

Flipped transparency in Community Strategic Framework. A bottom-up approach for transparent planning and urban design in Italy

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ABSTRACT

Efficient public participation in planning provokes transparency as an unavoidable condition. However, almost always, transparency is only partial. The main decision-makers prefer opaque mediation and negotiation processes. The weakest actors are disadvantaged. The aim of this paper is to present some methods and techniques for flipped transparency built for bottom up processes by small interested groups (instead of government). It is possible to hypothesize more planning plurality that is able to develop in parallel with the official one. It is thus possible to develop more

effective and transparent public participation. The construction of the plan can take shape through the combination of the strategic choice approach and the wiki environment. In addition to being completely public through the web, the system is simple to manage, low in cost, and able to trace the decision-making process through a detailed step by step documentation in which it is possible to explore the chronology showing the contributors to the planning process. and suitable for interaction among stakeholders. Finally, the paper outlines an approach to constructing urban design rules, again using wiki. In this case the wiki environment is accompanied by a revision of Christopher Alexander's pattern language.

INTRODUCTION

Equal access to information is one of the main requirements for public participation and inclusion of citizens in the decision making process. Yet, in Italian planning, this is rarely granted. Despite a rich legislation supporting transparency in public administration, the planning process in Italy is in most cases characterised by opaque practices and negotiations that make public participation a mere formality. Such opaque practices often degenerate into corruption.

The misdistribution of information in Italian planning is a paradigmatic case for what Lindblom (1990) defines as impairment. It demonstrates the limits of public participation as outlined in most Italian regional planning legislation. Furthermore, the national environmental legislation for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Impact assessment (SEA) shows the same shortcomings (Rinaldi, 2016). Certainly, it precludes any possibility of applying Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' in planning, as described in Forester (1993).

Empirical research (author 2012) has shown that opacity in negotiations between local authorities and stakeholders is the main cause of dramatic delays in the Italian planning process. Picchianti (2016 in this issue) examines the differences between the preparation and regional approval of Grosseto's structure plan,

which was carried out through a largely transparent process in less than four years, and its implementing operational plan, which required another eight years. The latter was prepared according to a traditional process, characterised by mostly opaque negotiations.

This paper outlines a completely different, fully operational approach to participation in planning. It introduces a tool, the Community Strategic Framework (CSF), through which common knowledge precedes the use of expert knowledge. For a community, this process is intended to give interested groups the opportunity to influence the official planning process.

The main argument of this paper is that self-organization of a proxy for an official planning system by communities not only can increase the community's bargaining power but also can contribute to the quality of the official planning process. Lindblom (1990) presents a model for a self-guiding society, and this paper looks at this possible organization for the purpose of planning. The transparency of such a CSF preparation can allow for various forms of aggregation and can build powerful avenues for dialogue and/or confrontation with the official planning system. CSF represents a "flipped transparency" (i.e. a bottom-up built knowledge of the decision-making process in the sense that transparency is not conceded by the 'government' but rather is progressively built and organised by the interested community). More specifically, this article considers a model in which technical expert knowledge is minimised so that the CSF is easily achievable using the available common knowledge. This knowledge is organized for policy construction according to a "wiki approach", here referring to an environment built a wiki software. At the same time, using a similar wiki approach, the community can also organize knowledge concerning problems in the realm of urban and landscape design.

In recent years, an increasing amount of free and open-source software has been made available to support public participation (Falco, 2016). As far as the CSF is concerned, most of the tool's

methods and techniques require the action of a facilitator, which should not be excluded but is not a *sine qua non*.

The possibility of using alternative plans to arrive at the same context dates back to the 1960s, but even with these alternatives, the presence of an ‘advocacy planner’ is considered to remain a must (Davidoff, 1965). In CSF, however, such techniques are reduced to a minimum. This is exactly the opposite of what happens in the Habermasian ‘ideal speech context’, where facilitation is emerging as a new profession, able to support a growing multiplicity of techniques (Holman, Devane, Cady, 2006). In contrast, simplicity and low cost are the essential conditions for the CSF.

The rest of this paper is structured into four parts. The paper is organized according to the structure summarised in figure 1. It begins by identifying the division between the areas of planning and of urban design and landscape. These two parts are then further divided into two spheres, that of knowledge and that of action. The article then analyses each of the four parts.

The first analysis concerns the planning. By reference to the strategic choice approach (Friend & Jessop, 1969), it describes methods for constructing a database in a wiki environment that progressively accumulates the systematic knowledge of the community. The STAN (following work on DOT see Openshaw, Whitehead, 1975; 1985) technique (Lombardi, 2016) allows the community to use this knowledge in the development of policies, plans, and programs.

The second section concerns the establishment of rules for the physical inspection of urban transformations and landscape. In the third part, the article deals with possible effects of the inverted transparency of the Community Strategic Framework on governance. Finally, the conclusions summarize potential limitations and possible developments of the proposal.

THE COMMUNITY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The organization of a Community Strategic Framework is summarised in Table 1. It outlines an organization that provides an effective alternative means of planning with a minimum of technical knowledge; i.e., it is able to provide all the necessary tools for self-organised planning and urban design. In this context, transparency is simply the use of available information that is progressively acquired by the community. Unlike official planning procedures, the initial and main information used by the CSF is so-called common knowledge, which when necessary will be later integrated with knowledge provided by the experts. It assumes, after the concept provided in Lindblom's (1990) Inquiry and change, that expert knowledge—including that derived from social sciences—is not central for social problem solving.

The scheme contains a minimal requirement of structure, with ordinary citizens organised in spontaneous groups to efficiently face impairment from the local authority in planning and urban design.

Table 1 - The CSF organization

	Knowledge	Action
Planning	Wiki data base of decision areas perceived by the community	Community policies, plans and programmes
Urban and landscape design	Wiki data base of decision areas perceived by the community	Solutions for urban and landscape transformation

Urban planning and urban design

Table 1 shows the CSF organization. Rows indicate two different areas of action for the CSF: planning and urban-landscape design. Urban planning and design in Italy suffer from the original sin of

the Italian schools of architecture, which were mostly born in the first half of the last century. From the beginning, urban planning was seen as an exercise in the formal spatial organization of sets of architectural products. Planning culture subsequently evolved, but this original imprinting still influences planning practices. After the reform of the architecture profession in 2001, the role of the planning professional was recognised and several university courses in planning were introduced. Yet most of these programs closed down only a few years later, especially those in Southern Italy. Nowadays, planning practice is still considered to be a competence for architects, and too often their plans are excessively oriented towards formal paradigms as in the so called rational comprehensive approach (Bobbio, 1996).

Wiki as an operational tool for a Community Strategic Framework: the flipped transparency

Columns of Table 1 divide the framework in the area of knowledge (first half) and the area related to decisions/actions (second half).

The term wiki is often used as a descriptor for the connectivity that is changing the world of today. The seminal book *Wikinomics 2.0* (Tapscot, Williams, 2006) anticipated many of the changes that have taken place in the last decade. New ways of production emerged through collaborative technologies. More recently, Cottica (2011) has outlined the possible impacts of collaborative technologies in advancing new forms of public participation in government and public administration in Italy. Even though this work emphasises the importance of the wiki software in the presented cases, wiki applications in their strictest sense are either absent or marginal. Cottica (2011) avoids considering the resistance to change and instead follows a path of the “ideal speech situation” (Forester, 1993); above all, he avoids examining in detail the planning sphere, where opacity appears to be endemic to the system.

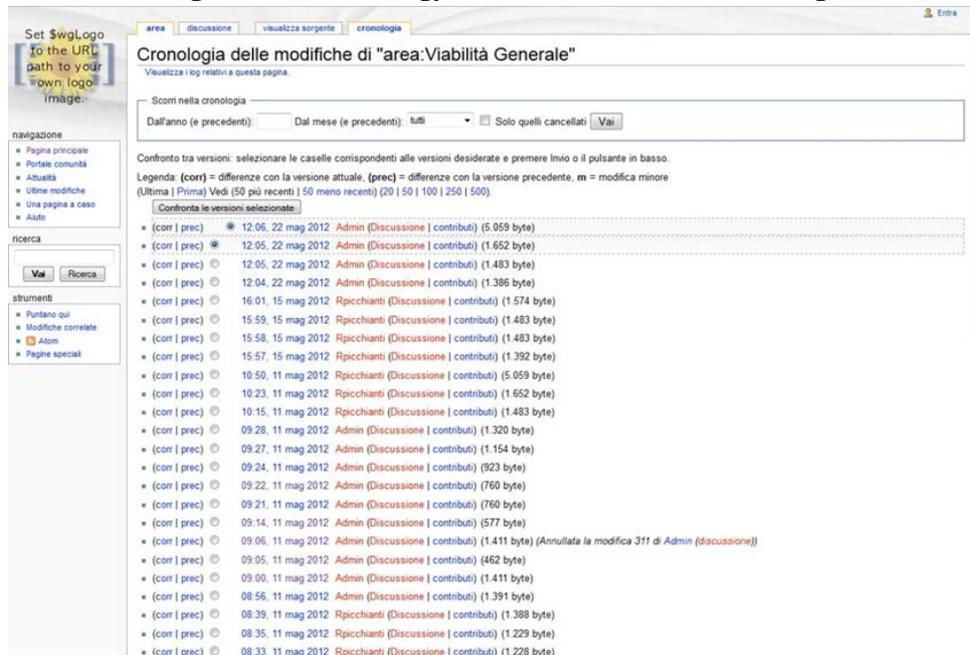
Herein, the term wiki refers conversely to a specific technique and even specific software: the well-known MediaWiki (Jackson, M., Blackburn, J. D., & McDonald, R. H., 2007) used for Wikipedia. The main criteria for choosing MediaWiki are its affordability, traceability, and debate. The three criteria are briefly discussed in relation to their use in a CSF process.

Affordability: As far as affordability is concerned, the software is freely downloadable. Initially it is possible to use an online version called wikia. This version offers a good guide for immediate use. As a non-commercial version, though, it can contain advertisements. A step further entails installation on a provider site, at a minimal annual cost. This would require less than an hour's work by a member of the community with some computing knowledge or by an external expert. The time needed for instruction on the use of the software would be minimal as well.

Traceability: The two wikis in CSF are organised in pages. Work carried out by the community can be traced, so that all changes (new data and modification of the old data) can be documented. Figure 1 shows the evolution of a single page. The chronology allows one to look at the page as it existed during each step and at the same time to identify the author of each modification introduced.

Debate: Each page can be commented upon, and it is, therefore, possible for members of the community to discuss possible modifications to the page and the introduction of new information. Again, these comments can also be documented through the chronology function.

Figure 1 – Chronology of the evolution of a Wiki Page



Furthermore a great advantage of the chosen wiki software is a qualified and safe update process that guarantees access from different operating systems. As shown subsequently, a different tool was developed but it presents additional difficulty and higher cost of maintenance to the preferred MediaWiki software.

On the other hand, the use of MediaWiki for knowledge accumulation in both planning and urban design makes the CSF easier to learn.

STRUCTURING THE FLIPPED TRANSPARENCY FOR PLANNING

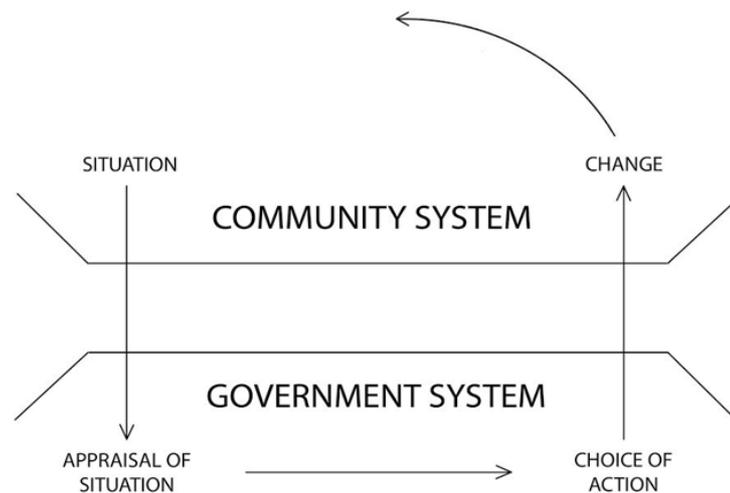
The wiki system is organised in entries as it is on Wikipedia. In the CSF, it is essential to structure the entry appropriately. This structure will be different for the CSF's two wikis, those of planning and urban design. The page structure in the wiki related to planning closely refers to the Strategic Choice Approach (Friend,

Jessop, 1969). Let us, then, look at the wiki that serves as the basis for this bottom-up transparency for planning.

The strategic choice approach

The CSF is by definition based on an incrementalist approach. Information is progressively accumulated, and consequently, policies and actions are based on that information. The structure for the entry must be based on the basic concepts of the strategic choice approach (Friend, Jessop, 1969). This approach considers the planning system as based on a continuous dialogue between a community system and a governmental system (Figure 2).

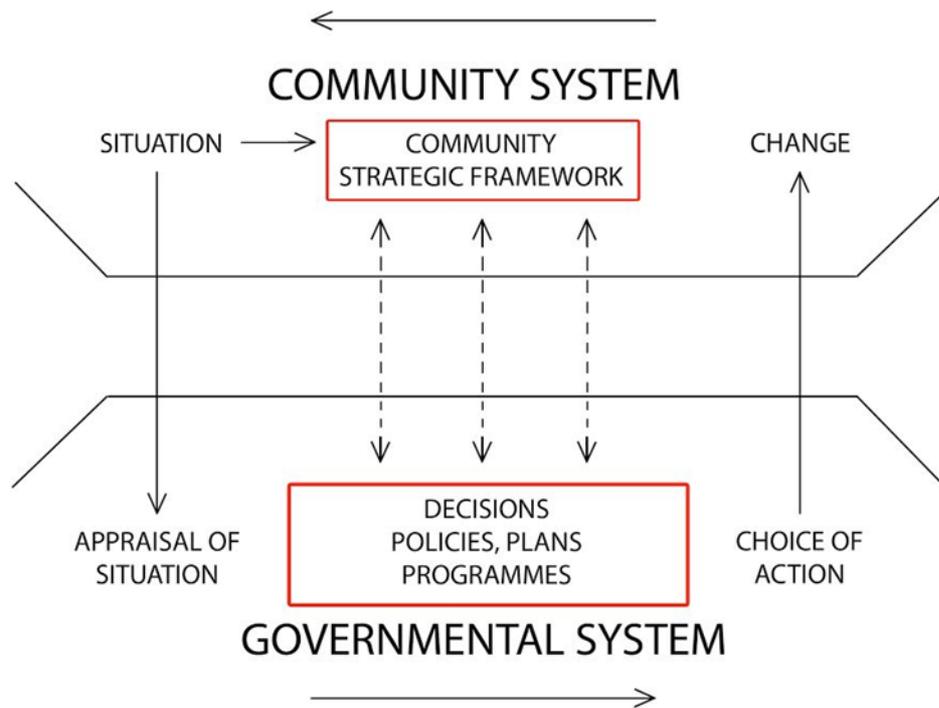
Figure 2 - The basic dialogue model (Friend and Jessop, 1969)



The community begins the process by expressing discomfort concerning problematic situations. The government analyses the situations to find a solution. A multiplicity of solutions may be needed to deal with these problems, because they are often related to each other—hence, the need to develop plans and programmes. Because of impediments in the community’s access to information as compared to that of the "transparent" government system, the

flipped transparency model changes the relations between government and community as follows (Figure 3):

Figure 3 - The basic model according to the CSF



This model represents a sort of parallel planning. The information base is organized by the community system. The entry in the wiki system can be easily organised. The knowledge is then directed towards the products (policies, alternative plans, programmes, etc.) to be used by the community in relating information to the government system.

The strategic choice approach then proceeds through 'decision areas', which are structured as follows: a title, indicating a specific problem; the description of the problem; and the available options, indicating alternative courses of action for addressing the problem. The zero option, i.e., accepting the present situation and consequently taking no action, must always be included.

Furthermore, the decision area has to include the main stakeholders who can influence the choice. It is the view of the community that determines the main actors who must be involved, including those among their own group.

The decision area also contains a list of other decision areas that are related to that problem. Finally, the decision area can contain considerations regarding possible developments presented by the analysis. The documentation involved in this analysis may vary; it includes official documents, certainly, but also a variety of other sources, e.g., press reports. It is essential to include such secondary sources in order to document, even partially, the positions of main stakeholders. The information contained in the wiki can thus be richer than the official documentation about the problem.

All this work can be publicly available in a simple but effective platform. Thus, in the flipped transparency model, users can get access to the information, discuss it, and potentially add new information.

Why not an ad hoc software?

In the past years, researchers have worked to develop a software that can trace all the steps of plan preparation and implementation, and including all information used for such purposes. PAULUS (Planning Analysis of Urban Linkages within Urban Systems), for example, has been successfully tested to document the Grosseto structure plan process (Scattoni, 2007). Even a decade later, it was found that the information stored in that system could be useful to consider updates to that plan (Picchianti, 2018 In this issue). PAULUS would thus respond to the needs of a "community group" seeking to make all the activity available in an accessible platform. However, the proposed wiki offers most of the functions of PAULUS while at the same time overcoming some of PAULUS's shortcomings. As a matter of fact, the PAULUS software has been found to suffer from several disadvantages, such as the time required for answers for a normal ADSL user. A second

shortcoming relates to the maintenance of the software, which must be upgraded any time a new version of the operating system is introduced.

The MediaWiki software overcomes such limits. Furthermore, the free version of the software, Wikia, can be used directly on the web. Possibly Wikia can be used as a first step for CSF work. The initial work can then be easily transferred to a wiki platform hosted by a provider.

Producing policies, plans, and programmes

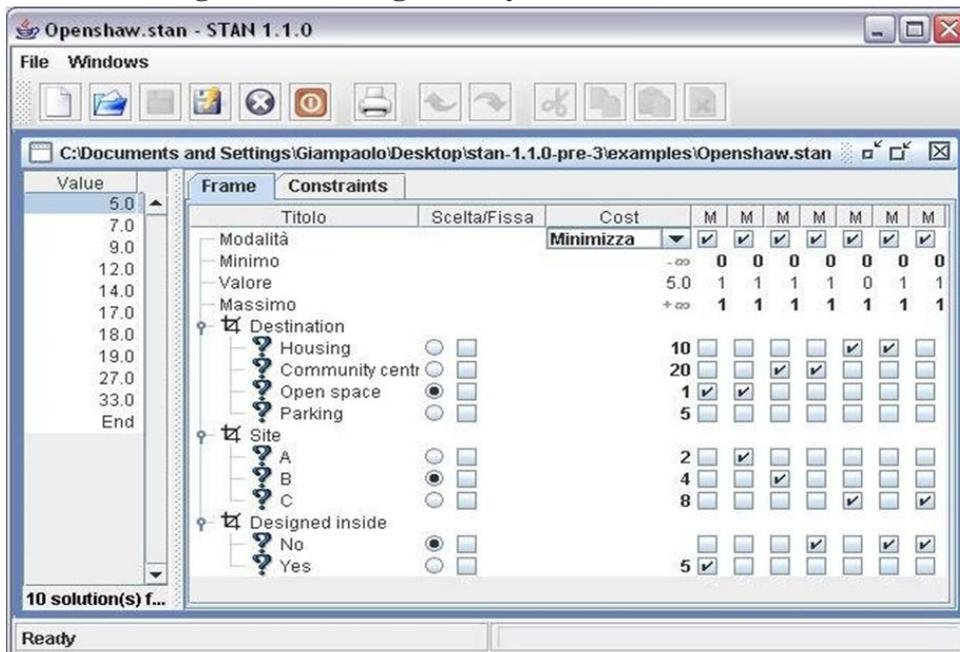
The CSF must produce coherent policies, plans, and programmes mostly in parallel with similar government activities. Among several available tools that can be identified for this purpose (Falco, 2016), Strategic Analysis (STAN) is suggested here (Figure 4). STAN was derived from the DOT (Decision Optimising Technique) developed by Openshaw and Whitehead (1975; 1985) in the 1970s and early 1980s. DOT, in turn, is based on the AIDA technique developed by the IOR school (Friend, Jessop, 1969; Faludi, 1987). Lombardi (2018, in this issue) provides an introduction to the characteristics of the two versions of the software STAN that were developed in the last ten years.

The wiki database allows for an easy feeding of information to a STAN framework. Subsequently, several exercises can be performed. It is up to the community to implement these exercises either for a restricted group within the community or with other groups and the general public.

STAN offers the ability to maximise the information available. All the elements of the strategic choice approach are present: decision areas, options and the interconnections among them, stakeholders and the preferences they have expressed. When such information is available, the STAN frame can also contain objective criteria, e.g., environmental indicators such as land use, polluting emissions, etc. STAN can be a very effective tool for producing a Strategic Environmental Assessment, in cases where public participation

should be activated from the beginning of preparation of the plans and programmes¹.

Figure 4 - Strategic Analysis (STAN) software



Simulating the planning system to increase general knowledge

Until now, STAN's real-life operational applications have been limited (Falco, 2016), but at the same time they are quite promising. Conversely, its potential for teaching has amply been shown. STAN's capacity to simulate the planning process according to the strategic choice approach is one of its main strengths. Through STAN, a community can replicate what is taking place in the government system planning process.

¹ This software can be downloaded at stan.sourceforge.net. Lombardi (2016, in this issue) offers a technical description.

Developing planning know-how within a community is one of the main elements for preparing an effective approach to counter undesired government planning decisions.

This approach can be supported by simple simulation methods such as role play (Higdon, D., et al., 2004). The community can easily avoid more complicated methods, such as those developed around the 'ideal speech' approach, that require the presence of specialised but often expensive facilitators.

From STAN back to the wiki

A STAN session is not an exercise that is carried out in the web. On the other hand, it represents a significant event during the planning process. It also provides further knowledge that should be made public. In Italy, the application of the strategic choice approach, e.g., the Grosseto structure plan, has shown how any participation or consultation exercise can induce multiple changes in the existing decision framework set up by planners (Scattoni, 2007). It is thus likely that this would happen in the STAN exercise. An interactive process is likely to produce not only new decision areas and options, but also possible changes to existing ones. These new contributions must then be introduced in the wiki and added to the chronology.

The increased ability to engage in a planning proposal and to control responses can answer a community's demand for transparency. It can produce a number of effects. Firstly, it makes clear to the responsible planning authority that the process is being monitored by at least one external organization that is determined to expose opaque negotiations and agreements. Second, the interest of the general public in the collected and developed information can be measured (e.g., through easy and at the same time powerful software such as Google Analytics). That is data that should be published as well. Thus, this action through simple and accessible tools makes it almost impossible for government authorities to

permit the process to go "dormant" for years in the eyes of the general public.

FLIPPED TRANSPARENCY AND THE QUALITY OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The following section considers the possibility of developing flipped transparency in the area of urban and landscape design. In this respect, the situation in Italy is particularly critical, and decisions in this area tend to be even more opaque than those in planning (Camarda, 1999). The Planning Act 765 of 1967 introduced a sort of 'emergency legislation'. The goal of this act was to correct the evident mismanagement of the fundamental planning act of 1942, though this act was never replaced but only amended. The emergency legislation of 1967 introduced standards and indexes. Since then, however, the development control has not taken into proper consideration the 'quality' of the built environment's transformation. The only exception to this lapse can be found in the listed landscape areas, which according to Landscape Act 1497 of 1939 allowed for qualitative control by state agencies (Soprintendenze). However, in these cases also, the criteria for decisions are not explicit and indeed are often perceived by local governments as impositions. In recent years, Regions and Provinces have produced plans that were accompanied with very specific attention towards landscape conservation and management.

Furthermore in Italy, self-organised communities often perceive the impact of potentially disruptive changes too late, most of the time when permissions have already been granted and sometimes when the work has already started. Given this fact, building an effective flipped knowledge model through a wiki may be more difficult than it is for planning, but it is still possible. Looking at a specific participatory project (Briani, 2016) for the municipality of

Scansano, Tuscany, a possible solution can be seen for a useful application of the CSF.

The Scansano project used a method that Christopher Alexander (1977) called 'pattern language'. Alexander's main assumption is that it is possible to build a specific language for solving design problems. This language would provide a shared basis to allow for communication among the different actors who are interested in working for acceptable formal transformations. In time, this approach was used in disciplines other than architecture, mainly in computer science (Gamma, E., et al., 1995). In those disciplines, however, Alexander's (1977, p.X) contribution is limited to the basic definition of the pattern language:

The elements of this language are entities called patterns. Each pattern describes a problem that occurs over and over again in our environment, and then describes the core of the solution to that problem, in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice.

In urban and landscape design, the pattern language method seeks to define elements of the language (the patterns). The patterns are shared values, because they are set up by the citizens themselves. Their combination then becomes a shared language with which the stakeholders can work to face the possible changes.

On the other hand, the Florence Convention on Landscape in 2000 defines landscape as follows: "Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'. It is, therefore, essential to include the people so that they can express their perception.²

² The Italian legislation recognised the Florence convention in Legislative Decree no. 42/2004.

Unfortunately, the Scansano project has been one of the few exercises, if not the only exercise, that did not leave the ‘people’s perception’ to be determined by experts. (Briani, 2011)

The CSF assumes that it is possible to transform that experience into an exercise in flipped transparency.

BEYOND THE MINIMAL STRUCTURE

Up to this point, this article has dealt with tools for flipped transparency in a small community; i.e., the minimal conditions for building a community strategic framework. Once it is shown that a CSF is viable, it is then necessary to outline possible developments arising from the growth of such a community in terms of members and its internal organization.

The use of a paid software like SoftGIS (Falco, 2016), used to build a GIS oriented to public participation, can represent an insurmountable entry barrier at the beginning of the CSF process, but it may be possible to incorporate such a process after initial consolidation

Also, access to expert knowledge can take place in numerous different forms. One such form could be through collaboration with universities according to the science shop model, even though that process is not always simple (Schlierf, K. and Meyer, M., 2013).

The success of a CSF for one community can trigger emulation by others. In such case, communities can exchange information about their respective experiences among themselves, including both achievements and failures. In the case of databases for urban and landscape design, patterns developed by one community can be easily reused by others, particularly those located in neighbouring areas.

The influence on the government system

Even a single CSF can influence the planning processes, at least in terms of the opaque relationships with some stakeholders. In other

words, the CSF community becomes an influential stakeholder, playing an influential role in support of transparency and participation. The extent and effectiveness of the community's influence depends on the quality of the strategic framework itself; as noted in Lindblom (1993): "existing societies need radical alterations, "need" in the sense that, if volitions were well probed, they would call for radical revisions" (p.365). Focusing this concept on planning and landscape design, a CSF can have a definite influence on the government system's planning practices. Article should be between 4,000-5,000 words, excluding tables, figures, and references.

CONCLUSIONS

This article investigated the feasibility of an independent information system that is built by communities interested in influencing the planning process. In Italian planning, transparency is often denied, despite an abundant legislation that should grant it. Yet on the contrary, opacity is the unwritten rule observed in conducting negotiations with interested stakeholders. It is, therefore, evident that only self-organization of a community can overcome the problem. This paper postulates that the use of a flipped transparency model built by the community itself is of great importance in achieving that purpose.

This paper thus describes the creation of a completely autonomous system called a Community Strategic Framework, through which a community can implement a dialogue or a confrontation with the government system. This alternative approach looks at, among other things to the well-established software Strategic Analysis (STAN). It can help to face limitations of planning processes in Italy, where too often the boundaries between planning and urban design remain unclear. In this sense, the academic background of planners in Italian architecture still plays a negative role.

An essential condition for the CSF is low cost. In most cases, a community will be unable to afford a tool costing more than a few dozen euros. Furthermore, the CSF must guarantee universal accessibility, mainly through the web, that is more and more accessible to the great part of Italian population. The flipped transparency must, on one hand, be granted by accessibility to a framework based on cumulative knowledge and must be immediately accessible during its making. On the other hand, this process must also be easy to manage.

A final condition for the CSF is scalability, the possibility to add new functions beyond the minimum conditions that were initially assumed. The community for a particular CSF can develop in number, influence, and resources and thus in the future may have access to possible integrations of expert knowledge. In this respect, the development of science shops for planning and landscape design could represent a great opportunity.

What results from this work is a puzzle combining three different yet simple techniques. These are wiki for decision area, Strategic Analysis (STAN) and wiki for pattern language. The flipped transparency is obtained through two databases. The first database is structured according to decision areas derived from a classical strategic choice approach. This database is then used to outline alternative policies as a basis for plans and programmes. Such information represents direct input that can be used in the STAN software to order and discuss solutions.

The second database exposes the rules of physical transformations as related to urban and landscape design. The pattern design approach allows the community to build pages of the wiki through the use of patterns. The MediaWiki software (Jackson, M., Blackburn, permits tracing of the whole process of building the database through its chronology function. As with the previous database, it is possible to open collaboration and discussion to the general public and not restrict it to the community only.

Such knowledge can allow the community to engage in dialogue/confrontation with the government system while in possession of effective arguments in support of the community's position. As shown in the Scansano project (Briani, 2011), a community can take advantage of the production of expert knowledge distributed in a variety of published sources. The knowledge accumulation process is also likely to reinforce the community's sense of belonging to its own landscape.

At the present proposed CSF is in its infancy and only single parts of the approach as shown in fig. 1 can be documented and evaluated in specific contexts and practical applications. On this respect further research on planning practice is needed.

As a matter of fact the main limitation of this work is the lack of empirical evidence of a CSF being implemented in its entirety. The different parts of the framework have been well tested. Therefore, if the proof is in the pudding, at present only the ingredients are reasonably reliable. Therefore, the main development from this research is its demonstration of the importance of monitoring the implementation of a CSF.

One immediate step forward that can be taken in support of the flipped transparency model is the preparation of simple guidelines that can help communities to embark on the process of building a CSF. In such a case, a study should also be undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of those introductory tools.

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