

**Deliberative praxis, creation of public spaces and community welfare:
The development model of a small Italian town**

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Abstract

We build on the experience of a small Italian town to illustrate how public space entrusted by public administrators has re-casted the spatiality of the town and carries the potential for alimending further changes at times of crises. We evidence the processes whereby the value-driven creation of public space re-vamps cooperative behaviours, the role of not-for-profit enterprises and promotes community development.

Keywords: Public space, John Dewey, Community Development, Spatial Policy, Deliberation, Cooperation

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1. Introduction

The space of a city is the result of a multiplicity of events and choices. History matters, and possibilities are conditioned by a path which defines perceptions and future trajectories (Arthur, 1994; North, 2005). The urban space, the one individuals can access in their everyday life, is made of the squares, the streets, the paths and the places they connect, the gardens, the public buildings, but it is also casted by the totality of the urban stage, formed by private buildings and by all those spaces such as shops, offices, production sites that individuals see and access in their everyday life experience (Madanipour, 2003; Solà-Morales, 2002). This broad dimension of space is not defined by its ownership (private or public in their traditional sense), but increasingly by <<spaces that are neither public nor private but both at the same time>> (Solà-Morales, 1992: 6).

Following this conceptualisation, neither ownership nor accessibility can be the only criteria for identifying the public nature of space. It is not a novelty that spaces and their perceptions are shaped, over time, by individual choices (for example public administrators and private citizens) reciprocally influencing each other. A closer analysis reveals that each opportunity is the result of past choices and trajectories, and that each private choice does not only affect the individual who act in the pursuit of a specific aim. It follows that private choices impact on the opportunities and the perception of the space that others construct for themselves when striving to satisfy some individual need or desire. Consistently, human geographers have long recognised that individuals build their knowledge by visually experiencing their environment and filtering it through <<parochial>> cultural lenses (Lynch, 1960; Lowenthal, 1961) and emotional attachment (Tuan, 1974). This argument, of clear Deweyan inspiration, emphasises that the courses of actions that affect such environment and that are undertaken in pursuit of particular objectives engender consequences on other people's experience that exceed the sphere of the decision-maker.

As Dewey explains <<every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after>> (Dewey 1938, p. 35). These interconnections, again interpreting Dewey's analysis, identify the <<publics>> or, in other words,

those who do not participate in the making of the choice and yet are affected by them (Dewey, 1927). The implications may seem counter-intuitive, but having each choice a public impact it also follows that the public sphere is generated by individual choices. Note that this view is different from the classic dichotomisation between the private and public spheres that occurs in standard economic approaches (Sacchetti, 2013). *The public sphere is therefore represented as the space of mutual influences, of the intersections between human choices.* When these intersections reflect self-regarding dispositions at the detriments of others, such influences can be negative for publics and for the community as a whole; or else they can be positive, when decision makers value, by using inclusive processes, multiple publics and their interests (ibid.).

Spatial policies, amongst others, are choices with a clear public impact. They occur within a policy arena constructed around general development targets and norms defined at higher normative levels (e.g. most constitutional laws would identify broad principles such as equality, dignity and freedom from which a hierarchy of norms and policy rationales is further derived by the legislator). City Council administrators reply to the rights and duties defined within the constitutional framework by choosing development priorities and modalities. Their choices cover therefore a special relevance in the analysis of public space and community welfare.

This capacity is challenged by the current debt crisis that has substantially redefined the possibilities of the public sector to invest in welfare services and new infrastructures. In the face of this, as we will suggest here, spatial endowments at the local level can engender more autonomous development processes, creating conditions that support the emergence of bottom-up community initiatives. The territorial endowment of *material assets* is, in this sense, the backbone of community development. Likewise, material assets can contribute to fostering the emergence and establishment of *immaterial assets* entailed in behavioural norms, such as cooperative attitudes that are able to engender flexible responses to community evolving needs (Sacchetti and Tortia, 2013).

Material assets have two types of consequences: I) on value transmission and II) on capabilities (or the freedoms that individuals enjoy). Spatiality studies have long recognised that – upstream –

physical spaces embody and transmit specific beliefs and values (Parkinson, 2013; Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001). For example, values of dignity and care are embodied in a safe and pleasant work environment; the value of imagination and critical thinking is embodied by art venues. Besides, the relation, between material spaces and capabilities, emphasises the unity between context and individual freedoms. This is a central idea in Dewey as well as in Sen, who stressed that human experience depends on the specific actions that we can do *and* from the context, with the two reciprocally influencing one another (Dewey, 1896; Sen, 1999). Therefore, working in a pleasant environment makes working life more enjoyable (capability), making individuals appreciate the value of dignity at work (value transmission); going to theatre activates critical intelligence, imagination and sensitivity differently from what one hour of shopping can achieve (capability), making individuals understand the value of the arts (value transmission). The impact of spatiality on the aspirations and habits of individuals is evident also when comparing policies that privilege the spectacularisation of cities (for example using thematic parks and shopping malls as attractors for masses of unrelated consumers) compared with cities that value authenticity, by investing on their historical heritage, or seek to reproduce in the design of physical space the values to sociality and cooperation. In other words the endowment of material assets (the context, reflecting particular values) holds consequences on the way individuals can enjoy freedoms, perceive reality, and inter-subjectively form their own values.

To interpret policy choices, our work accounts for the immaterial and material preconditions of the development model applied in a small town. The focus is on the spatial choices and policies promoted by public administrators. We build on the particular experience of Gambettola, a small Italian town located in the Emilia-Romagna Region to illustrate, focusing on the past 10 years, how the idea of society entrusted by elected public administrators has attached value and therefore factual application to specific development objectives, and how these values have re-casted the spatiality of the town accordingly. Our suggestion is that through spatial policies the decision-maker has endowed the town with new assets and spaces that hold a clear potential to impact, in the near future, on individual behavioural habits, life experience and capabilities.

The case presented here is the result of a multiplicity of collaborations and interactions with the town administrators and with the community, starting in 2006 with a university-Municipality joint Festival project. After the project, spatial policy choices have been observed during periods of participation in the town's life and events as a citizen, by means of repeated conversations with the Mayor and public administrators, and consulting secondary data (Municipality Strategic Plans, Council's decisions, statistical reports) from the Council archives.

2. A context of path-dependent innovation

The creation of an attractive territory, one where people want to live and work and enterprises establish their assets¹, represents today a major task which requires the joint presence of human, economic and institutional resources. Local economic development policy requires that administrators invest to create the conditions for communities to identify and move towards desired objectives with a long-term perspective. This implies that administrators embed and retain in the territory actors which aim at developing activities coherently with the values, objectives and praxis of the community. The task for administrators is therefore one of elaborating a local development model that specifies the type of socio-economic relations that need promotion and help the community to move towards desired welfare aims. Part of the challenge would also be addressing connections outside the Municipality locally and internationally, for citizens, community organizations, enterprises, to build networks amongst like-spirited multiplicities (Cowling and Sugden, 1999; Sacchetti and Sugden, 2009). This can be implemented through the integration of specific services, the exploitation of synergies for greater economic sustainability of activities, cooperative fund raising on innovative

¹ Recent arguments in local development studies relate regional competitiveness to the presence of highly skilled human capital and creative occupations. The work of Florida (2002) has placed creative occupations under the spotlight of regional development policy, engaging analysis with uncovering situated elements which can make cities attractive for the creative workers as an integral part of ensuring economic prosperity. The focus on the creative content of individual occupations has diversified analysis, which used to concentrate on industrial sectors, spatial division of labour, issues of manufacturing decline or innovation policies therein (Cf. Cooke (2006) for a review of the debate in regional development). This crucial passage is discussed also by Markusen (2004) who observes that the utility of targeting occupations is in their ability to transversally generate positive territorial externalities by stimulating entrepreneurship, recruiting and retaining talents, whilst serving multiple industrial sectors.

ideas but also, and especially with regard to distant or scattered communities, by creating communication platforms for sharing knowledge on local development aims and practices.

The recognition of the trajectories marked by the sometimes accidental or imperfect origins of a town, *vis à vis* the evolving needs and practices required by communities, leave Council administrators scope and perspective for innovation which, as we know, requires a good propensity to entrepreneurial action. We regard Council administrators (and especially the Mayor who, in the context of Italian towns is the key strategic decision-maker) as individuals who are in principle motivated, at times passionately, in benefitting the community by means of acting within the Council institutions and remit. In the case we present here, the administrators of a small town have embraced the public institutional remit with entrepreneurial spirit, using their professional competences and experience to achieve community-welfare aims, and with the strength and determination to see it through.

We can observe instances in which radical changes in the use of urban space have been introduced by social innovators as highly reasoned and structured reply to the experienced failures of previous courses of policy to meet wider societal needs. It is clear, however, that innovators do not just react to the failure observed in concrete policy actions. Their ideas and choices embody their experience, value system and, from a deontological point of view, norms (rights and duties) on how socio-economic relations should be (Sacchetti, 2013; Negri Zamagni, 2013).

In the case analysed here, for example, <<creative responses>> (as in Schumpeter 1947) elaborated by the town administrators expressed what they had <<reason to value>> (Sen, 1999). These represented an innovative benchmark for the ideation and realisation of new courses of policies. Specifically, official public presentations of the Town Strategic Plan placed great emphasis on the aim of creating a <<public city>> out of the <<bombarded city>> which, in the Mayor's perception and analysis, was inherited after waves of choices guided by individualism and search of private advantage, even at the expenses of long-term community welfare. As an indication of the privatised nature of the town, consider that Gambettola did not have a proper pedestrian public square, the

emblem of social and relational life in Italy's urban tradition. This could be evicted also from the Mayor's position, expressed in several public occasions and interviews. Before the Mayor reformed the development strategy around the idea of the public city, Gambettola mostly reflected – in the administrators' view – a development model shaped by short-terminism and individualistic values, where urban space had been arranged as a function of particular interests, despite this being evidently in contrast with the interests of other publics, with the community as a whole and with its long-term development.

Why individual interests had captured town choices requires some inferential effort. In small towns especially, human capital can be scarcely available and elected administrators might have lacked, in the past, the perspective, method and planning abilities required. Under these conditions it was easier for private interests to capture the choices of administrators. Also the majority of people, apart from those who contribute or work in the many third-sector associations, do not seem to be interested in public issues or in taking a public approach to problem solving, making judgements mostly on the basis of their own private sphere. This happened despite the fact that, on the other hand, a cooperative organisation had operated in the town since the Seventies and other third sector associations are present in the town.

Against a development form that privileges the exclusive interest of particular groups in isolation, social capital studies have, for at least two decades now, emphasised how communities that feature high levels of cooperation, involvement and trust achieve higher levels of welfare. Oppositely, where stark individualism and competition prevail, communities do not thrive (Fukuyama, 1995, 2001; Putnam, 1993, 2000). Social capital, in particular, has been argued to act as a form of asset operating within and across communities by means of specific norms that promote cooperation, such as trust and reciprocity, rather than the adoption of exclusive self-regarding attitudes.

The process of innovation introduced by the town's administrators aspired at moving towards greater cooperation, in contrast with prevailing beliefs and attitudes. Choices motivated by the aim of creating a public city diverged from prevailing habitual ways of thinking and required the unconditional

support of the administration, despite the fact that voices of dissent were raised from particular groups in the community. For example, a short run view on local development had always disregarded the absence of cultural venues in the town (with the exception of the cinema houses that were created again by the forward-looking entrepreneurial initiative of a private citizen) or of a public park, and never directed resources to their development. For decades administrators had given priority to ordinary maintenance and lack the value basis and planning abilities for committing larger resources to long-term development projects, even when funds were available. In this sense, the public innovator's choice can be regarded as a highly reasoned reply to historical contextual conditions, facilitated or obstructed by existing settings, by the layers of habits, beliefs, institutional norms in which the administration of a small town Council is embedded, and by sedimented political, economic and social relations (Granovetter 1992; North 2005; Sacchetti, 2013). The introduction of spatial policy innovations by the public administrator is therefore to be interpreted in the context of persisting beliefs (pre-judgments or prejudices; that is: judgements that are formed without critical reflection, to say it with Dewey (1910/1991)) and interests. Also the observation of past spatial choices emphasises the imperfect and uneven origins of the town (Muldoon and Schaap, 2012), linked to historical circumstances, established interests, and inherited ways of seeing reality and possibilities.

3. Theoretical perspective

Beliefs and their practical realisations

<<La vie quotidienne>> described by Lefebvre occurs within the spaces defined by social and production relations reflected in towns and urban spaces. Following his interpretation, Karplus and Meir (2013) place emphasis on the dialectic tradition of social spatiality, for which values and ideas must correspond to concrete, material arrangements, or disappear. History shows that value systems and points of reference dissolve and rise. The values that disappear faster without leaving a trace are those that do not find a material application. Recalling Lefebvre's analysis of space, it is in material

applications that <<each idea of ‘value’ acquires or loses its distinctiveness through confrontation with the other values and ideas that it encounters there>> (Lefebvre 1991/1974 p. 416; Charnock G, Ribera-Fumaz, 2011).

Confrontation amongst values occurs if individuals and communities have the critical capacity to scrutinise the outcomes (or consequences) generated by their pragmatic realisation. The policy requirement that follows is to create the conditions for communities to develop critical judgement abilities and be able to appreciate the relation between reality (objects and material spaces, but also prevailing habits and behaviours) and its consequences (for instance in terms of capabilities or freedoms that individuals in the community can enjoy). The method, derived from scientific enquiry, leads the *reflective assessment* of choices beyond what is directly observable (Dewey, 1910/1991). Rather reflective thinking proceeds by exploring the grounding beliefs of choices; in this case for example this would be the way we perceive reality, form expectations, perceive needs and act on space, by choosing for example public gardens to car parks, theatres to shopping malls or vice versa.

To say it with Dewey, reflective thought is the <<*active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends*>> (Dewey, 1910/1991, p. 6, original emphasis). For example, the danger of children to grow unhealthy habits, fail to construct their perception of space and lack confidence is a genuine possibility, or a possible fact that we induce from observing that they do not move around independently and are often driven by an adult to places of interest rather than walking or cycling. The observed phenomenon is <<*the ground or basis of belief*>> in the suggested consequence (Dewey, 1910/1991, p. 8). We believe something (children to grow unhealthy or lack confidence) not because we may observe its direct account, but a symptom (being driven by parents) that indicates the outcome. We can continue our critical reflection and consider what material realisations (objects) encourage these behavioural patterns and their consequences. The lack of safe paths for children for example is another element that witnesses or indicates the possibility that children fail developing healthy habits and independence. To complete our reflection we can enquire about the immaterial elements (existing values, ideas, other beliefs) that determine these habitual behaviours. To consider

one amongst others, we can reason that the value our society has given to the fast achievement of targets has gradually obfuscated the value of the process, or means, used to achieve them. Cars get children to school fast, but deprive them of a process (walking with friends) that would increase their self-esteem, independence and fitness.

Cooperation and deliberation as procedural outcomes of choice

By means of reflective thinking, new awareness of issues finds pragmatic realisation in a transformation of values, behaviours, choices, and objects. So administrators can rebuild their streets to include cycling paths that connect major areas of interest, school educators can teach about bike riding in urban spaces and work with local cycling associations and bike shops; parents can explain the value of physical activity and gradually give more independence to their children. This requires a deliberative, cooperative approach to assessment and problem solving. The deliberative praxis assumes further relevance as we think that individual capacities to foresee and learn are subject to limitations and errors (Bruni and Sugden, 2007; Hodgson, 2005). In our example administrators, school teachers, private organisations, and families cooperate to critically assess the problem and work together to solve it. When at least one of the partners fails to cooperate, there will be partial or no achievement. In line with Sacchetti (2013) the approach, therefore, suggests that:

- I. Interconnectedness or the existence of reciprocal influences does not necessarily imply cooperation or inclusion of interested <<publics>>.
- II. The <<publics>> are better off if they cooperate to give themselves common rules on how to identify and move towards shared objectives (Ostrom, 1990).

Cooperation in this sense explicitly requires a disposition to appreciate diversity of perspectives, needs, desires and impacts to find mutually beneficial solutions. Publics can therefore decide to give themselves rules about how to reach shared solutions to problems and decisions of shared matter.²

The choice of a cooperative deliberative process is not neutral with respect to the nature of chosen objectives. It is in fact conceived to fulfil the interests of publics and community as a whole, rather than particular interests at the detriment of community objectives and welfare. A cooperative, discursive process reflects a specific choice of method, and is directed at discovering diverse perspectives and to include them in a comprehensive assessment of available opportunities. As Sen (2002) explains in his theory of comprehensive outcomes, particular processes are chosen to avoid undesired outcomes and to attain desired ones. In other words, what we believe and what we value from a deontological point of view (norms defining rights and duties) holds consequences in terms of the processes chosen *and* of their final outcomes. The comprehensive consequences of choice, including both processes and end-outcomes, provide the context within which individuals develop their life experience as they strive to fulfil desires (Dewey, 1938). Reflective thought supports understanding of the antecedents and consequences of choices, thus increasing the opportunity of those who can think in this way to adjust and achieve fulfilment.

Public space: discursive and physical

Mutual influences can be discovered, understood and enriched using reflective thinking, when individuals and publics cooperate to the fine tuning of deliberative processes and put effort in participating accordingly. Only when interactions are understood, when meaning is formed, we can talk, for Dewey, of a life experience. This is:

² Multistakeholder governance in social enterprises (these are firms with a social aim and a not-for-profit remit) provides an example of how communities can organise themselves to entrepreneurially provide services that address community needs and that can only marginally be provided by traditional welfare (Borzaga, 2013; Sacchetti and Tortia, 2012). Empirical and experimental literature has shown that participation in the definition of procedural norms increases participants effort and compliance to the norm (Ostrom 1990). Cooperation applied ex-ante to the formation of pre-agreed norms is specifically relevant in any process of critical reflection. This is because, as noted, critical construction of knowledge (e.g. about community needs) is the outcome of a deliberative process that needs actors to cooperate on enquiry about values, beliefs, choices and outcomes.

...the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication ... What is distinctive in man makes it possible for him to sink below the level of the beasts. It also makes it possible for him to carry to new and unprecedented heights that unity of sense and impulse, of brain and eye and ear, that is exemplified in animal life, saturating it with the conscious meanings derived from communication and deliberate expression. Dewey (1934:22-23).

We call *discursive public space* a place of transformation, where communication and deliberation engender critical reflection over interacting beliefs, choices and outcomes. Discursive public space is, in other words, the space of curiosity, enquiry and discovery, where individuals are enabled to use their critical intelligence to make sense of interactions, and shape their aims and existence by reflecting on their experience (Cf. Dewey, 1934; Halsall, 2012; Latour and Weibel, 2005; Sacchetti, 2013).

Albeit enquiry is mostly a cognitive inter-subjective process aimed at identifying the elements and patterns that underpin choices and their consequences, it dialectically opens up the task of *creating the conditions for its practical realisation*. Practical realisation, from Levebvre's spatial perspective is searched in physical space, in the activities undertaken within, and in the norms and practices that regulate such activities. *Physical public space*, consistently, is produced space that embodies part of the practical pre-conditions for developing enquiry in the course of everyday life (Cf. Habermas (1996) for an extended consideration of deliberative conditions). In Gambettola this happens on different physical platforms. Such can be the streets and squares surrounded by local shops and cafes where people meet in the morning; the public gardens where anyone can sit and discuss in summertime at dawn; the public library and cultural centre where, besides offering access to a variety of materials, cultural activities are hosted, associations and citizens' Forums can self-organise and gather; the basketball fields where young people gather and play; the cinema; the town theatre, where suggestions from the stage prompt new perspectives and critical thinking, where workshops and Festivals gather artists from an extended international network, and where children and people with

disabilities engage with artistic expression; the industrial area where production facilities are concentrated to grasp the benefits of proximity; the old slaughterhouse where performances of independent musicians gather a varied audience and favours diversity of interactions.

In all these spaces, deliberation can occur in two ways: intentionally or occasionally. Deliberation can be an intentional process that, especially when issues are complex, requires explicit procedural rules to ensure cooperation and to amplify the impact of the ideas developed within the discursive space. Yet, everyday life within physical public spaces includes also occasional interactions that can unearth new perspectives and discourses. These paths of discovery are only apparently or partially casual. Occasional processes of discovery, as well as intentional ones, occur because physical public spaces exist and were valued ex-ante by the decision-makers who anticipated the positive consequences of their creation and use.

By involving rather than excluding, physical public spaces encourage cooperation and deliberative social praxis. Witt (2003), in particular, suggests that widespread changes occur when new values are communicated to attract agents' attention, so that a critical mass is reached in the community. In our case, a policy agenda and subsequent actions that prioritise the creation of public spaces can initiate a widespread critical reflection on the value of such spaces and on observed consequences, e.g., amongst others, access to opportunities, communication and deliberation. The physical and the discursive spaces thus feed each other in synergy, one providing the material condition that signals how much cooperation is valued for community development, the other contributing the cognitive content, the space where critical reflection engages publics and uncaps their creativity. By favouring communication and cooperation, both physical and discursive spaces offer a terrain where multiple needs, desires and ideas can emerge and find a practical realisation in local development projects (Cf. Sacchetti et al., 2009).

4. A case study on the production of public space

The town

In the case we present here we analyse the experience of a Gambettola, a small town of slightly less than 10,500 inhabitants located in the Southern part of the Emilia-Romagna region, in the North-East of Italy. The town was settled on the old road that connected the borough of Longiano located on the hills, and the sea. Historically Gambettola has always been a passage way, having been funded as a Roman military camp at the borders of the Republic and being part of the lands where historians have placed Cesar's crossing of the Rubicon. Massively affected by World War II bombing, nothing is left of its remote and more recent origins and the town has never been on the map of tourists for his historical heritage. Rather, its particular location encouraged the development of trade, which has always represented a major economic activity for the town.³ Trade of scrap metal and old car parts defines the perception of those who arrive in the town, with high hips of mechanical parts and demolished cars that stand out from the countryside around, covered, in spring, by the blossoms of fruit trees. Small to medium manufacturers have now converged in the new industrial area, not far from the wreckers. Large distribution is absent and independent retailers' shops populate the high-street. The perception the city gives is one of constant movement and dynamism, with a very healthy weekly market, cinema's nights, a Puppets Festival, a Spring Carnival and an Antiques Market. Voluntary associations manage the cultural events, the carnival and the antiques market, whilst a social enterprise (non-profit) organises the annual puppets festival and manages the Municipality's theatre, recently brought back to life after fifty years of closure. Besides the various independent shops and cafes, privately owned spaces with public relevance include the cinema theatres, the Church's recreational spaces, and Fabbrica (<<The Factory>>), a cultural centre located in a converted industrial site.

The Mayor

Over the past ten years the town has been administered by the same Mayor (associated with the Democratic Party, of leftist tradition), who has been re-elected after the first mandate. Not a politician by profession, he is a medical doctor who in the past coordinated professional training and the

³ In 2005 the workforce (self-employed and employed in local enterprises) was 666 in retailing, 652 in manufacturing, 392 worked in services, 255 in constructions, 138 in agriculture, and 36 in tourism (data are from Camera di Commercio di Forli-Cesena, in Piano Strutturale Comunale, Quadro Conoscitivo, Volume 1).

publication of specific pathologies guidelines. Part of these activities had to be abandoned after the first mandate. Besides being the Mayor, he is general practitioner and offers constant voluntary work at the hospital emergency. During this administration, local policy choices have always shown the marked leadership of the Mayor, whose personality reflects typical entrepreneurial traits, such as a clear vision of priorities and possibilities, innovativeness, high cognitive and decision-making abilities, courage, supported by a very dense network of acquaintances locally and regionally.

The choices

Ten years ago public spaces were not sufficient or, at least, they were inferior to the endowments available today. The situation that the Mayor inherited was one of an under-resourced city, where community needs were still conceived within 1970s structures, thought for a smaller population (the population increased from 6 to nearly 11 thousand in the span of 40 years). Changes in demography (with a high incidence of elderly people and the increase of new, albeit smaller, households with children)⁴, in lifestyles, as well as new types of needs and expectations required an innovative development project.

The creation of a <<public city>> represented the objective that led policy innovation. This entailed the creation of an inclusive environment whereby the new material infrastructures were open to the projects and ideas contributed by the community for its own development. This view was expressed by the Mayor in several public occasions (public Council assemblies, the citizens' Forum, meetings with various stakeholders such as political parties, trade/industry associations, voluntary associations).

The path emerged progressively, as each specific choice materialised in a town development project. Policies developed in discrete rather than sequential steps, which allowed the administrators to assess

⁴ Between 1996 and 2006, people over 65 years of age raised by 30% (from 1,396 to 1,807). Infants and children between 0 and 5 years of age have increased by 16% (from 494 to 574). During the same time span the total population increased by 8% (from 9,270 to 9,997). The average composition of a household shrunk from 2.93 to 2.69, with a variation of -8% (own calculations on data from Camera di Commercio di Forli-Cesena, in Piano Strutturale Comunale, Quadro Conoscitivo, Volume 1).

the consequences and improve the understanding of each development project, adding after each step new ideas and knowledge to the design of what came after.

The ideal has been objectified in two ways.

- I. On the one hand the administration has supported all the expressions of social capital and civic involvement organised around the activities of several non-profit citizens' associations. By offering capacity building and linkages with actors who shared the development model (also by contributing financially), the administration has supported those community-based actors who could contribute with ideas and projects and fill physical public spaces with *contents*.
- II. On the other hand, the administration has undertaken large investments in spatial policy to create a <public city>, improving – through new and developed material infrastructures (the *containers*) – access to education, health, culture, work and social inclusion.

The aim has been pursued with method and articulated in several consistent discrete steps that benefited from the experience and knowledge built along the process. Priorities since the start focused the Council's resources over education, health, culture, social inclusion, production and trade activities, investing over 15 million Euros over a ten years period, whilst keeping per-capita debt at the lowest level in the Region. Where the Municipality ordinary budget resources were not sufficient, resources were integrated by regional funds (e.g. for the new town theatre) and from the conversion agricultural land into urban space, a choice that has raised resources from private constructors which have then been re-invested by the administration for urban requalification or for new recreational facilities. This was a debated choice, dwelling between eroding part of the landscape and promoting the town's welfare services.

Below we present, with some chronological ordering, the main choices that impacted on the town's spatiality, physical (or material) and deliberative (or immaterial).

The public park. Amongst the first spatial policies was the creation of a public park at the outskirts of the town, on the farm land which was the summer house of Federico Fellini, the film director. The

town had a few small public gardens, but nothing like a park. The park is owned and managed by a recreational cooperative (which has a long history in the town) for the benefit of the town's public.

Cycling paths, playgrounds and sports facilities. New sports facilities, public gardens and playgrounds were introduced mostly by recovering a degraded area in the town centre with the aim of increasing safety and providing aggregation spaces for the youngsters, including a basketball pitch.. The new peripheral areas had meanwhile also been re-designed around aggregative public spaces (public gardens, squares and a skate-park). At the same time, part of the streets was redesigned to contain cycling paths that connect the periphery with major public areas (the schools; the public park, the town centre). There are now 9 km of cycling paths out of 40 km of urban streets, and the plan is to increase the ratio. This gives the town the highest density of cycling paths in the Region. The construction of a relatively dense network of cycling paths was thought in view of reducing the use of cars and by reaching major public areas the choice was meant to increase independent mobility especially of the youngsters, with expected benefits in terms of health, confidence, socialisation and environmental respect.

The new school. A new school project was also undertaken very soon by the administrators. This provided new capacity for pre-school and primary-school children, as a reply to forecasted trends in the population demography. The new building's architecture was inspired by the rainbow colours and revived the monochromatic pattern of the older building. Meanwhile the Municipality also undertook capital investments for the junior school.

The health centres. A <<health city>> was – together with the new school buildings – one of the first projects to be implemented. It was created inside a converted area to gather in the same venue all GP surgeries, as well as private health practices with the aim of increasing the proximity and synergies among treatments and therefore facilitating access to healthcare. More recently, in 2011, another entirely public integrated health centre has been established to cover the town needs and those of the nearby municipalities. As a result, about 20,000 people (which is double the population of Gambettola) use the service and gravitate in the town area.

The Festival: reinforcing the new trajectory. In 2006 a university-led project was initiated (by the author and other colleagues⁵ who at that time worked at the *Institute for Industrial Development Policy*, at the University of Birmingham) with the objective of designing and organising a Festival event aimed at the identification of <<publics>> (as defined in this script and not so much as audience). The Festival's invite described the event as <<*seven days on creativity and the economy to imagine, express and create new development possibilities through deliberation, art, dance, poetry, theatre, cinema, music and science*>>. The expressed aim was ambitious and in many ways quite at odds with the established expertise in Gambettola, which developed around recreational events such as the town's Spring Carnival, or other annual events like the transit of the historical cars race 'Mille Miglia' or the 'Mostra Scambio,' (an antiques market that includes also the trade of historical car parts). Both events are mostly oriented to attract large audiences, masses of random individuals, but with no explicit deliberative contents.

Deliberative intents were instead reflected in the Festival which was designed for the construction of a discursive space over matters of community interest, aimed at creating a culture of inclusion and participation placing at the centre of choice processes the roles of a) the scientific method, b) production skills, c) the arts. These reflect in turn a) analytic knowledge, b) synthetic knowledge, c) symbolic knowledge. With the first type of knowledge we know about the <<why>> of things, with the second we know the <<how>> and with the third we can imagine new and unknown scenarios (Asheim et al. 2011; Simon, 1969). The relevance of combining these three knowing modalities is in their high innovative and developmental potential.

The Festival was led by academics with the support of the Municipality, which funded the project and contributed to fund raising also with the construction of a network of public and private partners, building bridges at local level across 6 more municipalities and upper institutional levels (the Province, the Region, the President of the Republic), local schools, cultural institutions, the local cooperative bank, the totality of small/large firms/ retailers associations, the trade unions, and private

⁵ Roger Sugden and Marcela Valania.

firms. All of these linkages, apart for those with local academics, were built through the mediation of the town's Mayor who bridged the academics and the local publics.

The Festival was managed entirely on a voluntary basis through a newly created non-profit association whose members were both institutional (the networked municipalities) and individual (the academics and some of the Festival participants). The event, which was mostly hosted at <<Fabbrica>>, the former town cement factory entirely re-designed and transformed by his visionary owner as a place for the production of crafts, arts and culture. Sculptures made of scrap materials (by a locally based international group of self-styled artists called <<Mutoids Waste Company>> (Cf. Sacchetti et al. 2009) were placed along the town streets.

The identification and involvement of such large network of partners proved to be a very challenging task. At the same time, besides the actual delivery of the Festival events, the construction of the extended network was chosen as the preferred process. Networking was aimed at facilitating the emergence and discovery of diverse experiences and views by using ideas laboratories, arts workshops, exhibitions and performances. The other reason was related to the scope of the discussion. The community of a relatively small town is necessarily synergic with the communities of nearby towns and their socio-economic actors, and a shared discourse wanted to explore possibilities for cooperation with multiple partners across communities (with opportunities for cooperation also beyond the Festival itself).

The Festival began nearly two years after the current administration started his first mandate. The project always had the full support of the Mayor who, from the very initial encounter, shared with the researchers the values embedded in the idea of the Festival and recognised the exceptionality of the event for the town. We can reasonably say that the project gave voice, scope, method, and concrete application to values of cooperation and trust that existed also prior to the Festival in the understanding of administrators, but needed to be objectified with the creation a discourse and a specific event that served as the context for participation using innovative modalities for engagement. The Festival design had been conceived for creating a preferred platform where local development

objectives could be considered through the modalities of deliberative democracy and arts, using critical thinking and within an international environment that emphasised the advantages of diversity as against <<normalisation>> of solutions. In 2009 the event was replicated on a smaller scale with an explicit focus over the <<recapturing of space and time>> in development strategies. For this second edition, an inter-disciplinary workshop hosted architects and regional development scientists to discuss possible new uses for the town dismissed areas.

The Festival represented, in the Mayor's opinion, a catalytic event for the administration, who subjectively re-interpreted the Festival experience to sharpen the strategy towards the town's spatial policies. The most important choices implemented after the Festival contain some of the elements discussed during the Festival events. We do not claim here, of course, that these new development initiatives were caused by the Festival. A multiplicity of discourses and views has converged in the policy actions taken afterwards, and presented below. Still, however, in the Mayor's understanding of the Festival experience was crucial in strengthening the direction and meaning underpinning later strategic choices.

The town old slaughterhouse. Located at the edge of the town's residential area, the old slaughterhouse was re-built in 2007. A non-profit association was created with the specific aim of coordinating the reconstruction, which benefited mostly of Council and Regional funding. The non-profit association was later in charge of managing the space thought as a cultural and recreational centre principally dedicated to young people. The association has now built a reputation in musical events, which are offered weekly and communicated via social media. A consistent part of the members who visit this space come from nearby towns, showing visibility but also, on the other hand, that this space and its activities have not fully entered in the perception of opportunities of the local community. Because activities are confined to night events, they *de facto* exclude the youngsters. A critical assessment of spaces in town evidences that still young people lack opportunities, therefore providing scope for the introduction of new entrepreneurial initiatives.

The town's theatre. Inaugurated in 1913 and located within the premises of the municipal building, the place had been abandoned for fifty years and transformed into a deposit. The majority of citizens ignored its existence and history. In line with offering an integrated welfare system, the theatre project introduced social innovation by fusing the recovery of the town cultural heritage, bringing artistic performances and sensibility in the town and, mostly, providing a space for activities that support the social inclusion of individuals with various forms of disability. The theatre's premises also host a number of laboratories where users-artists learn to build their own puppets and costumes. In 2009 the project obtained regional funds, representing a unique experience in the Region of a theatre dedicated to people with disabilities. Another element of innovation is in the management of the theatre. Having cultural and social aims, the theatre is owned by the Municipality and managed by a small social enterprise of artists (including one anthropologist) who brought contents and ideas in this new space. The administrative offices of the social enterprise are located in the premises of the municipal building with the clear intent of legitimising the public nature of the social and cultural aims pursued through the theatre. The choice of delegated the artists' social enterprise the planning of the theatre activities as well as the choice of including them physically within the premises of the municipal building is in stark contrast with the way they had been regarded previously, in the city (much larger and more visible) where they used to work, and where they had been marginalised.

A work of art for the new industrial area. The new industrial area was thought during the first mandate with the aim of resolving a situation in which the location of production activities (mostly manufacturing and wrecking) was not separate from residential areas, creating disservices and raising issues of concern for the community. This space was created to improve production infrastructures for firms, town viability, whilst importantly reducing the unhealthy promiscuity between residential areas and manufacturing. When arriving, the high rusty metal trees placed on the town major roundabout, soon after the Festival, speak of the town's tradition in the recovery of scrap metals. The idea behind commissioning a piece of art-work to place at the entrance of the industrial area was also, and mainly, one of pairing arts and industry, for inspiring and improving the quality of the space where people work and spend a good portion of their time.

The high-street. In 2011 a project for the substantive re-structuring of the town's high-street and squares was presented to the town. The main aims were the improvement of underground infrastructures, road safety, the aesthetics and quality of urban space. Being the high street the place where shops agglomerate (with retailing being one of the most important economic activities in town) and where public life unfolds, improvements of this <<natural shopping centre>>, as defined by the administrators, were intended to benefit the community as a whole.

The high street defined the spatial identity of the town and the perception of this space was deeply established in the inhabitants, especially those who had deep historical roots in the place. It is from this attachment that the restructuring of the centre originated the biggest experience of public engagement recalled by its inhabitants. The original project came as a surprise for many, who besides some technical issues were very much concerned with the place losing its identity. The protest had the immediate benefit of awakening interest and desire to be involved across the community. The main difficulty in this debate was to balance the views of specific individuals. These were community opinion-makers who were interpreting the perplexities of many and who collected a thousand signatures to stop the project in its proposed format. This part of the community was composed by those who are highly affectionate to the image that the town had given for over five decades, and would like to see a more cautious approach towards change. The administrators, on the contrary, suggest actions that would introduce changes based on a future-oriented vision about the long-term development of the town. Car-driving proved also to be a powerful habit, voiced especially by independent shop owners. The administrators and the citizens discussed the project over thirty-two meetings before works started, accommodating a number of suggestions, albeit by some citizens the effort was considered insufficient.

Overall, some degree of mistrust and antagonism characterised the interaction. The administrators had to choose between renewing the city centre using the original project as a basis (despite its limitations and having introduced several changes following public assemblies), or continue the debate (e.g. about number of parking places; trees to be replaced, etc.) at the cost of delaying works with a very high administrative risk of losing resources and keep the status quo. Here the administrators decision

to go ahead represented a high political risk, because of the doubts and voices of dissent raised by parts of the community. The renewed high street is still today a debated issue, with the community divided between those who appreciate the change (including some who had signed the petition or had expressed perplexities), those who are indifferent and those who are not satisfied.

The archaeological site and the public square. The central town square was part of the project to renew the high street. As most of the squares in Italy, this one too had for a long time been used as a car park. Because of the much embedded habit of driving even on extremely short distances but also because of the absence of public transport, part of the community, including shops patrons near the square, voiced a will to keep it as such. The administrators compromised the original idea of giving a pedestrian square to the town, so that the final project contained a hybrid solution: half car-park, half public garden. As the digging started, beginning of 2013, the remaining of a 14th century villa emerged. With the authorisation and support of the <<Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici e Paesaggistici>> (the agency that overlooks the architectural and landscape heritage) the square was re-designed around the archaeological finding to be completely car free. When works had to be stopped to allow for the site identification, people voiced their perplexities about the unexpected event, and for having to renounce to their habit to park there. People did so by gathering around the square fences, asking questions to the archaeologist, the administrators and the workers, but also reacting offensively and writing disruptive sentences about the site. Despite pressure, the historical site was preserved. This choice was not obliged. The Mayor could have opted for cataloguing the findings, covering the site, and go ahead with the initial project. The dominance of short-term perspective (cover the site and keep the car park on half of the square surface) would have deprived the town, in his view, of its heritage and of the opportunity to sensitise the community towards the historical, cultural, and social value of space. These reasons were again officially explained during a public assembly. The existence of 380 car park slots in the premises of the town centre was also presented as evidence of the low marginal utility of few additional car parks on the square.

The public Forum. More recently, in Autumn 2013, an on-going citizen's initiative created a public Forum aimed at considering the requalification of privately-owned, abandoned buildings that occupy

a central position inside the town and that could represent an important long-term development opportunity for the community. Following the recent national debt crisis, the new challenge that the community faces is how to give these areas back to the community in the impossibility to use public money. The Forum includes a variety of stakeholders and is open to all those who want to participate and commit to the creation of a discourse. Participants, who are self-funded and use public spaces as meeting points (the library/cultural centre and the theatre stage), include also the artistic coordinators of the town's theatre, architects, public administrators, citizens, few entrepreneurs, one academic (the author) and other professionals.

The prevalence of conventional conceptions about economic possibilities and the traditional public/private dichotomy on production governance, had initially confined the Forum ideas about possibilities. The participation of the author in the Forum has prompted discussions around the role of non-conventional organisations and more generally of responsible enterprise and not-for-profit organisations. The discussion was relatively new to the Forum participants but has proved to engender a new discourse around the governance and type of activities that could be involved in the recovery of the town dismissed spaces. Following the town experience and elaborating on the idea of public space and community welfare, the discussion has considered the role that *private organisations with public objectives* can have in the creation of public spaces and community welfare (Zamagni, 2013). Here, as well, the notion of <<public>> clearly differs from one of public ownership. It is rather associated with the social objectives and the deliberative, cooperative praxis of this type of organisations. Consistently, one of the emerging policy suggestions includes attracting responsible enterprises who entrust public aims and values, e.g. social and responsible enterprises and co-operatives. Specifically, at the heart of the suggested proposal is the social enterprise as a deliberative network amongst actors with explicit public aims. A deliberative approach to enterprise can inform strategic choices towards the integration of complex relations amongst publics and their needs. Social and cooperative enterprises hold, in this sense, the governance features that suit cooperation, deliberation and the integration of complementary experiences and knowledge about needs and possible solutions.

The public Forum has overall contributed, through deliberation and the generation of novel scenarios, towards a new set of criteria for spatial policies. These include the utilisation of new financial instruments, the cooperation with other communities and municipalities to engender sufficient demand for welfare services, the attraction of private, socially responsible, community-based organisations.

5. Discussion

In the town experience presented here, the characteristics of physical and discursive space were importantly shaped by the value system of the decision-makers, by their choice of policy priorities and by the projects that were endorsed for the city. The creation of public spaces has informed municipal policies with the explicit developmental aim of creating a <<public city>> where human beings could chose to participate in cultural events, healthcare, sports, economic and political life as part of their everyday life experience. Through its spaces, the public city has signalled to users and community members the extent to which cooperation, inclusion and welfare were valued. Since these values were at odds with some previous beliefs and habits (as it were in Gambettola) signalling had to be paired by explicit communication about choices and the meaning of public space.

The inherited context represented a challenge, defined by the incongruence of the destination of physical space in the town and by the beliefs of particular groups in the community, their habits of thought and expectations, which were often at odds with the public administrator idea of long-term development. Critical thinking about the current state of the town, its needs, and the opportunity of producing public spaces was encouraged by means of communication which at times occurred under conflictual circumstances and, at a second stage, through the direct experience of users who, by engaging with the new public spaces, could construct their own meanings and form (new) beliefs about the value of public space, as it emerged in the Forum experience. Specifically, the value of public space and the formation of an attitude towards cooperation was learned, by those engaging, in two steps:

- I. *Ex-ante*: the new values are learned during the *process of design and practical realisation of space*. This is the learning that occurs during the planning phase, through processes of deliberation and communication that lead to a policy choice.
- II. *Ex-post*: the *use of public space creates amongst users an experience of public space*. This experience contributes to transmit values and behavioural perspectives that would have otherwise been displaced by inherited prevailing values which were embodied in the old conception of the town. Furthermore, in his analysis of enquiry, Dewey is clear regarding the place of observation and use of creative intelligence alongside experience in a holistic learning process.

Should the new values and enquiry habits reach a critical mass, they will be responsible for a widespread change in development aims, processes and outcomes. In this sense, the evolution of the town can be predicted by the ability of the future town administrators to keep on supporting the public city, endorsing activities and practices that are distinct from the older ones and capable to <<win>> – when put to the test of experience – the battle against short-term and exclusive values.

Some signals in this direction have been observed very recently in the discourses developed around the new public square and inside the public Forum. The Forum initiative, in particular, has signalled the emergence of a deliberative praxis aimed at exchanging knowledge, forming new perspectives and generating ideas about future development scenarios, recognising and legitimizing the public city as a new context from which further opportunities can be engendered. Again, following a deliberative process that has brought together a multiplicity of stakeholders, knowledge and competences, the Forum has reasoned about the value of public space and recognised the centrality of administrators' choices. In the face of the economic crisis and the downturn of public resources, the recognition of the path undertaken has enabled the Forum discussions to take a step forward and start considering how to embed inclusive and socially responsible practices in the spaces that still need to be recovered, seeking to unearth and attracting a type of entrepreneurship that pursues, through privately-owned organisations, the welfare of communities.

Albeit these experiences are probably far from having reached a critical mass of cooperative and deliberative attitudes in the community, they signal a change in the method of discussion that can be traced back, in our view, to the influence of the policy choices implemented over the past ten years.

6. Implications and concluding remarks

Through the development model presented here, spatial policy has been depicted as the outcome of an act of rupture with previous trajectories, mostly driven by the Mayor's values and vision with the support of the administration. From this model we can trace some policy implications.

Building a parallel with Sen's analysis of processes (Sen, 2002), we had argued that public spaces possess an anticipated ability to achieve specific outcomes. In Gambettola, we observed choices that sought, in the creation of public space, the means to discover and satisfy evolving community perspectives and needs. A central aim was also the generation of behavioural attitudes towards cooperation, critical thinking, deliberation, and long-term perspectives. In parallel, the aim of decision-makers was to avoid undesired outcomes, or the perpetuation of behavioural habits (such as individualism and short-terminism) that were at the heart of the inherited <<bombarded city>>.

Reflecting on this policy experience and outcomes, we identify a number of features that may be associated with the creation of public spaces and that could be further investigated over time and elsewhere in different contexts.

First, the creation of public space by means of policy action is an important condition to break path-dependence and institutional inertia: by promoting inclusion and raising the level of opportunities, public spaces can help overcoming situations (such as the persistence of exclusive behavioural attitudes, urban decadence and social exclusion) that limit or slow down change, encouraging the search for socio-economic practices and activities that are consistent with community welfare objectives. These outcomes could be observed in the theatre's activities and social aim, in the vitality of the new high street and shops that take care to offer street events on a regular basis; or in the management of the public park, which hosts also festivals and other thematic gatherings.

Second, public spaces are well suited to respond flexibly to communities changing needs. By favouring a culture of cooperation, the creation of public spaces represents a way to address complex and mutating challenges that communities face on unemployment, health, education, young people, social inclusion, the environment to name some (Cf. also Sussen, 2011). The health centres, the new sports facilities and cycling paths encourage healthy life styles whilst providing the necessary welfare services. As the experience of the private and public health centres show, for small municipalities, or administrative units, the ability to respond to health needs and more generally to mutating social challenges, has required cooperation through the creation of trans-local community networks that make the use of public space economically sustainable, create scale in service delivery, a critical mass of users, and social visibility.

Third, within an open and accessible environment, opportunities increase in terms of networking, learning, access to relevant debates and decisions of interest, formulation of new ideas and innovation. As a consequence of improved access, community stakeholders can learn to deliberate and articulate their perspectives on shared areas of interest. By providing access to deliberation, physical public space lowers the costs of participation and bridges the distance between different societal groups and professions, it fosters debate, creativity and supports the generation of trust and new ideas, as the Festival and the Forum experiences indicates.

The lesson of ten years of choices aimed at creating a more public city has the potential, now, to shape also future decisions. The town pullulates of fatigued private places which could become new engines of development. For this to happen a critical reflection about what activities and organisations can best serve community welfare has more chances now than in the past to be understood and to witness the cooperation of publics in progressing a shared discourse about local development.

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