

Laura Lieto is Associate Professor of Urban Planning at the Federico II University of Naples, Italy. She is visiting scholar at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University, member of the Doctorate School of Architecture at Federico II University of Naples and editor of the planning journal CRIOS – Critica degli Ordinamenti Spaziali. She mainly works in the field of planning theory. Recent works include: *Americans. Città e territorio ai tempi dell'impero*, Cronopio 2012 (ed.); *Place as trading zone. A controversial path of innovation for planning theory and practice*. In Mäntysalo R.; Balducci A. (eds.), *Urban Planning as Trading Zone*, Springer, 2013; *Planning for a material world*, with R. Beauregard, CRIOS 6, 2013.

1. Present Status of Planning

From the mid-20th century till the present day, the need to reform the national urban planning law issued in 1942 has been refreshed several times, without accomplishing the relevant results. Recent years have seen a new impetus, both on the part of institutions, and practitioners and the academic community, in the face of substantial transformation of cities and regions due to socio-economic and political processes. These have occurred on different scales, from local level up to European level. Unemployment, depletion, land consumption and environmental degradation are just some of the major issues in the general frame of the socio-political crisis affecting the country, and the need for more effective normative tools and, most importantly, a coherent political vision for urban and regional development is being voiced by different parts of society. Within the Public Administration reform process, the institution of Metropolitan Cities (http://www.governo.it/GovernoInforma/documenti/sintesi_legge_Senato.pdf) has triggered debate within professional and academic networks, as well as, more recently, the proposal to reform national law by the Minister of Infrastructures and Transports (<http://www.mit.gov.it/mit/site.php?p=cm&o=vd&id=3387>). These initiatives are still ongoing and, despite the general consensus, have resulted in problems and conflicts, both political and cultural. One major criticism, raised by the main urban planning associations (the National Institute of Urban Planning and the Italian Society of Urban Planners), is about the yet weak and incoherent vision of urban and regional development. Local and national reform proposals are still – according to such criticism – uncoordinated and, from this standpoint, the national law reform proposal seems too focused on procedural and technical issues, rather than on a shared and convincing political scenario. This mirrors the long-term debate on the weak role of urban and regional planning in the country's public life. Nevertheless, the frame is still uncertain and deserves more observation in the future. For more information about the national law reform process, go to: <http://siu.bedita.net/>, <http://www.inu.it/15034/rassegna-stampa/lupi-annuncia-la-riforma-urbanistica/>.

2. Dominant Themes and Media Coverage

Land consumption, environmental and landscape preservation, housing and urban issues related to migration and new forms of poverty are among the most debated themes. Such planning challenges are hardly acknowledged by the media.

3. Theory vs. Practice

The gap between theory and practice is quite a problem. Somehow 'physiological' in any socio-eco-

nomic and political context, in Italy, the divide between planning theories and practices 'in the real world' looks even wider than in other contexts, especially in comparison with northern Europe. This seems to be the case for many reasons. Two are worth highlighting: the normative over-production, often a limit for more experimental approaches to planning problems; and the traditional distance between the academic world (where planning theories are usually developed) and the world of professional practices, where the leading professional figure is still the architect.

Anglo-American literature, in the academic field, is quite influential, not just in force of a historical tradition (in balance between dialogue and dependency) of cultural exchange, but also, more recently, of the incentive 'to internationalize' research according to the evaluation parameters issued by the national government (and by the National Agency of Research Evaluation, in particular) to fund projects and organizations.

4. Addressing and Reducing Disparities

Despite the divides and problems mentioned above, the issue of disparities is a relevant theme for planners in this country. This applies more to the field of community planning, participation and political mobilization though, than to the field of spatial planning *tout court*. From this standpoint, young academics and practitioners are very motivated to develop studies, proposals and projects addressing these problems.

5. Future Challenges and Education

The issue is very controversial. Planning education in Italy is traditionally the domain of architecture schools. In the last two decades, a relevant number of planning courses have been offered by different universities, from the north to the south of the country, within quite a strong cultural movement of strengthening this profile and making it autonomous. Nonetheless, the current organization of professional qualifications actually penalizes trained planners, as a 5-year MA in architecture allows those who pass the state exam for professional qualification to work in the architecture, planning, preservation and design fields, whereas planners are allowed to work only in their specific sector. Over the years, this restriction has led to a reduction in the number of planning students and this has had an effect on preparation as well; planning courses are often a second choice for those who do not pass the admission exam for architecture schools – people who are less motivated and usually from a modest cultural background. In addition, given the decreasing numbers, many courses have been taken off the syllabus by various universities over the past few years or have been merged with more general courses, not specifically focused on planning.

6. Role of the European Union

No, I would not welcome a top-down regulation system at EU level, not just because top-down models have proved ineffective for a long time now, but also because it would flatten important differences among states and societies that, despite all the problems, are still valuable and worth preserving and acknowledging. I would be more in favour of coordination policies based on coherent political visions, respectful of differences and attentive to how local contexts deal with global urbanization issues.