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Evaluating strategic metropolitan planning in Bari and Taranto

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ABSTRACT

Following the Italian Government's decision to fund strategic planning in order to promote a sustainable and competitive development in city-regions in southern Italy, the regional governments were asked to steer proactively strategic planning initiatives within their respective territory. In the cases of Bari and Taranto, it was the first time that 31 municipalities constituting Metropolitan Bari and 28 municipalities constituting sub-region Taranto attempted to think collectively in order to prepare the strategic plan. This paper evaluates strategic planning in Bari and Taranto sub-regions and discusses lessons learnt for future efforts in strategic planning. We examine why were the strategic plans made and how was the planning process organized and what, if any, impact these attempts had on development strategies and governance models at the urban-regional level.

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Strategic planning; hybrid model; relational outcome; performance; sub-regions

Introduction

In the last three decades, strategic planning has helped cities to find answers to new challenges like the competitiveness crisis of their territories, improve social cohesion, and face challenges posed by globalization and sustainable development. Cities have tried to adapt strategic planning tools derived from managerial fields to the relational complexity of the urban realm (Gibelli, 1996; Bagnasco & Le Galès, 2000). This has, furthermore, challenged physical planning methods and processes particularly at the urban-regional level in order to incorporate new principles and approaches (Healey, Khakee, Motte, & Needham, 1997; Salet & Faludi, 2000; Albrechts, Healey, & Kunzmann, 2003; Healey, 2007).

Compared to the rest of Europe, Italy has witnessed a slow diffusion of strategic planning practice. It has taken place in few cities towards the end of the 1990s in northern Italy, e.g. Turin (Sartorio, 2005), Milan (Balducci, 2003) and a few small- and medium-size cities (Fedeli & Gastaldi, 2004; Bertuglia, Rota, & Staricco, 2004; Martinelli, 2005; Pugliese & Spaziante, 2003). In her evaluation of strategic planning in Italy, Sartorio (2005, pp. 34–37) states that 'Italian strategic plans ... make a contribution to opening decision-making processes at

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the local level to a more interactive approach, slowly abandoning traditional, entirely politically and technically driven decision-making modes.' She also states that since strategic plans do not have a legal status they are not subject to traditional political and bureaucratic interference and hence provide a 'creative' platform for redefining 'local potential and new synergies, and for finding new local scales of analysis and action'. However, Sartorio does not dwell into the causality between strategic planning and tangible results.

After almost 10 years of strategic planning initiatives in northern Italy, the Italian Government decided to fund such attempts in southern Italy, through special funds for interventions in Mezzogiorno. In this way, it introduced a top-down push factor in typically voluntary traits in strategic planning efforts and initiated hybrid experiments combining different approaches to planning e.g. socio-economic programming, collaborative planning. The Government was concerned about the capability of southern Italian urban regions to implement the EC directives for developing an integrated framework of multi-dimensional policy development (Vinci, 2010). Strategic planning is considered as means to boost sustainable development in urban regions and make them pivot for public expenditures and regional growth (European Commission, 2011). The Government emphasized the use of strategic plans 'to optimize conditions for ... competitiveness and cohesion' (Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti, 2004). It did not define the territorial size of each sub-region but expected that the plans steer the development of a wider urban region. Accordingly, each Southern Italian region passed regional guidelines, identified targeted areas for strategic planning and defined operational instructions for the development of the plans. Unlike other regions, Apulia decided to fund sub-regional aggregation of municipalities only, and not, single cities. It let municipalities to negotiate in order to define the boundary of each sub-region. As a result, the 258 cities and towns in Apulia constituted into 10 sub-regions of a viable economic size for elaborating inter-municipal development strategies (see Figure 1).

The regional planning board elaborated detailed guidelines about procedures and contents of strategic plans, taking into account national intentions. A special board, the Regional Board for the Assessment and Verification of Public Investment (RBAVPI) was entrusted the task of approving final plans.

There are a few evaluations of strategic planning in southern Italy (Camagni, 2010; Vinci, 2010; Pasqui, 2011). They highlight the peculiarities of these practices compared to northern European experiences, illustrating challenges and drawbacks in southern Italian cases. Camagni (2010) characterizes weaknesses of centrally driven planning in terms of deficit in 'leadership', 'coherence', 'organization', 'potential synergies' and 'responsibility'. He discusses premises for inter-municipal cooperation in southern Italian planning as opposed to northern Italian efforts that were restricted to single municipalities. Inter-municipal cooperation in strategic planning is quite exceptional when compared to traditional spatial planning practices in Italy. Vinci's (2010) evaluation focuses on the differences in governance models in southern Italy. With the help of a comparative framework to evaluate southern Italian experiences of approved but not implemented plans Pasqui (2011) discusses the potential innovations of governance models in strategic planning in order to increase its effectiveness.

Our paper is a contribution to the above-mentioned research. It investigates the actual outcomes of strategic planning processes in two Apulian cases, namely Bari and Taranto sub-regions. Our assessment focuses on drivers that kick-started the process as well as on how the institutional/policy framework-shaped strategic planning. We also discuss how



Figure 1. The 10 sub-regions in Apulia demarcated for strategic planning.

the planning process was organized and implemented, and what lessons could be learnt from such hybrid experiments for future efforts in strategic planning.

The case studies involve a critical analysis of data and knowledge acquired through participant observation. One author of this paper was a member of the R&D staff in Bari; another was a member of the scientific committee (SC) in Bari while the third was a member of the SC as well as a representative in the socio-economic partnership (SEP) in Taranto. Several interviews were carried out, during the planning processes among the key actors. Plans and other policy documents were also an important source of knowledge.

Apart from this introduction, this paper consists of four major sections. In the next section, we discuss the theoretical aspects of evaluating strategic planning. The third and the fourth sections contain the evaluation of strategic planning in Bari and Taranto respectively. The final section includes major conclusions from the planning efforts in these two southern Italian urban regions and the lessons learnt for future strategic planning efforts.

Evaluating strategic planning

Performance as a primary criteria for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of policy delivery was used in the first generation of evaluation methods, the so-called ‘measurement generation’ in order to evaluate school-children’s performance determining their progress and measuring the actual impact of resources that were used in schools (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It came gradually to be used in ex-ante evaluation in rational planning where it amounted to means-ends efficiency (Oliveira & Pinho, 2010). Planning goals and

their impact in terms of costs and benefits were crucial in the selection among planning alternatives (Faludi, 1987; Voogd, 1997; Khakee, 1998). Performance as a concept is also used in the appraisal of the impact of the content and design of a plan on decision-making and governance (Berke & Godschalk, 2009; Lyles & Stevens, 2014). With the shift from exclusive interest on plans to the planning process, performance not only referred to the quality of planned interventions but also about how planning process emulated shared values among participants, community learning of development perspectives and institutional capital (Healey, 1997; Albrechts & Balducci, 2013).

When it comes to strategic plans, the premises for evaluation are different because strategic plans do not influence actions directly but they provide a frame of reference (Healey, Khakee, Motte, & Needham, 1999). Strategic planning has been defined in different ways because of differences in theoretical premises. According to the decision-centred view of planning (D-CVP), strategic planning is concerned with a 'set of decisions and actions that are being coordinated by means of a plan' (Faludi, 2000, p. 306). However, a strategic plan is different because such it provides a framework

for action and needs to be analysed for (its) performance in helping with subsequent decisions ... Rather than a finished product, a strategic plan is a momentary record of fleeting agreements reached. It forms a framework for negotiations and is indicative. The future remains open. Action never flows automatically from the plan. (Faludi & Altes, 1994, pp. 2&9)

Thus the determinate relationship between objectives and outcomes that is central in D-CVP becomes 'ultimately irrelevant' in strategic planning (Alexander & Faludi, 1989; Mastop & Faludi, 1997).

As for the evaluation of the strategic plan, D-CVP distinguishes between project plan and strategic plan. Whereas the former has a determinate effect and its evaluation must follow the ends-means logic, the latter provides a frame of reference for negotiations where all options are kept open (Mastop & Faludi, 1997). The model adopted for evaluating strategic plans is called the Dutch performance model (DPM) since it is developed primarily by Dutch planning researchers.

The object of the strategic plan is still decisions but departures from strategic plan do not indicate ineffectiveness since the plan can be interpreted freely. However, in order to judge the performance of the strategic plan, decision-makers must have 'thorough understanding' of the plan which must also have a 'continuing relevance' in the evolving situation and is accepted as 'part of the definition of operational decision situations' (Faludi, 1989, pp. 139–140). DPM involves deconstruction of the plan into planning statements, which constitute units of analysis. The deconstruction plan enables assessment of the relationships between planning statements, strategies and policy measures. It also allows an examination of the recipients of planning statements, subsequent departures from planning statements and their function in ensuing deliberations (Faludi, 2000)

DPM accepts the challenge posed by communicative planning by admitting the fact that planning is more than making plans. It generates 'invisible' or 'sociocratic' products e.g. shared values among participants, awareness of development perspectives (Faludi & Altes, 1994). It also concedes that the quality of decisions based on planning becomes effective only if decisions as well as the planning process are subjected to some form of evaluation (Mastop & Needham, 1997) According to DPM 'invisible products ... by their very nature

are difficult to perceive' and evaluate (Mastop & Faludi, 1997, p. 828). It may be relevant to point out that similar objections were made against Lichfield's Planning Balance Sheet (PBS) which improved cost-benefit analysis by including intangibles like distributive and social impact. PBS came gradually to be widely used in planning evaluation (Lichfield, 1996).

In the communicative/collaborative planning, there is a shift from an exclusive interest in plans to the planning process. Strategic planning is defined as 'a social process through which a range of people in diverse institutional relations and positions come together to design plan-making processes and develop contents and strategies' for urban development (Healey, 1997, p. 5). Strategic planning provides an opportunity for 'building new ideas', for developing 'capacity to produce action frameworks' and for 'mobilizing people to action' and 'constructing a new governance structure' (Albrechts & Balducci, 2013, p. 18).

Evaluation according to communicative logic involves not only assessing plan quality in relation to plan outcomes but also the role of the strategic plan as a communication tool (Berke, Godschalk, & Kaiser, 2006). It also requires the assessment of such intangibles as shared values among participants, community leaning of development perspectives, institutional capital and governance innovations. There are no explicit models for evaluating communicative planning but Albrechts and Balducci (2013, pp. 20–22) provide a framework that is relevant for this purpose. It is based on four major dimensions: the content of strategic planning, the form of the planning process, the relational outcomes and institutional implications especially for the evolving governance structure. Several efforts have been made to evaluate intangible outcomes of collaborative strategic planning (Khakee, 2002; Davoudi, 2005).

Our evaluative framework makes use of tangible and intangible impacts of the hybrid form of strategic planning that was carried out in Bari and Taranto. The consistency between the strategic vision and subsequent policies and programmes and the concrete actions respectively are inspired by the DPM whereas the relational outcome, knowledge diffusion and governance innovation by the collaborative planning model.

Our framework for assessing strategic planning in Bari and Taranto consists of five criteria:

- Strategy orientation – coherence between the strategic vision and subsequent policies and programmes;
- Implementation consistency – between the vision and concrete actions for implementation;
- Relational outcome – cooperative capacity (co-production) developed among participating municipalities and other stakeholders;
- Knowledge diffusion – dissemination of knowledge and development perspectives among stakeholders;
- Governance innovation – the impact of strategic planning on social norms and standards and on formal and informal ways of thinking and behaving.

The strategic planning of Metropoli Terra di Bari

The socio-economic and institutional context

The strategic plan for the Metropolitan area of Bari (Metropoli Terra di Bari, henceforth MTB) covers a diversified and polycentric territory with 31 municipalities and about

970,000 inhabitants, a fourth of the population of the Apulia region. The municipality of Bari has roughly one third of MTB's population, three other municipalities – Bitonto, Molfetta and Corato – have a population of about 50,000, other six towns have a population of about 35,000 and the remaining 21 municipalities are small rural communities with less than 25,000 inhabitants. Services and industry are the main employers in Bari and neighbouring municipalities. Small and middle-sized textile firms are widespread in MTB. The other two major industries are agro-industries and tourism. At the time when the strategic plan was developed, unemployment in MTB was high – 13.8% compared to the national average of 7.7%. MTB-faced (and still faces) several social and environmental problems: inadequacy of public services in childcare, for homeless people and family support; poverty and poor health among elderly people and immigrants; decay of old city centres, illegal housing, high water pollution due to pesticides, inefficient wastewater treatment and contaminated industrial sites.

While strategic planning in southern Italy was mainly induced by a top-down push, MTB's planning had a different background. Strategic planning was part of the public debate in the municipality of Bari since early 2004 when it was on the political agenda of one of the mayoral candidates of that time, who later won the elections (Borri & Scandale, 2004). The decision of the National Government to foster strategic planning in southern Italy thus fell on a fertile ground in Bari, although a broader coalition of municipalities had to be formed in 2007 to apply for National funds. Initially, three different coalitions were proposed; one with Bari and 10 neighbouring municipalities, the second centred around the town of Bitonto and the third one headed by the town of Gioia del Colle (see Figure 2). However, the Apulia Regional Government forced their merging in one large coalition. The resulting aggregation was not without problems because municipalities belonging to the former coalitions of Bitonto and of Gioia del Colle feared they would lose their identity in the larger group. They also feared the domination of the regional capital Bari. Such fears were allayed as final decisions had to be passed by an assembly of all mayors, the Metropolitan Committee of Mayors (Consiglio Metropolitan dei Sindaci – henceforth MCM). In order to further mitigate these fears, an executive board (Cabina di Regia – CDR) composed of a leading representative of each former aggregation (Bari, Bitonto and Gioia del Colle) was formed to steer the work of the larger assembly of mayors.

Because of the uneven strength of 31 municipalities, development of trust and cooperation among them took much time and efforts. The definition of every development objective and strategy involved a long process, where initial priorities of the three coalitions were discussed in the larger group and within each municipality before a final formulation was agreed upon by the MCM. These painstaking negotiations took more than a year.

Strategic vision

The polycentric character of MTB was identified as a key feature in the strategic vision of the plan, while a balance between 'traditions' and 'innovations' became its central motive (Borri, 2009). The strategic plan focused on three main goals: the creation of a structurally polycentric and sustainable metropolis, integrating cities and towns with the rural and coastline landscapes; establishing a network of socially cohesive, technologically creative

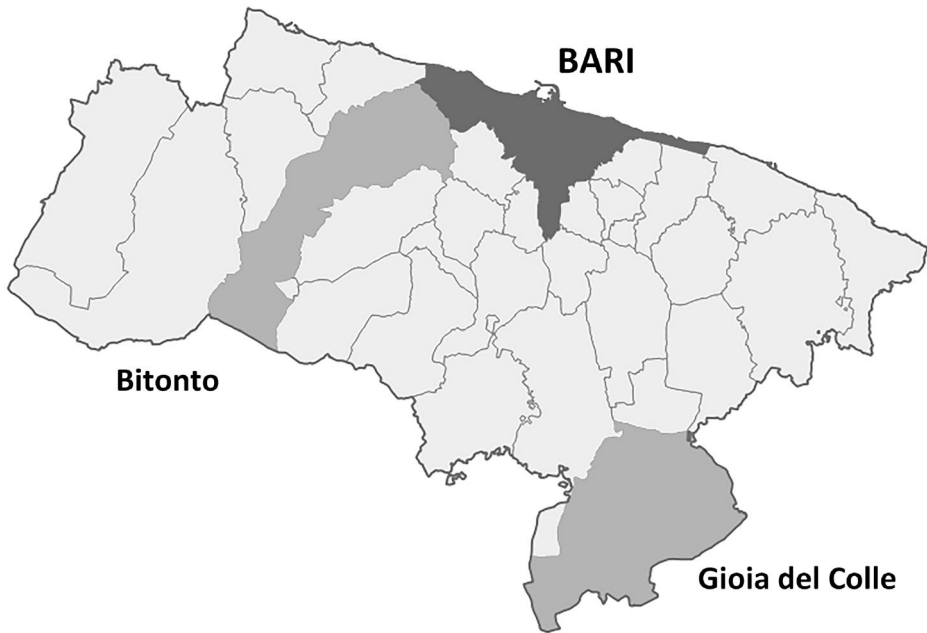


Figure 2. Metropoli Terra di Bari (MTB).

and attractive cities open to the Mediterranean area; defining an efficient, participatory and candid ‘union of municipalities’.

Polycentrism and spatial integration required a wide range of actions including valorization of historical centres and rural landscapes, requalification and reconnection of marginal areas, “lame” and coastal areas, generation of sustainable mobility and sustainable use of natural resources.

The attractiveness of MTB for potential talents and investors in a wider Mediterranean context required several actions in order to increase accessibility of the entire metropolitan area, public safety and provision of services for inhabitants, tourists and investors. For this purpose, policies were proposed for social inclusion, employment, research and innovation, international marketing of MTB’s identity, promotion of culture and public safety.

Within this framework, the strategic plan envisaged a set of actions with two time horizons: short term ending in 2015 and long term up to 2035. In the beginning of the planning process, long term visions dominated the discussion. However, the alluring perspective to use the plan to obtain public funding from the EU Regional Operational Program 2007–2013 (EU ROP) strongly influenced action strategies and the structure of the plan. There was a strong preoccupation for the alignment of the plan with the priorities and rules of regional, national and EU funds, which meant that the plan came to rely heavily on already-established regional development strategies. Furthermore, the desire to include as many projects as possible in the hope of obtaining public funding resulted in that the plan lost its initial clarity and sharpness and ended up by including as many as 600 projects requiring about 5 billion euro of investments! While some of them were of strategic importance, many had little of that quality.

Governance process

MTB's strategic planning involved a set of complex political and administrative actions, which included the creation of MCM and CDR. The mayor of every participating municipality, irrespective of its demographic size, had one vote in MCM, where decisions were taken by a majority rule. It meant that Bari municipality, with a population of 300,000, had the same vote as a rural municipality with less than 10,000 inhabitants! This rule became a confidence-winning innovation in the governance process of the strategic plan. Correspondingly, on the administrative side, a new inter-municipal board, the Union of Municipalities (Unione dei Comuni), was created. It did not correspond to any existing administrative body and involved new governance rules. Moreover, the heads of the technical departments of all the municipalities formed a forum (Assemblea dei tecnici) to discuss technical aspects of all major infrastructure projects. A specially recruited R&D staff of young PhDs from different disciplines was entrusted with the task of collecting and synthesizing ideas and proposals on development projects from various stakeholders. Finally, a SC was responsible for evaluating alternative ideas about the vision, strategies and development projects. Participation was a major focus for all stages of the strategic planning.

The strategic plan including a vision was developed through an inclusive process of participation (Omero, 2009). More than 130 public institutions, representatives of various social and economic organizations, and more than 300 citizen associations and individuals were involved in these discussions. Six thematic committees (for environment, social affairs, culture, economics, mobility and governance) were constituted from among members of these groups, public institutions and R&D staff. This was as a result of an agreement, namely the 'treaty for the sustainable development of MTB' which defined the modalities for consultation, collaboration and cooperation between the official agencies and R&D staff on one hand, and various stakeholders, NGOs and civil society on the other.

From plan to actions

The strategic plan was approved by stakeholders and was then endorsed by the MCM in September 2008. It was then submitted for approval to the RBAVPI, who took one and half years, instead of two months as stipulated by the regional guidelines. During this period elaborate negotiations took place between the RBAVPI and MTB when the latter was required

- to improve coherence and effectiveness of various strategies,
- to strengthen the logical framework of the plan and to provide a detailed monitoring system that included output indicators,
- to ensure that environmental considerations had been integrated in the decision-making process by applying Strategic Environmental Assessment,
- to include an ex-ante evaluation,
- to rank projects with the help of multi-criteria analysis. For this purpose, eight criteria were selected by MTB staff, together with the SC and in consultation with stakeholders and MCM. These were metropolitan impact, internal coherence of the interventions, priorities by municipalities, projects' design, the extent of private partners' involvement, environmental sustainability, socio-economic impact, cultural impact, knowledge input and creativity.

Project ranking was necessary, as public funding allotted to planned projects was much smaller than the estimated 5 billion euro envisaged in the plan. By the end of 2009, the Regional Government assigned each sub-region a small sum from the EU ROP 2007–2013 in order to kick-start the implementation of the strategic plans. MTB got 50 million euro. The size of funding was not based on the quality of the plan or on the comparative relevance of the projects. It depended entirely on the demographic size of each sub-region. Those funds were so downsized that a direct link between the strategic plan and its implementation became quite vague. Moreover, the final selection of projects to be implemented was no longer a result of the multi-criteria analysis. It was in subtler ways influenced by negotiations with the Regional Government, where resource availability, regional priorities and political pressure exerted by key stakeholders were crucial. No evidence of the reasons for the final decisions was available to the public. Nor were the key stakeholder groups, involved in the plan implementation. This diminished the trust and commitment of stakeholders towards the plan. At the same time, the reduced size of allocated funds lessened the plan's implementation consistency and caused huge disappointment among mayors and other stakeholders. Despite the regional board's assurance that more public funding would be provided after the initial kick-start of projects, this never materialized. Some regional and EU ROP funds were actually allocated to MTB for specific purposes e.g. for energy efficiency, ICT and digital services. These funds were, however, a tiny part of the total financial requirements.

Tangible and intangible outcomes of the plan

As mentioned above, financial constraints and political considerations curtailed the implementation of projects derived from the strategic plan. However, strategic planning of MTB resulted in several important tangible and intangible outcomes.

Among the relational outcomes, the appreciation among municipalities for proactive and cooperative strategic planning was the most essential achievement. Municipalities recognized the advantage of working together to achieve specific common goals e.g. the development of tourism as well as the promotion of environmental and cultural attractors. For these purposes, municipalities within MTB formed various sub-aggregations in order to apply for EU and regional funds. However, relational networking was mainly restricted to municipalities and did not involve other stakeholders.

The core knowledge base behind strategic planning involved strategic thinking, cooperative approach to solve inter-municipal problems as well as a new understanding of territorial development premises. The diffusion of this knowledge, however, has been mainly limited to public actors and rarely reached non-governmental stakeholders.

The major strategies outlined in the vision of MTB inspired several subsequent development proposals. For example, the inter-municipal railway project became a crucial strategy in order to improve the accessibility within MTB as well as a part of the Trans-European Transport Network. The new congress centre in the exhibition area of Bari and the fast-speed railway between Bari and Naples are being implemented with national Funds for Underutilized Areas as well as from private funding. Bari municipality has also embarked on a programme for energy efficiency and knowledge economy in response to the European Smart Cities Program aiming to improve the quality of life in medium-size cities.

Finally, the confidence-winning rule of giving each mayor a vote regardless of the municipality's demographic size was an important governance innovation. This rule has been accorded a statutory status in the Metropolitan City of Bari which is one of the 15 Italian Metropolitan Cities that were constituted following a national law enacted in 2014. The law defines the organizational structure of Metropolitan Cities and mandates the formation of a new body, namely 'Conferenza Metropolitana', with mayors of all participating municipalities. However, it left to each Metropolitan City to define its working rules. The Bari 'Conferenza Metropolitana' voting rule is exceptional in Italy.

The strategic planning of Area Vasta Tarantina

The political-institutional context

The Taranto sub-region (Area Vasta Tarantina, henceforth AVT) is predominantly rural. It is made of 28 municipalities who voluntarily decided to cooperate in the strategic planning experiment. The sub-region has a population of almost 520,000 people. Taranto is the only industrial city with a population of around 200,000 inhabitants. The other municipalities are small towns. Most of them have populations under 10,000 inhabitants. On the bases of geographical and economic differences, AVT is divided into three areas: the urban area of Taranto, western and eastern Arco Ionico, respectively (see [Figure 3](#)). Tourism and agriculture are the mainstays of western Arco Ionico, while coastal urbanization mainly made up of holiday or 'second' homes and tourism characterize eastern Arco Ionico. A steel plant dominates the industrial landscape of the Taranto urban area, where other important economic activities are the ENI oil refinery, the commercial port of Taranto and an aircraft industry. Sixty-one percent of the sub-region's employment is in trade, tourism and related services, 27% is in the industry and 12% in agriculture.

At the end of the 1950s, the National Government chose Taranto as one of the industrial 'growth poles' in the underdeveloped Italian South. It financed, through the Special National Programme for the Development of the South (Intervento Straordinario per il Mezzogiorno), the construction of one of Italy's biggest steel plants managed by Italsider (a State-owned enterprise) in the Taranto Municipality. The national government, local authorities and businesses had high expectations about the steel-based growth of the urban region. However, the actual development became otherwise. At its height of expansion at the end of 1970s, Italsider employed more than 20,000 workers. In the following years, as a result of increasing global competition in steel production, the employment decreased by almost half. After lengthy privatization negotiations, Italsider was sold in 1995 to ILVA, a private consortium. In 2007, ILVA employed 12,000 workers and produced 'nearly 8 million tonnes of steel, roughly 30% of the total Italian production, accounted for 0.06% of GDP, about 7.5% of the regional GDP' (Greco & Di Fabbio, 2014, p. 417).

However, instead of spreading benefits, the steel production has caused a severe socio-ecological crisis in the sub-region and exacerbated territorial imbalance between Taranto and the rural areas. Nonetheless, the national government has continued to support and fund the uncertain industrialization of Taranto, and promote its role as growth pole. Thus, at the end of the 1990s, in order to mitigate the impact of economic downturn caused by



Figure 3. Area Vasta Tarantina.

the decline in steel production the national government decided that the port in Taranto should be upgraded as Taranto Transshipment Port. Reminiscing on its ancient past as the Magna Grecia colony, the new port was envisioned to become a crucial Italian hub in international trade. So far even this investment has not produced any significant socio-economic returns (Barbanente & Monno, 2004).

At the same time, the ILVA steel plant has represented a major source of environmental pollution at the base of the AVT socio-ecological crisis. In 2005, the steel plant was responsible for 83% of Italy's total reported dioxin emissions. Between 1995 and 2004 leukaemia, myelomas and lymphomas increased by between 30% and 40% in Taranto region (<https://www.thelocal.it/20141225/Italy-to-nationalize-troubled-steel-plant>).

The industrial development of Taranto has been exploited by a few invisible coalitions – or ‘invisible polluting coalitions’ (IPC) (Coalizioni di potere generatrici di inquinamento ambientale) – made up of local and national entrepreneurs, politicians and trade union leaders (Greco & Di Fabbio, 2014). Supported and sustained by a system of political patronage, corruption, administrative incompetence and a ‘silent majority’ of citizens (Monno, 2010; Bianchi, 2011), these coalitions have always glossed over the environmental pollution and health hazards caused by the steel industry. To protect their interests and power, they have opposed every attempt about an alternative form of economic development other than the one based on ‘steel monoculture’.

The period between 2002 and 2007 was particularly important in AVT. First, in 2002 the Taranto Municipality initiated a strategic urban plan in order to exploit the potential of the Transshipment Port. The plan combined the steel-based industrial economic development with the new opportunities that the port would provide in the globalized economy. Although the plan was never implemented the image of Taranto as a hub-port city gained a prominent position in every discourse in the following years. Second, as a result of the mismanagement through top-down governance processes controlled by the IPC and

exacerbated by political patronage and corruption, the Municipality of Taranto went bankrupt in 2005. Thirdly, the economy of small municipalities improved as a result of new small- and medium-sized enterprises established with the help of EU initiatives and programmes. Finally, increasing awareness of environmental pollution and deaths caused by cancer in the Taranto urban area led to the emergence of a contentious civic movement in 2006. The new environmental awareness breached the wall of fear and resignation. The socio-ecological crisis was recognized as a result of an aggressive economy based on the 'working or dying' blackmail.

In 2007, a new Taranto Municipal Government was elected, with a declared commitment to resolve the socio-ecological crisis and promoting sustainable development.

Structuring strategic planning governance

In late 2007, the AVT was officially designated by the regional government to carry out strategic planning. Taranto City being the biggest among the 28 municipalities led the process. The AVT sub-region faced several challenges. The most important one was if it should continue its growth policy based on the steel plant or change its developmental path. The strategic planning process was conceived as an opportunity to cope with this challenge and bring about institutional and socio-economic changes promoting sustainability and economic competitiveness.

In the absence of national directives, the governance structure for strategic planning followed the top-down strategic planning guidelines advocated by the Apulian regional government (Vinci, 2010). Accordingly, the organizational structure included

- (1) An institutional partnership (IP) (Partenariato Istituzionale) of the 28 municipalities in the AVT with an assembly of 28 mayors and heads of other local institutions entrusted to lead the planning process.
- (2) A planning board (PB) (made up of technical staff only from the Taranto municipality) with the task to prepare a strategic plan containing a vision and strategies,
- (3) a SC made up of external scientists and academics acting as an advisory group,
- (4) a SEP (Partenariato Socio-Economico) that included NGOs, business representatives, trade unions and academic institutions.

Within the IP, the municipal government of Taranto exerted a dominant role on account of its size as well as its control of the PB. The latter emphasized the neutrality of its technical knowledge and acquired the role of impartial planner, negotiator and consensus-builder. The SC's role was limited to help in selecting appropriate development projects. The SEP had only an advisory role and could not exert influence on planning decisions. The interaction with the population at large took place in the thematic forums where local stakeholders (not included in the SEP) could come up with proposals related to the vision. In short, the governance process was based on a strong collaboration between the IP and the PB. The IP had decisional power with the PB acting as a technical board as well as an intermediary between the IP and the SEP.

Although initially contested the structure of governance was generally accepted despite its limited inclusion of citizens and NGOs.

Vision and strategies

The PB prepared a vision entitled 'Mediterranean Horizon'. It was then approved by the IP and the SEP. It drew upon the existing consensus on Taranto as a hub-port, development of tourism and rural industries in small municipalities and improved flow of goods and services within the sub-region, with Taranto as the barycentre. The vision emphasized improving the territorial identity with the help of sustainable industrialization, ecological sensibility and economic competitiveness in 'a society of flows'. The vision combined local stakeholders' interests as expressed in SEP as well as compliance to national and regional guidelines in order to obtain funds (Profin Service Srl, 2009).

The strategies were structured at three levels of action: inter-regional, metropolitan and local. (Oliva, 2009). At the inter-regional level, strategies dwelt on investments in logistics and in the adaptation of the port to shipping new cargo as well as attracting tourism by sea. At the metropolitan level, the focus was on the regeneration of decaying urban areas and improving the attractiveness of the city of Taranto. At the local level, strategies highlighted the promotion of tourism and rural industrial growth as well as the building of streets, sewers system and other infrastructure. Environmental restoration and rehabilitation of local ecosystems were accorded highest priority at all three levels.

In order to implement strategies, eight thematic forums were set up. They focused on the new knowledge economy, urban regeneration, environmental enhancement, tourism, agriculture, logistics, labour mobility and infrastructure. The forums proposed 700 projects, many of them aimed to improve local infrastructures. Among the new proposals were: the enlargement of the port, the development of a scientific-cultural centre 'Polo Magna Grecia' and a network of archaeological sites and building of a cycling route along the southern Arco Ionico waterfront. They also included old projects that had been previously submitted to the regional government for funding.

The SC was asked to select ten major projects with the best prospects for regional funds. However, SC selection did not appeal to the IP who preferred projects related to the expansion of the port and urban regeneration. SC's role was quickly terminated and its tasks were taken over by the PB. In the end, the project selected were those that were most likely to be funded.

Governance: the limits of an 'opportunistic' consensus

Participating municipalities formally viewed strategic planning as a highly innovative process that had helped to change political attitudes, frames of knowledge, and convictions. It attempted to forge a shared identity and institutional understanding that could eventually help to reduce the prevailing democratic deficit. However, the planning process was problematic because of the persistent conflicts among the main actors: the IP, the SEP and the civil society and the omnipotent IPC.

The strategic plan never explicitly addressed the ultimate fate of the steel-based industrial development. Although weakened by municipal government's bankruptcy, the IPC still was powerful enough to ensure the preservation of the status quo. The IP hoped that the socio-ecological crisis would be overcome gradually by 'greening' the steel plant, diversifying the economy and through urban regeneration. Ambiguity characterized the role of the SEP. Because of its heterogeneous composition and advisory role, it kept on changing its standpoint on the environmental issue in order to negotiate with IP on

specific projects and protect the interests of its members. For the small rural municipalities, the main issue at stake was to set up new rules for distributing regional funds and thereby reduce their dependency on Taranto. They supported strategic planning as long as they succeeded in reducing Taranto City's dominance in the sub-region.

Under these circumstances, the environmentally conscious part of civil society and NGOs instead of attending the thematic forums preferred a “guerrilla governance” strategy (Legacy & van den Nouwelant, 2015) to highlight the urgent need of new ecologically sustainable policies for AVT. However, in order to avoid conflicts, PB promptly dismissed proposals by the civil society that questioned the future of the steel industry as being technically infeasible and scientifically unreliable. Getting necessary funds for infrastructure projects became the major focus of decision-makers.

Thus, the Taranto strategic planning process catalysed an opportunistic consensus among the 28 participating municipalities rather than exploiting the ‘transformative potential’ of the strategic planning approach (Albrechts, 2015) failing thereby to construct visions of preferred innovative structural outcomes and opportunities.

Outcome of strategic planning: A missed opportunity?

Strategies resulting from the ‘Mediterranean Horizon’ endorsed and obtained funds for several existing and new projects at the inter-regional, metropolitan and local level focussing on urban regeneration, infrastructure and rural industrial development. However, the strategic plan failed to provide guidance about how to deal with the environmental crisis, and promote a comprehensive programme for sustainable development. This failure was one of the major reasons why the High Court in 2012 ruled that the owners of ILVA had failed to reduce toxic emissions that caused environmental damages and that the steel plant to be placed under the administration of the National Government.

The ‘Mediterranean Horizon’ vision was not a product of an inclusive governance process. It closed the doors to any innovative ideas about alternative development paths and to debates concerning structural problems related to steel industry-dependent development. Despite its metaphorical openness, the vision was too selective. It did not activate the production and diffusion of new knowledge.

Besides a new system of economic resource distribution between Taranto and the smaller municipalities, the relational outcomes of the strategic planning were meagre. Taranto Municipality has continued to set development priorities and appropriate the biggest part of the economic resources made available by the national and regional government for cleaning up polluted areas and enlarging the port. Stakeholders’ involvement through the SEP and thematic forums was more apparent than real. The top-down managerial approach to planning limited the emergence of alternative development ideas and innovative ways of interaction among local actors. It also diminished opportunities for the emergence of new economic and political coalitions in opposition to the IPC and prevailing networks of political patronage.

How well did Bari and Taranto perform their strategic planning?

Our evaluation of strategic planning in MTB shows a significant relational outcome namely the resulting disposition towards inter-municipal cooperation against the

backdrop of previously prevailing suspicion and rivalry among municipalities. A significant contributing factor to this outcome was the governance norm introduced in the early phase of the strategic planning, namely the voting rule in the MCM, that gave each participating municipality a vote regardless of its demographic size. In fact, this rule has been so appreciated that it has been adapted as ruling principle for the 'Conferenza Metropolitana' in the new Metropolitan City of Bari. Relational outcomes with regard to the involvement of the wider groups of stakeholders and grassroots were meager because cooperation among them was not promoted strongly, especially in the implementation phase, partly due to lack of resources.

With regard to strategy orientation, MTB planning helped to create appreciation among participating municipalities about the benefits of vision-based planning. This is also shown by the fact that the knowledge base, created as a result of strategic planning, has been used in preparing the strategic plan for the Metropolitan City of Bari in 2015 and core parts of the strategic vision of the MTB plan have become embedded in subsequent programmes and development proposals made by several municipalities. In some cases, knowledge resulting from the strategic planning has been used by aggregations of municipalities for the development of tourist networks as well as for the promotion of environmental and cultural attractors.

The strategic planning of MTB resulted in extensive knowledge base, but its diffusion among the wider groups of stakeholders was much more limited than expected. Moreover, ideas generation in thematic forums and dialogue with stakeholders took place at the end of the plan-making process and had no bearing in the implementation phase – a clear shortcoming in the governance process.

Implementation deficit is perhaps the most negative outcome of MTB planning. Policies and projects actually implemented were far more limited compared to the far-sighted strategies in the plan, mainly due to the lack of funds and limited efforts to develop public-private partnerships. Implementation deficit generated considerable disappointment among the stakeholders.

In short, MTB planning had positive outcomes with regard to relational outcomes, strategy orientation, knowledge creation and governance rules. Shortcomings in these respects but especially implementation deficit resulted in disillusionment with regard to the worth of preparing such plans.

Evaluation of strategic planning of AVT presents a somewhat different picture. Formally, the strategic plan can be considered as a step towards change (Martinelli, 2005). It arrived at a shared vision and produced a shared framework of rules for developing plans and policy measures in a context divided by profound conflicts. It sketched a new framework of resource allocation and tried to modernize the public administration. It also considered issues such as cultural and sustainable development and created an atmosphere of cooperation among the municipalities. Several projects were funded, but, the implementation of the plan as a whole has been problematic especially because of the contextual factors.

The AVT plan exposes several contradictions. They are the result of the failure to address the crucial issue of whether to continue with the steel industry-dependent development or to work for an environmentally sustainable sub-region. The strategic planning process did not change the existing structure of governance and the prevailing power relationships that are the root cause of the socio-ecological crisis. An important positive

by-effect of this failure was environmentalists' and other NGO's acquisition of autonomy in order to keep alive the idea that Taranto's industrial dependence path could be changed by changing existing knowledge and power relationships.

Our case studies in hybrid strategic planning indicate several lessons. One is that strategic planning did not include transformative planning practices owing to excessive concern for the promotion of projects that could be funded and exclusion of a broad civic involvement. Regardless of how well the strategic planning was organized, their ability to arrive at development strategies depends on a pre-existing agreement on the most important direction of change. In absence of any major fundamental conflict, Bari was able to develop strategies for inter-municipal cooperation in specific policy areas. Taranto opted for an opportunistic consensus by ignoring fundamental socio-ecological conflicts.

The aim of the hybrid strategic planning experiments was not only to arrive at a strategic plan but also to define new governance approaches, which nevertheless needed the assent of the existing governing institutions and political alliances in the participating municipalities. Against the backdrop of the lack of previous inter-municipal cooperation and the top-down character of local government, governance processes were vulnerable to the dominance of major cities in the sub-regions and lack of transparency. Bari avoided this problem to some extent by the declared openness of the planning board and the voting rule in the political assembly of the mayors. In Taranto, the historical legacy of the growth pole and the dominance of the IPC undermined dissenting views about regional development and let Taranto municipality retain a dominating role in planning governance.

The failure or success of strategic planning depends on the awareness among the stakeholders about its potentialities as well as its limitations. Strategic planning in southern Italy was essentially a voluntary effort depending on the cooperative willingness and ability of participating municipalities. Neither Bari nor Taranto succeeded in developing strategies that were free from existing institutional alliances and interventions. There existed in Bari as well as in Taranto a tension between the participants because of differences in expectations as well as in how the planning process was carried out. When strategic planning works within the prevailing institutional structures, attempts to change governance structure from within are not easy to carry out. However, these two planning experiments paved the way towards a few changes.

Strategic planning models call for mobilization of local creativity, the transformation of prevailing institutional and knowledge/power relationships through the improvement of democratic process and achievement of social and environmental justice. However, according to Albrechts (2015) such intangibles should provide a way to imagine a new idea of the city beyond the dominant cultural models. This was far from the reality in Bari and Taranto with their ambivalence towards a profound structural transformation of the urban regions.

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