision *top-down*, but is also influenced by strong economic interests. Therefore, this kind of process imposes technocratic and political important changes in the ecosystem and living space of people without their awareness about what is happening around. This article presents a growing alternative in territorial planning that has drawn from various disciplines as well as social and historical circumstances constantly changing over the last forty years.

Since the 70s and 80s several social and academic movements begin to question the logic of rational and authoritarian planning as well as experiment methods and techniques that involve people participation to bring processes into the sphere of everyday life needs. From this emerging point of view, Urban or Regional Planning was seen as an opportunity, a tool to recognize the resources of territories and reposition the capabilities and role of local communities in the protection and management of their commons (Alexander, 1977). In the 90s social sciences that started to work with planning processes, particularly anthropology, indicated that this view was not complete because the lack of attention to cultural issues and local identity, underlining the need to add this fundamental dimension to planning (Althabe and Selim, 2000). In the early 2000s, the revolution in multimedia languages and consolidation of Civic Art end to form a transdisciplinary scenario that we call *collaborative planning*. That means hundreds of experiences of emerging democracy in the world with the collaboration of artists, planners, universities, local governments and communities, reinforcing the practice of Do it Yourself, against total democratic delegate. In that sense, there has been a great work in the last years in order to find better methodologies to safeguard natural and social commons (Ostrom, 2005) as well as understand how to make a collective management of them.

**Keywords:** extreme situations, emerging democracy, collaborative planning, civic art, commons.

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## ***A world of extreme situations. Urban growing, migrations, urban divide, climate change, water crisis and energy transition.***

In the last century cities have been privileged as the center of the economic and social development model, with serious consequences in the movement of millions of people from rural to urban environments. As the UN Population Division stated in 2009, it is expected that in 2050 seven out of ten people in the world live in the city (UN, 2009).

The greatest dimension of this phenomenon affects particularly urban and regional planning, which should consider 75 million people who migrate each year worldwide (Balbo, 2012).

Cities are the new productive and directional axis, needing management models at a large scale, for example the Mega Regions, Urban Corridors or City Regions, with exorbitant numbers of population that can reach 200 million people or more.

These Mega Urban systems, say UN Habitat involves a number of advantages in various regions of the world, as for example, improving the interconnectivity between cities, creating complementary activities in regions in virtuous cases (UNHabitat, 2008). While on the other hand, for the critics of urban prevalent system, it creates greatest differences that reinforce the major and equipped centers, undermining the functions of small centers, producing forced migrations of local populations and *shrinking cities*.

Furthermore strengthen this kind of transnational economies, takes away increasingly local populations and governments from the possibility of thinking self-sufficient and sustainable systems. Nowadays international capitals flow trigger raw materials and goods globally, creating a new geography that divides the world in manufacturing areas, raw materials and natural resources areas, directional and service areas (Harvey, 2012). The social consequence of this is a new global geography of rights and exclusion, with areas where people are evicted and exploit, and areas of wellness and richness, creating new global inequalities.

Travelling inside the cities we find how the segregation growth, creating an evident urban divide among populations with severe consequences in pacific coexistence and services management. As Peter Marcuse underline post modern cities are *partitioned city*, with more than 800 million people living in slums in extreme spatial and social conditions (Davis, 2006). This kind of development needs a lot of urban land, creating non sustainable phenomenon as *Urban Sprawl*, which is called also *peripheralization*, not only the *growth of suburbs for middle class or gated communities (fortress for rich people)*, but also for the creation of *favelas* and marginalized populations (Margulis and Urresti, 1999). Usually governments and planning systems realized the effects of the urbanization after these changes, and need to *repair* and *incorporate* this new parts of the cities, which at the begging were not functional to the rest of the urban form, needing to give them services and *resilience qualities*, in order to organize the fastest growth and give the same rights to all the urban inhabitants.

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Another important issue is the climate change, research indicates that by 2050, more than two thirds of the world's population will be under water stress as well as that the artificial methods for producing animal food cancel the capability of human beings for an autonomous and healthy consumption (Rifkin, 2001). Therefore, if we don't consider inside planning a responsible role about consumption of natural resources, we can arrive to a deep water and food crisis in the middle of XXI century. International Planning could not be any more an illusion, as Ellinor Ostrom, Nobel prize of economy, indicated in the '90s: governments could not wait for a global coordination, but need to develop environmental national policies, involving populations, in order to safeguard commons at least among their own borders (Ostrom, 1990).

Although international agreements about environmental issues tried to develop in governments a particular attention towards an energetic transition and sustainable practices, in many cases this allows the creation of a new version of capitalist economy, without redistribution criteria and looking for profit as well as the traditional one, what is called the new *green economy* (Raitano, 2012). The situation gets worst when emerging economies follow the same behavior looking for *development* and *growth*, making clear that natural resources are not the inheritance for future generations but the economic sources to be *exploited* and *defended* for assure the future survival of one part of the humanity. Although some governments declare they exploit natural resources with redistribution purposes, in order to create wellness and pacific coexistence, as Latin American ones, the number of investment in arms of the BRICS, the five major emerging national economies association: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, demonstrate they are preparing for a not pacific coexistence in this purpose. Between 2011 and 2015 the expenses in military issues show an increase in the purchase of arms and security systems of 140% for China, 70% for Brazil, 40% for India and 31% for Russia (Nascia, 2012).

## ***Worldwide Counter-hegemonic movements for the safeguard of commons***

With globalization, the scale of international capital grows, and from New York to Seoul or Mexico City, the *developers*, and in the last years the *speculative financiers*, create *financial bubbles* that force the systems until a crisis. The States undertake debts to solve people's problems which constrain them to implement austerity measures that in general affect public services, although they are useful more than ever in this economic crisis circumstances in order to not punish the poorer classes creating more social iniquities (Harvey, 2012).

The *development* and *growth* process has had historically social oppositions of different kinds. In the first modernity, large movements of workers fought for their rights as well as spent much of their efforts in order to build a Welfare State. They were the first mass movement that made clear the contradictions of capitalism, as for example thinking just in the profit for the leader class. Perhaps one of the main mistakes of this movement was to believe that their rights should be safeguarded, as well as the gradual inclusion of the proletariat and the sub proletariat to the benefits of the system, by trusting just in the representative democratic system, where the union's voice should be considered (Merklen, 2009). However, the Welfare State model produces sophisticated institutions distantly too much from the comprehension, decision and control of people in everyday life (Newman, Barnes, Sullivan and Knops, 2004). Nowadays the capitalist system evolves creating *artificial needs* in people that then constrain the States to make debts in order to give more houses, more infrastructures, the newest technologies, biggest airports, fastest trains, etc.

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(Canclini, 2008). The States have to negotiate in order to have more capitals of inversion, but playing in the new logic of modern economic system is in an evident disadvantage for creating balanced scenarios (Harvey, 2012).

Although the current model is devastating the world, new social movements are growing with the slogan *right to the city is right to decide about our economy* (Hall, 2012), *food sovereignty* (Shiva, 2005), *protection of landscapes and natural ecosystems*, as well as our *immaterial and material heritage* (Schroeder, 2006).

The principles in which new alternative movements are based propose to create a new culture of safeguard of commons different from the *growth and development* one. It should consider the **reduction** of consumption and of pollution, the **reconversion** of all energies, industrial materials and urbanization and the **relocation** of goods and products, returning to local and self-production (Viale, 2011). The most important supporters of these new theories and statements are the civil society organizations, but many local governments are interested as they believe that these changes are urgent. As for example the Slow Cities network that exchange good practices looking for social and spatial justice solutions, against the growing exploitation of local resources and the extreme poverty. However governments of other cities are not interested at all, as the police and military repression demonstrate in many parts of the world, where the economic crisis happened more often than before, even in the developed countries of the *North*. We can see nowadays riots in french Banlieu, or in London peripheries, as well as occupations in public spaces as the *indignados* of Madrid, or the movements against austerity in Greece. They are worldwide connected, celebrating the *Arab Spring* movements in North Africa, as well as the current South Africa liberation ones, or the shy *Occupy* from Wall Street to Hong Kong (Chomsky and Mehennin, 2012). Due to new technologies for the first time there is a global awareness of the negative effects of the current economic model, the novelty change is that nowadays there is also a critic Western Centre, that could not avoid the crisis, the corruption and the concentration of power as well as in other countries in the world (Castells, 2012). Furthermore, many of these local alternative experiences are connecting among them, getting into international networks, which believe that in processes of transformation it's necessary to involve specially the right holders, which means those ones who live in the informality and are never consulted (Roy, 2005).

## **What can planning do in this context?**

In every historical period and geographic scenario we can found experiences of collective building of cities and territories, however the right to decide and the traditional capabilities to contribute in the self-made of territories has been *expropriated* from people with the representative democratic system by *delegate* this right to the State, giving up the management of commons.

In the XIX Century with the consolidation of the Welfare State as the main responsible of social and spatial organization, territorial and urban planning grow as well. At that time the most accurate planning seemed to be the rational one which follow the completely delegate to the State, that should work very close to the market and the private economic forces, in imaging and build territories. In 1994 the Italian urban planner Marco Cremaschi stated that this kind of approach had arrived to a deep crisis, as it was not able to make suitable planning of commons, moving away from social needs and reinforcing the sectorial division in which the modern State deal with everyday people's life. He proposed three great challenges for planning: a) The need

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of return to a narrow scale in urban and territorial planning, or an anthropological measure of planning: b) The development of the Plan process as a *somatization* of places and problems, paying particular attention in the deep meanings of urban space for people that live in it, as well as they needs and priorities: c) the difficulties of communicate the results of planning that generally produce maps, or technique designs, thus the need of produce narratives of the desire changes in a collective way, capable of finding a place in the common sense of local culture and the practices of people who live in that places.

On the other hand Alessandro Giangrande (2004) who studied deeply strategic participatory planning introduce a fourth challenge; the need to be aware that traditional planning privilege the scientific disciplinary knowledge as well as the private interest. Therefore, it represents the technical and active stakeholders view as well as their interpretations of the context letting outside other voices of the processes.

In 1999 John Forester proposed to renew the planning practice by public deliberations in which all citizens, rural or urban ones, could participate with planners and politicians in the main decisions for their future, as well as in the process of public learning about their own territories past and present. Furthermore, he tried to advise young planners about the great difficulties in plan complex society if they just consider *the facts*, suggesting them to follow *the values* of the cultures in the place, asking people and governments, what should be *honor*, *protect* or *transform* in that territory. Although the empiric evidence all around the world demonstrates that this kind of planning works better in complex societies, Forester said that he found a great resistance in planners. He observed that his colleagues in urban planning reproduce a hierarchical planning where they don't want to lose the *power of experts*, although the processes show the importance of having *grassroots decision makers*, as well as other disciplines that know how to read the symbolic aspects among planning groups.

On one hand the social changes that we mentioned before put under pressure not only hierarchical governments, but also the role of the sciences and professions that follow planning processes. Within this historical context a science that used to reduce natural and social processes to quantitative data that could be control and plan rationally, was questioned as it didn't take into account the postmodern complexity. On the other hand the critics went to a science that tends to follow the last findings or modes, as the modern movement of Le Corbusier (Bourdieu, 1999), that created copies of its social housing ideas all around the world without interact with the local social and cultural context (Massarenti, 2007). Furthermore, this approach with fair objectives of giving new urban areas of quality to marginalized populations in cities (Caldeira, 2000), gets into misery enclaves of young criminality and exclusion (Rossal and Fraiman, 2009).

## **Possible paths for a collaborative planning**

From our research it came obvious how a new planning paradigm, that explores the dialogue with inhabitants and social movements, it's getting stronger and represents a real option for collective building of territories (Durand, 2012).

In the '70s, Cristopher Alexander invented a method with many interest techniques that aims to create a common planning language among people, in order to motivate them to get protagonist of the bottom – up democratic decisions building everyday life places (Alexander 1977). Furthermore, he stated that it seemed really difficult to get a



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common vision among people, as they have different values and cultural backgrounds, however, he demonstrated that there were common *emotional centers* in human being experience. At that time he was influenced by the school in Environmental Psychology, that took him to study these emotional centers in different cultures around the world, thanks to this he made an important collection of universal emotions and reactions to particular environmental conditions calling it *The Nature of Order*.

What Alexander wanted to promote was a reaction to urban traditional planning, by demonstrating why emotions are so rich and important as rational aspects of planning. In addition to this he created a system to translate these emotions in urban design tools by what he called a *pattern language*. The patterns are the architectonic materialization that had been given to emotions, in different cultures, as fear, calm, anxiety, in front of different kind of spaces, open, close and so on, as well as the sensations of the body in contact with different materials as wood, stone, water, among others. This approach wanted to create a collective reflection in people about the emotions of wellbeing that the best combinations of these aspects create in life experience, as well as the importance of the contact between man and his habitat.

Another school of collaborative planning less centered in architecture and more in the local plans and projects is the Spanish and Latin American one driven in the last thirty years by the sociologist Tomas Rodríguez Villasante. He was a professor of the Complutense University of Madrid and founder of the CIMAS Iepala Institute that collect cases of participatory planning in Latin America and Spain (XXI local agendas, participatory budgets, local action plans, and so on). One of the most important contribution of Villasante and his research group is to analyze deeply the relational aspects of power in participatory processes. Furthermore, they create a series of techniques as the *Sociograma*, which maps different actors relationships, identifying alliances as well as conflicts that help to make a complete scenario of all this social and political engineering. The main purpose of Villasante, as he works with social movements, as indigenous people, feminists, younger, and so on, is to imagine new ways of participatory democracy by getting people aware of the complex systems of domination relationships, as well as built together strategies in order to give more power to the bottom up initiatives for overcame the hierarchies in each cultural system (Villasante, 2006).

We can identify this work as part of the current social theory studies about the role that global movements have at this moment in looking for alternative models of representative democracy, as Boavenutra de Sousa Santos studies from the *CES Centro de Estudos Sociais* at Coimbra University in Portugal [1] (De Sousa Santos, 2003). In this center many researchers collect cases from all the world, even far away from the traditional democratic systems we know, as for example the Kerala State in India, with 32 million people, and a *caste system*, that creates a horizontal way of planning and decision by participatory budgeting with its agrarian cooperatives. Even China is studied by them as the fast growing urban economy, as long as the corruption in government create great urban conflicts and a growing will to search alternative ways of planning that are changing gradually the dictatorial system of governance they have (Allegretti, 2012).

## ***Inventing new common narratives: Civic Art and applied Anthropology***

One of the most important demands of these processes is how to support them with new languages that are less rational and more accessible to everybody, in order to

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really promote the voice of communities in the transformation of their territories. In the last years an interesting change within arts create what North American schools call *social engaged art*. This kind of art came from an intern revolution in arts, a radical wing that decided to go outside museums and theatres, where in many cases was embalmed and transform in buy and sell goods art, understanding that the city outside could be more interesting for returning to its main aim of been the expression of human beings emotions, culture and values.

In the '70 ies and '80ies started the *performances, art installations*, and other devices created with communities inside local processes which was called public art (Jacob, 1995). In the '90ies and 2000 has been defined as *relational aesthetics art* (community, collaborative, participatory, dialogic, and so on). Artists mixed with anthropologists and other people who works in territories as they understand that is more interesting make art with and for communities, and not just for the public of museums anymore (Jackson, 2011). On the other hand also in urban planning grows the need of Social Engaged Art, or the need of new languages that create a new pool of knowledge with different disciplines as pedagogy, theatre, subjective anthropology, communication, linguistic, that work together in the mission of creating a new *esthetic capability* in people and local processes with the aim of elaborate collective narratives that can be translate in images or performance art (Helguera, 2011).

The freedom that artists demonstrate in thinking interventions out of usual planning, as well as their creativity in the use of alternative languages and in their fusion with social movements create a novel situation that Francesco Careri called Civic Art (Careri, 2006). These experiences have been register for the MIT in a handbook with more than 250 experiences and groups around the world. It tells how this collectives work in planning the unexpected as well as constituting a key resource in the interaction between planning and symbolic (socio cultural) dimension (Thomson, 2012).

## ***Are we walking towards new ways of planning that promote an emerging democracy?***

Our last point is how these new collective narratives and common projects can gain space in the public decisional sphere in order to participate to the government of territories. That means local plans need not only to reflect local culture and desires, but also have the possibility to negotiate with governments and strong economic powers in order to implement them (Sintomer, 2007). Furthermore, public administrations should also change their approach in these cases to whom has to facilitate and improve dialogue among the different positions in planning processes and not any more try to control everything and decided by themselves (Lussault, 2011).

We find many examples in the world that use a great variety of participatory planning methodologies as the URBAN I and II in Europe that worked about urban renewal introducing in the '90s the local stakeholders active participation, which gradually arrive to permanent programmes with a micro urbanism scale as the Neighborhoods Contracts *Contratti di Quartiere* or a city scale as the *Urban Centre* of Bologna (Bobbio, 2004). From the other part of the world in the same years at New York city, after conflictive struggles created by gentrification phenomenon, born the *Community Plans* process. It took many years of efforts principally of neighborhood movements and academics to create an urban instrument that protect people from financial

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speculation, giving them the right to decide about the development they want to their neighborhoods. Nowadays *Community Plans* are recognized by governments and counts with a law to regulate them, as well as more than hundred experiences in all the city (Angotti, 2008).

One research group that we find really interesting about these issues is the ***Dispute Resolutions Institute***, at the Urban and Environmental Planning, MIT- Boston [2]. It came from the Group on Dynamics Research Centre at MIT founded by Kurt Lewin on 1940, who was a prestigious professor on social psychology. The originality on his approach was in the method that he called Action- Research, and was based on three pillars : a) a social reality couldn't be understand if all the different points of view of people who live in it are not listen, b) a narrative approach that value the unity and contingency of a situation is a necessary complement of a quantitative study, c) a social reality could be understand just when you try to change it (Susskind and Sclavi, 2011).

The current research group analyzes the most important Disputes about Plans and Public Policies around the world, as well as work with governments in big projects in which the conflicts among civil society, private actors and governments are very strong in general because the differences in interests and visions seem radically opposed. That problem takes in general to the complete stop of the process and works without any alternative solution. Professor Lawrence Susskind directs this research group and develops the Consensus Building methodology, which has been described in the many articles and books published by him. Look at *Breaking the impasse - Consensual approaches to Resolving Public Disputes* L.Susskind, Jcruikshank (1987), and *The Consensus Building Handbook* L.Susskind (1999).

This theory state that although participatory planning in many parts of the world are nowadays recognized as a necessary practice with many methods and techniques, it's still necessary to improve the contractuality of these processes with governments and private actors. That means a carefully design of processes and programmes that ensure all actors from the beginning that their decisions and work are going to be really taken into account, as well as that they have the power of make real negotiations until the end.

Lawrence Susskind met professor Marianella Sclavi that has been working in Italy in the last thirty years in participatory processes and write together the book *Confronto Creativo* (2011), where they explain how this kind of approach is historically necessary due to ; 1) the demand of transparency , participation and creative planning that civil society asks nowadays, 2) university centers that make research and information in these topics as well as offer professional education creating a widespread culture of conflict resolution and participatory democracy, 3) a public administration that understand the utility of these instruments and are available to encourage it experimentation in planning processes.

Some key aspects have been stated in their book, one very important condition is that if a government wants to take ahead a process of *Confronto Creativo*, it must make available a real decision as well as stipulate an agreement with participants about the commitment to take ahead until the end the decisions that came out of the process. Another important advice is to be aware to understand the interests behind the different positions of actors, in particular those which seem antagonists, as they are more important than the positions themselves. The proposals that came out of the



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planning process should reflect in a way all the interests involved in the processes, otherwise it should be very difficult to arrive to a new satisfactory agreement. In order to reach these objectives specific techniques are required, as well as a flexible methodology that should be clearly explain and recognize by all the actors involved, in particular accepted by governments and private actors. Furthermore, without reaching agreements in each step the process couldn't go ahead to the next one, thus it's important to stop each time the group considers it necessary, as well as going back until a proposal is clear and shared, but it's not advisable to go ahead unless the agreements are not firm and accepted by everyone.

These kind of processes are a permanent *negotiation of senses*, as Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro professor of the *Federal University of Bahía* [3] underline. In her research group in Urban Studies with Paola Bernstein Jaques and Fabiana Dutra Britos they create the Platform *CorpoCidade*, a project in which collect different international experiences in multidisciplinary languages approaches to urban transformations. The research work of Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro concentrated in the importance of living the tensions in the gradual processes of knowing the others, in particular those ones with whom conflicts are evident. She suggested to work deeply in the resolution of these tensions in order to create the group, as it's impossible to make planning processes if the group is fragmented or is in permanent conflict. For doing that it's necessary that every person *try to look with the others eyes*, that means to try to understand the other's reasons and points of view, because without a gradually understanding of others points of view it is impossible to think into common futures. She stated that the exercise of *active listening* and *conflict resolution* open a real possibility of collective action (Bernstein Jaques, 2012).

The same problems that we have in the micro scale, appears in the big scale of negotiation, if we have to solve problems of a whole city or planning processes of a region or a whole country. However, the instruments are different as these kind of processes needs public moments with a great visibility in order to promote public dialogue and make the process transparent and affordable (Bacqué and Sintomer, 2011).

In these cases the participative processes need to alternate with techniques like the Open Space Technology or the Town Meeting, that could make dialogue a big number of people (from 70 to 500 or more). Another important help for this level of planning are new technologies, for example the e-poll or deliberative polling (informed polling) invented by Prof. James Fishkin[4] (director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy Stanford University), that can make participate 2000 people or more to the decisions. The main help that Information and communications technology (ICT) can offer for these processes is to arrive to large numbers of people, although it's very important that it makes part of mixed systems of inform and discuss processes. In some cases, for example there are Internet changes that explain participatory processes and collect messages of people that can't participate directly or e-democracy platforms which collect proposals and show the news about the implementation of processes (Angeloni, Festa, Giangrande, Goni Mazzitelli and Troisi, 2013). If the processes at a great scale, like controversial public works or big infrastructures, needs to involve people in many cities, many of these instruments could be use simultaneously, making television campaigns in order to inform about the decisions to take, as well as using Referendum, which can be metropolitan, regional or national one, in order to create a public debate (Podziba, 2006).

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**In conclusion**, this article presents different lines of research in transdisciplinarity and participatory planning studies, as well as in the social processes that are challenging the future of the world towards a collective building of cities and territories. The two main issues discussed in the article are, which are also topics on research of the Laboratory of Civic Art in the University of Rome<sup>3</sup>[5] are: on one hand how to include in participatory planning transdisciplinary methodologies that taking into account symbolic aspects produce collective narratives about people's desired transformations. On the other hand how to promote innovative political processes that ensure transparency and a *civic control* of negotiations, in particular in the decision and implementation phases, in order to give the inhabitants a political role in the process of building *commons*. Both are part of worldwide movement that ask to freedom local energies and resources in a gradual transformation from a completely delegate, or representative democratic system, into a more participative or deliberative way of manage territories.

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[1] <http://www.ces.uc.pt/>>

[2] <http://scienceimpact.mit.edu/>>

[3] <http://www.corpocidade.dan.ufba.br/>>

[4] [https://www.opendemocracy.net/blog/james\\_fishkin/](https://www.opendemocracy.net/blog/james_fishkin/)>

[5] <http://www.articiviche.net/>>