A Survey on Difference-Sensitive Planning:
Images and Perspectives

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This contribution examines some of the images and perspectives of postmodern urbanity suggested by the literature. The reflections brought together in this paper try to leave behind mundane literary routines, imprisoned in the clichés of the discourse on post-modernity, to single out a 'field of practices' that is enigmatic but at the same time constitutes and generates a new idea of urbanity. It is referred to the concept of DiverCity (Perrone, 2010) as a literary and evocative figuration that recounts this set of practices. Such figuration uses a 'play on words' between diversity and city, in which the two concepts are understood as entities with a one-to-one correspondence, an ontological interconnection. In this contribution DiverCity is just a horizon of the survey tha is aimed at outlying a conceptual framework of contemporary multiple, plural and interactive (built up during the action) practices.

Images

The literature has suggested many images of postmodern urbanity to the collective imagination. And it is precisely some of these that, to different degrees of emphasis, contribute to underlining some of the aspects constituting *DiverCity* (Perrone, 2010) as literary and evocative figuration that recounts this set of practices. The figuration uses a 'play on words' between diversity and city, in which the two concepts are understood as entities with a one-to-one correspondence, an ontological interconnection. DiverCity is the outcome of a process to produce and exchange multiple, plural, interactive (built up during the action), expert and experiential knowledge.

It is interesting to try to list the images that contribute to the "DiverCity making", however briefly, in order to understand the breadth of the cues that this terrain of action/research gives to the route towards a new planning imagination. A new, highly imaginative dimension of planning that sees multiculturalism, the concept of social justice and multiple publics as its constitutive elements (Sandercock, 1998a, 2003). A planning in which forms of rationality, comprehensiveness and scientific objectivity are replaced by forms of experimental, intuitive and local knowledge, based on the practice of listening and dialogue, and expressed through symbolic, ritual and visual methods.

What the theory proposes are fundamentally "images" of a creative sensitivity in planning. Images built in the sphere of the imagination where many things can become real, beyond our everyday experience, where the ability to imagine a radically different future from the known order of things breaks the barriers of convention: in other words, the sphere of utopia. Utopian thought in planning has a tradition that starts from far off. However, some of its most interesting exponents are contemporary authors. If we are to start, as we indeed should, from Owen and Fourier, Proudhon and Morris, Kropotkin, Howard (and many more), and, for some aspects at least, Mumford and Wright, it is possible to arrive, as John Friedmann (2002) also upholds for example, at two other generations of utopian thinkers: the generation of Jacobs, Lynch, Schumacher, Illich and Bookchin, and the most recent generation represented by Dolores Hayden and Leonie Sandercock. What makes the utopia of these authors attractive resides above all in its constructive rather than in its critical dimension. One could say that the first has absolute prevalence over the second, in the intent to design a "realisable utopia" outside the consolidated limits of planning and alternatively to the indeterminacy of the future.

The attempt to interpret the world and give it some "useable" images has often moved on the boundary between utopia and planning. In the era of post-modernity, this attempt also has to face up to the new challenge of multiplicity. And in the effort to seize upon this challenge, portraits and visions have been produced that head towards revealing the trends, depth and development of this multiplicity. Some of these - prevalently those drawn up by the more audacious expounders of postmodern thought - have become stimuli for trying out a new planning practice, while others have worked as a bridge between one theoretical approach and another, and others still have simply remained as exercises of visioning on the future.

In the text entitled *Towards Cosmopolis. Planning for Multicultural Cities, Cosmopolis* is the image of post-modernity through which Leonie Sandercock (1998a) describes her utopia for the new millennium. As the author herself defines it, *Cosmopolis* is a place of building the mind. Here planning language is extended to define the outlines of an emerging (insurgent) paradigm, and room is found for a creative multiplicity of topics and horizons: social justice, politics of difference, multiple and insurgent citizenships, heterogeneous publics (such as realising a form of plural civic culture – Young, 1990), and finally also multiple community ideals (meant as *resistance communities* based on the rejection of homogeneity and the search for a coalition policy – Hooks, 1990).

Mongrel City is the metaphor that the same author of *Cosmopolis* (Sandercock, 2003) uses to define and symbolise a new urban condition, in which difference, alterity, fragmentation, splintering, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity and plurality prevail over other images. It is akin to the sphere of action of multiculturalism policies. In the text entitled *Mongrel Cities in the 21st Century*, the author reflects on the elements making up her multicultural project for the twenty-first century. She sums them up under two different, complementary

aspects: thought inspired by the dialectical category of identity/difference and a multicultural perspective as the device for dealing with the constitutive "culturality" of human beings. And she dwells on this latter aspect in particular, owing to the heightened multiculturality of society and the consequent emergence of the topic of multiculturalism. In substance, she presents the 'multicultural perspective' as an attempt to interpret post-modernity. It inspires her thought towards a proactive approach to the dialectical pairing of identity/difference[1].

"Togetherness in difference" is the image used by Richard Sennett (1994) to express his desire (while jumping onto the back of a trend that was already underway) for a civic culture based on intercultural interaction in addition to the tolerant indifference of an apparent togetherness. Togetherness in difference puts across the image of post-modernity in which the dominant effect produced by the intercultural encounter between different systems is to expand the intellectual and moral horizons of each culture (which on their own could only interpret a limited range of human capacities and emotions).

'Politics of local liveability' is the expression used by Amin to propose an image of intercultural togetherness, enriched by his emphasis on local negotiations of difference, managed in the "city's micro-publics of banal multicultures" (Amin, 2002, p.13). He starts from the assumption that immigration phenomena and the manifestation of ethnicity are what make up globalisation and are reshaping the spaces of social relations in many ways. The image of peaceful togetherness has to take note of this phenomenon and encourage social, multicultural and multi-ethnic mixing, beyond the limits of globalised localities (communities without community) (Amin, 2002, p. 16), and extend the language of policies to alternative modes that include culturally diversified systems of meaning.

"The Good City"[2] is the image of utopia recounted by John Friedmann (2002) in his text entitled *The Prospect of Cities*. In the book the author shifts from the concept of citizenship to the concept of a multiplicity of citizenships, from the expansion of spaces of democracy to insurgent practices, from analysing the effects of places and power relations to the fights against what he defines – borrowing the words from Held (1995) – as *"nautonomy"* (the opposite of autonomy).

The Good City is the citizens' city, and it is up to the citizens to decide among themselves how a common good can be pursued, and through which process, so long as it is open and not imposed or declared while ignoring the voices of dissent. The central point of Friedmann's line of argument (and The Good City) concerns the citizens' political and natural relationship with their city in a context of a political practice that contributes to the realisation of each citizen and their fundamental right to human flourishing.

Among the many images that are useful to understanding the concept of plurality running through positivist epistemology, some more than others contain what we could define as the *radical power of a vision*, or its capacity to anticipate transformative actions.

"The Just City" is one of these. With this image, its inventor, Susan Fainstein (2000, 2010), proposes a radical vision of interaction (also meant as managing conflict in order to claim rights) as the element constituting the city of differences, in the awareness that progressive social change derives from power exercised by those who have been deprived of it. The Just City theory is based on the concept of extending participation to "disempowered groups", and on the concept of equity between differences of gender, race and sexual inclination. The persuasive dimension of The Just City rests on an idea of an enterprising state that not only sponsors welfare practices but prevalently creates the conditions for the production of wealth. A state that sponsors a project for the future which promotes the empowerment of the poor and the cheated through the involvement of the middle classes. These ideas are particularly fertile if referred to contemporary societies which are defined by the contribution of cultures and peoples in search of their own dimension of life, survival strategies and forms of self-determination. The Just City therefore interprets a new stage in

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1 See next paragraph.

2 "The Good City" is in turn defined by other images: "the Good City 1: Theoretical Consideration"; "the Good City 2: Human Flourishing as a Fundamental Human Right"; "the Good City 3: Multiply/city as a Primary Good", "the Good City 4: Good Governance" (Friedmann, 2002, pp. 103-118).

planning. Alongside the principles of equity and well-being, it incorporates diversity and participation as tools to improve the quality of life in the context of a global and capitalist economic policy.

Perspectives

If there is such a wealth of highly imaginative suggestions in the literature, this should ring some alarm bells: new perspectives are needed that are sensitive to the language of everyday life. Besides, one of the aspects constituting the epistemology of multiplicity concerns the nature of the cultural perspectives that underlie professional practice and orient theoretical research. They correspond to the capacity to take plural views, while making conceptual reformulations and trying out contextual strategies. Planning stories give us at least three of these views, which seem to effectively interpret the need for a speculative turn with respect to the cognitive trajectories of modernity: the *multicultural perspective* (Parekh, 2000; Burayidi, 2000; Sandercock, 2003); the *transactional perspective* (Bridge, 2005); and the *gender perspective* (Fainstein & Servon, 2005).

How to use them in a complementary and effective manner is perhaps another big enigma. However, they are unavoidable 'tools' to build DiverCity.

The multicultural perspective drawn up by Parekh and Sandercock works on the ways in which to structure a political life in accordance with the reality and desirability of cultural diversity. Hence, it works on a defined sense of belonging, not on the basis of shared ethnic or cultural characteristics, but in relation to a political goal agreed by the community. It is proposed as an attempt to interpret post-modernity; a sort of inspired thought oriented towards a proactive approach towards the dialectical identity/difference pairing.

The proposal by Parekh (2000)[3], the "inventor" of this speculative device, interprets multiculturalism as a cultural and political opportunity, as well as a progressive necessity and fact of postmodern society called to the attention of policies and planning.

As appears evident, the question revolves around the political bearing and public/collective recognition that societies choose to give to cultural diversity and the deriving social practices, both in terms of rights and in terms of participatory potentialities.

In his investigation of the concept of multiculturalism, and consideration of its social implications on community practices, Bhikhu Parekh (2000) outlines a scenario in which two parallel processes encounter and fuel each other: the multiculturalization of existing traditions and the emergence of a tradition or a multiculturally constituted culture. In a multicultural society, cultures continually come into comparison with each other, both formally and informally, both in the public and the private domains. Guided by curiosity, comprehension and even incomprehension, they enrich and transform each other. Even when their interaction is limited, sensitivity towards other traditions becomes awareness of their single specific aspects. Over time these cultures tend to make up a composite culture, in which their structural characteristics are all separately redefined. Like all cultures, the culture created from intercultural exchange (interculturally-created) and constituted by a multiplicity of cultural contributions (multiculturally-constituted) develops in

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3 The concept of the multicultural perspective was subsequently taken up again by Sandercock (2003) and divided into 10 points. Here are the most important ones, in the author of this article's opinion at least:

"My multicultural perspective for the 21st century is composed of the following premises:

- The culture embeddedness of humans is inescapable. We grow up in a culturally structured world, are deeply shaped by it, and necessarily view the world from within a specific culture […].

- "Culture" cannot be understood as static, eternally given, essentialist. It is always evolving, dynamic and hybrid of necessity […].

- Cultural diversity as a positive and intercultural dialogue is a necessary element of culturally diverse society. No culture is perfect or can be perfected, but all cultures have something to learn from and contribute to others […].

- At the core of multiculturalism as a daily political practice are two rights: the right to difference and the right to the city […].

- A sense of belonging to a multicultural society cannot be based on race, religion, or ethnicity but needs to be based on a shared commitment to political community. Such a commitment requires an empowered citizenry […]"(Sandercock, 2003, pp. 103-103)

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an unpredictable manner. It is defined by broad and not universally shared contents; it is the product of the intercultural dialogue needed for the survival of any culture; it has an enormous potential.

The interpretation suggested by Parekh lays down the bases for defining the outlines of a multicultural governance that is as absent as it is necessary for planning practices and policies. In this sense, the assumption of a multicultural perspective is the turn needed in order to pursue a model of multicultural "good governance". It is a turn that inevitably has to be supported by three issues: the premise according to which human beings live in a culturally structured world; the awareness that it is impossible to lead a culturally self-contained life in contemporary social contexts; and the assertion of the plurality intrinsic to every culture, even primitive ones.

A second reference to the necessity to adopt differentiated perspectives on the multiple urban manifestations comes from the *transactional* rationality theory drawn up by Gary Bridge (2005). If post-modernity puts aside rationality and its limits, at least those that are perceived and decoded, to leave room for the manifestations of an apparent "irrationality", thought beyond the postmodern will seek a new dimension of rationality that enables the manifestation of differences and is able to establish a proactive dialogue with them.

The very idea of reason, "attacked" on many fronts and in particular called into question by the turn of difference and its manifestations in the domains of the body, language, culture and the unconscious, regains central importance in the dimensions of the relationship between city and difference, going beyond the threat of the exclusivity (on one hand) and homogenisation (on the other) exercised by positivist rationality. The paper by Bridge slots into the reflections on the limits of a certain conception of post-modernity that interprets the city as an endless place that cannot be mapped, a post-human environment and an assembly of emerging elements. Contrary to those who propose urban orders based on stability and identity; capital, power and surveillance logics; and rational planning to deal with these effects, Bridge outlines a conception of urban space (urban space *after* the postmodern) which reflects the distribution of difference and the consequent pluralisation of power. To do so, he leans on philosophical pragmatism and its recent developments centred on two themes of postmodern thought: (1) recognising differences and (2) the meanings of communication and discourse after the communicative turn in philosophy. He shows how, by reading pragmatism in a certain way, it is possible to derive an interpretation of rationality that can live with difference and is related to the nature of the urban space that hosts it. It is a rationality that overcomes the dichotomy between communicative and instrumental, abstract and lived (Lefebvre, 1968; 1947,1961, 1981), strategic and tactical (De Certeau, 1980), between disciplinary space and heterotopy (Foucault, 1984), system and life-world (Habermas, 1984), the public and private domains, space of flows and everyday life (Castells, 1996). Instead, of all these entities, this rationality interprets the relations and situational interactions in a both discursive and non-discursive space of communication. Therefore, beyond irrationality's postmodern stigma, Bridge builds and legitimises a performative rationality whose primary essence is expressed by its capacity to connect and interpret the diversity between the times and spaces of communication and action, in other words, a *transactional* rationality.

The third perspective seen as a distinctive feature in an epistemology of multiplicity is the gender perspective (Fainstein, Servon, 2005). It is marked both by the contribution given by the voices of Judith Butler, Mary Parker Follet and Jane Addams, and by the texts of an immense amount of critical literature, which it appears dutiful to recall[4]. It intervenes creatively in the disciplinary gaps and thus influences the practical approaches and theoretical reflections of many contemporary scholars. This perspective brings about many scientific enigmas and brings some of the most important claims of post-modernity to planning. Indeed it explicitly contaminates the relations between knowledge and planning, and invades the disciplines of spatial planning, urbanism and some of the topics explored more widely in the sector literature (public space,

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4 Of the immense amount of literature on the topic, I consider it useful to quote some texts that are particularly "compromising" for the study of a new epistemology of planning: Bridge (2005); Butler (1990, 1993, 1997); Duden (1994); Fraser (1992); Follet (1965); Golderger, Tarule, Clinchy & Belenky (1986, 1996); Nussbaum (2000, 2001), and many more.

housing, economic development, transport, etc.). The gender perspective (plus, to an equal extent, the multicultural and transactional perspectives) belongs to the set of attempts to renew the image and usefulness of planning in dialogue with the progressive and postmodern claims.

In substance, there are two stages along the way to crediting the gender approach in planning: (1) defining the gender perspective and its epistemological potentialities in relation to gender diversity (in addition to the exclusively female dimension) and (2) incorporating the new gender epistemology into planning theory (Sandercock, 1998a, 1998b; Young, 1990; Jacobs & Fincher, 1998; Wekerle, 1999).

The first aspect is oriented towards recognising the multiple dimension of gender and both the intrinsic and the socially-constructed transactional diversity of the genders. Attention towards gender becomes inclusion of all manifestations of a *trans-gender* and an *in-gender* kind: no longer only selective gazes, the gazes of women, minorities, blacks, immigrants and so on, but also, and primarily, gazes including all these contemporary and multiple dimensions of experience. A sort of 'transactional gendering' as the dimension constituting "transactional bodying".

The second aspect instead concerns the role of the new epistemic authority of gender and its possible declensions for planning. Many essays that can be ascribed to this second aspect reason around the active and radical role of the epistemic trajectories of gender, while highlighting the necessity to expand the epistemologies at the basis of practices and reassessing the local knowledge and gender experience. Among the "loudest" voices I must mention those of: Leonie Sandercock (1998a) with her alternative story of planning and epistemological recognition of insurgent practices; Tovi Fenster (2004) with her specific attention towards gender spaces and the constitutive role of cognitive gender practices; Iris Marion Young (1990) with her reflections on distributive justice and the politics of difference; Jane Jacobs (Jacobs & Fincher, 1998) with her explorations of the transformative dimension of difference applied to the life practices of women, foreigners and children; Gerda Wekerle (1999) with her reflections on the relationship between gender planning, local knowledge and insurgent citizenship practices; and Susan Fainstein and Lisa Servon (2005) with their gendered survey on gender, oriented towards finding new domains and directions in planning theory by rereading the relationship between feminist philosophies and planning practices.

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