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**Deliberative Democracy in Local Government**  
*New institutional mechanisms for participation in two Italian cities*  
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(FIRST DRAFT – NOT FOR CITATION WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION)

**Abstract**

Increasingly, new models of governance aim to engage larger sectors of the population through participatory and deliberative mechanisms, as a way of coordinating local interests to increase the territory’s capacity to produce collective goods. The tension between representative and participatory democracy has different implications at the local level, since local voters are perceived to be more competent on local issues. Furthermore, institutional designs that foster strong executives at the local level, as chosen by many European countries, have strengthened the relationship between local administrators and the citizens, who are increasingly perceived as direct interlocutors rather than passive recipients of services. This paper, part of a larger comparative-case study, presents the experience of participatory governance in two medium-sized Italian cities characterised by very different socio-political and economic contexts, Trento, in the northern region of Trentino-Alto Adige, and Sassari, in the island of Sardinia. Both cities have implemented *strategic planning*, which entails a collective *vision* of the territory’s social and economic future, elaborated with the involvement of local civil society through deliberative forums. The objective of this paper is to explain the impact of strategic planning on the local polity. The focus is on local context to understand the effect of endogenous (i.e. pre-existing associational density and the degree of strength and autonomy of the local leadership) and exogenous factors (i.e. institutional constraints and opportunities at other jurisdictional levels).

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## **Introduction**

The geography of administrative and political responsibilities in Europe has rapidly changed over the past twenty years, and local administrations in several European countries have had to learn how to exert their new authority and respond to a pluralisation of local needs, whilst often being confronted with a rationalisation of public resources. The global socio-economic context has changed, and it is increasingly based on territorial cooperation and competition, whereby local governments become, by necessity, loci of economic and political innovation (Keating 2000; Le Galès 2002; Kazepov 2005). Local governments are in a privileged position to enhance the local human resources that the local active citizenship can mobilise and to involve social actors in producing collective goods. The issue is how to institutionalise forms of democratic mobilisation within the representative system. There is a tendency to think of deliberative arenas in terms of efficiency and management of conflicts, fostering a politics of consensus. If the rationale of these initiatives is merely oriented towards improvement of service delivery, then the idea of citizen-centred democracy envisioned by many deliberative democracy scholars will hardly square with local governments' understanding of participation (Andrews et al 2008).

In Italy, reforms such as the 1993 Act, which introduced the direct election of mayors, were not simply a response to declining electoral turnouts and the difficulty of achieving political accountability, but they represented a reaction to a deep legitimacy crisis of party politics, precipitated by *Tangentopoli* (Bribesville) and party corruption scandals (Borraz and John 2004; see also Dente 1997). The direct election of mayors has engendered a different relationship between the local administration and the citizens, as the latter are increasingly perceived as direct interlocutors, rather than passive recipients of public policies (Fazzi and Scaglia 2001). However the reforms have generated the illusion that to separate the bureaucracy from politics would be enough to engender greater efficiency, and that a visible local leader would ensure prompt decision-making (Trigilia 2005). In fact several new mayors, especially when they lacked previous political experience, clashed against several, and often conflicting, local interests. Coordination of such interests is at the very heart of novel experiments of territorial governance, such as strategic planning (SP), which are gaining popularity as they help to respond to the challenge of attracting new resources for local policies, whilst fostering greater coordination of local interests and enhancing local elites' legitimacy. SP entails a collective vision of the territory's future; within deliberative forums and roundtables, participants define strategies that can increase economic development and competitiveness, but also enhance liveability and strengthen social capital. The rationale behind these governance arrangements is that by reinforcing pre-existing social networks and supporting new ones, they can encourage collective behaviours that can help generate a more integrated, hence more competitive, local system, whilst providing incentives for new entrepreneurship (Gastaldi 2003).

This paper, part of larger comparative case-study<sup>1</sup> examines the experience of SP in two medium-sized Italian cities: Trento in the Northern Region of Trentino-Alto Adige and Sassari in Sardinia. Both cities are part Special Status Regions, hence they enjoy greater autonomy from Central Government, but they are

characterised by very different political and socio-cultural contexts.<sup>2</sup> The comparative studies of subnational entities within the same country allows for greater control of country-level institutional variables (Bukowski et al 2003), as the focus is on political agency and socio-cultural context. In this respect, Italy represents an ideal case, as it displays deep structural and cultural differences among regions, particularly evident along the North-South divide.

Findings presented here are based on textual analysis of relevant documents and semi-structured interviews with actors involved in the SP process. Interviewees were selected so as to guarantee a balanced mixture of political and institutional actors, the private sector and citizen associations.<sup>3</sup> Since it is very difficult to evaluate the degree of success of these experiences, as they cannot be simply measured by the number of projects implemented, this study is more interested in understanding the dynamics engendered by new governance mechanisms within different local contexts and how such dynamics are hindered or enhanced by endogenous factors, such as the strength of the local leadership and pre-existing associational dynamics, and exogenous factors, or the influence of other tiers of government, in a context of multi-level governance (Le Galès 1998; 2002).

The paper is structured in three main parts. The first section attempts to bridge the gap between the literature on governance and the literature on deliberative democracy in order to frame the emergence of SP and its impact. The second section briefly examines the context of Italian local governance since the introduction of the direct election of mayors in 1993. Finally the last section presents and compares the experience of SP in both Trento and Sassari.

### **Bridging the gap between governance and deliberative democracy**

In Italy, as in most other European countries, the new concepts of social capital and local governance, with their emphasis on consultation, participation and partnerships, have generated much debate and interest (see among others Bagnasco et al 2002; Brunazzo 2004; Mutti 1998) and have started to influence policy-making at the local level. Civil society engagement in government is advocated by the European Union as a way of improving local government efficiency, as administrations tap into new and potentially innovative local resources, and as a tool to resolve social conflicts and coordinate local interests, whilst increasing the public administration's legitimacy. The emphasis on concepts of transparency, accountability and partnerships underpins the international discourse on governance, as citizen participation in policy-making is expected to foster civic-ness and social cooperation, following the Habermasian communicative reasoning (Habermas 1996).

Much of the literature on participatory democracy identifies pre-existing high levels of associationism as one the pre-conditions for participatory mechanisms to work and be sustainable (Fung and Wright 2001; Heller 2001). Putnam (1993) relies on a culturalist, *path-dependent* explanatory framework to account for variance among Italian regions in terms of levels of associationism and social capacity. On the contrary several studies in Italy (Arrighi and Piselli 1987; Magnatti et al 2005; Piselli 2005; Wolleb and Cerosimo 2006) find that the outcomes of governance arrangements, such as territorial

pacts, are not significantly influenced by the degree of local development or the level of pre-existing social capital. In some instances, where civil society was particularly weak and fragmented the presence of a strong institutional leadership was able to encourage cooperation among local actors, promoting new social capital and enhancing local development. In this respect, an understanding of social capital in terms of its dynamic evolution, following Coleman's interpretation, can represent a more effective tool to analyse the different outcomes of these processes, since trust and cooperative relations can develop within these institutional arrangements (Piselli 2005), often based on deliberative democracy.

In representative democracy, voting simply expresses one's own self interest; on the contrary within a deliberative process different opinions are discussed and the fairest and most persuasive will win. Since choices and preferences are not given, but are expected to develop and change as they are confronted with stronger arguments, deliberative democracy distances itself from rational choice theory and its applications to political systems and instead enhances the cognitive dimension of politics, as agreement is based on personal development and mutual learning (Gelli 2005). However, several conditions need to be met for deliberation to be effective, as criteria such as the inclusiveness of the process, the mutual exchange of arguments and the existence of clear rules are pivotal (see Bohman and Rehg 1997). Representatives of different interests should thus be invited, and all stakeholders should be equally informed and empowered. If authors such as Weir and Beetham (1999) are critical towards increased participation as they believe it weakens mechanisms of representation and accountability, others such as Hirst (1994) welcome an "associative" model of democracy, whereby local governance can contribute to strengthening the role of civil society and citizen initiatives, and propose a strengthened role for secondary associations that, within a deliberative democracy framework, can help to cultivate citizens' autonomy (Elstub 2008).

Critics of deliberative democracy emphasise that interest groups clearly display different "power resources" (Lowndes and Wilson 2001:639) and that communicative reasoning fails to take account of Foucauldian relations of power. Participatory mechanisms can thus reproduce inequality and even have the potential capacity for tyranny (see Cooke and Kothari 2001). Several scholars argue that, since most new participatory arenas are opened from above, government, as it sets the agenda, will often control the process and the participants (Blaug 2002). "Democratic engineering" might thus result in what Habermas (1987) calls "colonisation", or cooptation of the participants, as *incumbent democracy* takes precedence over *critical democracy* (Blaug 2002).<sup>4</sup> Several scholars (Beetham 2005; Fung and Wright 2001; Fung 2003), however, believe that inclusive and accountable institutions can still provide an important space for interactions between citizens and their elected representatives, to nurture critical democracy. In a way direct democracy and representative democracy can coexist in participatory democracy, as "without sustained public pressure, governments rarely fulfil the promises they make on Election Day. But without elections, it is difficult to reconcile different interests and agendas that exist in civil society" (Edwards 2002:3).

As subnational governments are devolved new competencies and responsibilities, there is now wide support for what has been defined "local democracy", which is increasingly seen as a possible way of reinforcing democratic institutions and increase

efficiency of local governance systems. From local governments' perspective, the concepts of local democracy and local autonomy are often interchangeable, as they have long been putting pressure on central governments for devolution of power and resources (Gelli 2005). Furthermore the relationship between representative and direct democracy has different implications at the local level, as local elections are not strictly limited to one's vote. The local electorate will not simply vote for the mayor, but also for a programme of policies which will directly affect citizens, and the different phases of the electoral campaign will at least partly respond to the themes of the local political agenda and the public debate, since local voters are perceived to be more aware and competent when it comes to voting on local issues (ibid.).

Concepts of governance and deliberative democracy, from an empirical perspective, are increasingly interconnected and themes of local participation are now deeply entrenched in the urban governance discourse (Melo and Baiocchi 2006). As processes of governance change and citizen involvement is now perceived as a salient ingredient of new modes of governance, it is important to assess the implications of participatory and deliberative mechanisms for local democracy and how the new participation rhetoric is interpreted by both citizens and local councils. Citizens seeking to get involved in public-policy might expect empowerment and greater saying over the institutions that control their lives, whilst governments' efforts to involve citizens may be motivated by the need to build consensus or even to control "participation to bend it to government aims", often with serious consequences in terms of citizen associations' autonomy (Blakeley 2005; Tarrow 1994).

Both urban governance and deliberative democracy policy studies analyse these same mechanisms of local governance, however, with few notable exceptions (Blakeley 2005; Melo and Baiocchi 2006; Abers and Keck 2006; Fagotto and Fung 2006), they take little account of each other's debates. The literature on urban governance has focused on the outcomes of different governance arrangements, at city and regional level (Le Galès 1998; 2002; Pierre 2000; 2005; Healey 2001). Conversely scholars of deliberative democracy have theorised ideals of deliberation and empirically studied governance structures that approximate those normative standards (see among others Fischer 1993; Fishkin 1995; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Ackerman and Fishkin 2002; Neblo 2005).

The study of strategic planning could particularly benefit from combining these two theoretical approaches. In fact, at one end of the governance spectrum, more traditional forms of concertation, such as local partnerships, have a stronger focus on governance outcomes, since they decide on programmes with long term implications for local development, but have less impact on local democracy, as only few interests are invited (generally political and economic elites). At the opposite end, experiences of participatory budgeting can prove more empowering, since they are open to citizen associations and individual citizens, although most often participants can only decide over small neighbourhood-level projects, within the confines of a tight budget, so the impact on local development is minimal. Strategic planning lies somewhere in between, as it aims at elaborating a local development model, within which social, economic, environmental and cultural policies are defined. The outcomes in terms of governance can be substantial, since the future of the locality is collectively envisioned and then given concrete shape through several projects, whilst cross-sectoral cooperation during

the decision-making process is expected to encourage integrated planning, also involving different jurisdictional levels. In terms of local democracy, the political space here is much larger than within traditional partnerships, as associations and the community at large should be invited to participate in the deliberative forums and workshops, and later to monitor project implementation.

### **The Italian context**

The direct election of mayors, introduced in Italy in 1993, has enhanced the political need for visible and quick results. The priorities and the policies that the administration intends to pursue need to be clearly framed and resources promptly identified, so it does no surprise that the local leadership often represents the main drive behind new governance mechanisms (Gastaldi 2003). However, the *decisional illusion* (Trigilia 2005) fostered by the reforms clashes with a resource deficit and the reality of several, and often conflicting, local interests. The issue of coordinating local interests, which the 1993 reform leaves unresolved, is at the very heart of novel experiments of territorial governance, such as (SP).

SP has been defined by Camagni (2003:83) as “a collective vision of the future of a given territory, through processes based on participation, discussion and listening; as a pact between administrators, local actors, citizens and different partners to create such a vision through elaborating a strategy and a subsequent series of projects, variously interconnected, justified, evaluated and shared; finally as the coordination of these actors’ responsibilities in implementing the projects.”<sup>5</sup> The process is based on voluntary cooperation between public, private and social actors, who identify strategic objectives and commit themselves to implementing several integrated projects, consistent with the overall development model. SP can thus encourage coordination not only of private actors, but also of public agencies, and it involves social and cultural interests as well as economic ones (Trigilia 2005).

As SP is a governance instrument based on participation and deliberation, its impact is on two levels: process and outcome. In terms of process, all participants (institutional actors and strong economic interests, as well as citizen associations or non-organised interests) can potentially contribute to enhancing the local polity, by taking part and interacting with the other actors involved in SP (Segatori 2007). In fact, a strategic plan can help to reinforce and diffuse a deliberative approach, as an alternative to non-transparent elite decision-making behind closed doors, or to the corporatist practices that often impede any substantive development (Donolo 2003). Clearly the main issue here will be how truly inclusive and non-opportunistic the process proves. Whereas the relationship among the participants is often asymmetric, since certain actors will always play a more important role than others (i.e. the president of a corporation vs. the president of a cultural association), the mode of participation can make a radical difference to the process. SP is, by definition, a space where to learn about participation and deliberation, so it is pivotal to understand who participates, why and how, as well as to examine how dialogue is facilitated and inclusion ensured.

In terms of content, the development model elaborated through SP is generally based around two main dimensions: liveability and competition (Segatori 2007). The first

dimension is associated with sustainable development, hence the concern for future generation vs. the global risk society (Beck 1992), but it is also linked to concepts of social cohesion and empowerment (see Donolo 2003; Segatori 2007). The competition dimension, on the other hand, allows the city to respond to economic and structural decline, by promoting a novel image of the territory and encouraging innovative, hence competitive, production structures (Segatori 2007).

Although SP has not been formalised as a governance instrument, and it is initiated by local governments on a voluntary basis, it has now become such a well-established process that it is undergoing “proceduralisation,” as attested to by a few handbooks published by Formez (Gioioso 2006)<sup>6</sup> and the Government’s Department of Public Function (*Dipartimento della Funzione pubblica della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*) (Tanese et al 2006). New networks are developing for cities to exchange experiences and models of good practice, such as the Network of Strategic Cities (*Rete delle città strategiche*), founded in 2004 by a few cities that had already launched their strategic plan.<sup>7</sup> Both Trento and Sassari are members of this network.

### **Strategic planning in Trento and Sassari**

*The case of Trento: “Trento città delle opportunità”*<sup>8</sup>

Trento has been an autonomous Province since 1972 when the new special status for the Region of Trentino-Alto Adige<sup>9</sup> transferred most competencies over health, education, welfare, transport and infrastructure from the regional to the provincial level, whereby the two provinces of Trento and Bolzano are now entirely responsible for economic and social development and all matters which are not of strict national relevance (Losito 1997). This special status, which has been the envy of other special status regions in Italy, configures a highly favourable centre-periphery relationship, with a clear divide between national and local competencies.<sup>10</sup>

During the First Republic, the whole province was characterised by high electoral turnouts (Brunazzo e Fabbrini 2005), always above the national average; this was symptomatic of the strong local subculture that characterised the North-East, or the so called “white belt” (*zona bianca*) (Bobbio et al 2008). This subculture was influenced by the Church and catholic associations, which became the main point of reference during the post-war social identity building process (ibid.). The end of mass parties, following *Tangentopoli* and the end of the First Republic, has in fact marked the decline of politics as an integrated system, since it is now increasingly based on territory and personalisation. Lorenzo Dellai, former DC and founder of the centre-left Daisy (*Margherita*) civic list, which later grew into a national movement, has become the most prominent political personality in the province, becoming, after two mandates as Trento’s mayor (in 1990 and 1994), the governor of the Province, where he was first elected in 1999 and then re-elected in 2003 and 2008. Since the 1990s there has been great political continuity between the municipal and provincial levels, as Alberto Pacher,<sup>11</sup> deputy mayor under Dellai, was elected mayor in 1999 and 2005 and he is now provincial vice-president, whilst his own deputy mayor, Alessandro Andreatta, has been elected mayor in 2009.<sup>12</sup> Twin government coalitions at both levels would suggest great synergy in terms of policy-making; however, the strong administrative role of the Province and the

forceful personality of its governor have tended to hinder all attempts at multi-level governance that the new season of planning launched by Trento at the beginning of 2000 tried to encourage.

Trento has a high degree of associationism and cooperation characterises all relevant sectors of the economy. Cooperatives represent an important part of Trentino's economy; there are over 500 cooperatives, counting about 200,000 members and 12,000 employees, and making roughly €2 billion turnover (Bobbio et al 2008). The Cooperatives Federation is an important institution, whose presidency is by many perceived as the second most important "political" position, after the Province's governor (ibid.).<sup>13</sup> Though local authorities, both at provincial and municipal level, have invested greatly in participatory experiences, with positive outcomes in terms of consensus and innovation, on the other hand such openings have sometimes favoured particularistic interests. Some interviewees noted how associations can then become an instrument of local corporatism; as they tend to be very close to political institutions and sometimes too dependent on state resources, they are sometimes used to promote partisan policies and even raise electoral consensus for a particular party. However, overall the interactions between representative democracy structures and associations have contributed to the high degree of responsiveness and accountability from municipal and provincial institutions.

Trento was one of the first few Italian cities to adopt SP, officially launching the process in December 2000 when a protocol of agreement was signed between the City Council and representatives of local interests. However, already in 1999, the municipality's Local Development department had organised a forum involving the main local actors to elaborate a SWOT analysis and identify the city's strengths and weaknesses (Detassis and Penasa 2005). The forum and the territorial pact of Mount Bondone, launched in 1999 to enhance the development of the area as a tourist resort, represented fundamental steps towards a logic of participation and a moment of learning for the actors involved, which later facilitated the SP process.

You need to make sure that all the actors involved are on the same wavelength and start together, and everyone has to put something in and commit, so that you don't have smaller actors that are sidelined. They all start together and they know where they're going. This I've learnt from the territorial pact for Mount Bondone, which I was involved in. At the time there was this idea of thinking strategically, beyond the five years of an administration and look beyond the limited municipal resources, through involving the private sector, the hotel managers, the cultural resources... And the SP entails the same things, consistently with the territorial pact. This is why I was initially coordinating the SP, because I was already convinced [of its importance] [Former Local Development commissioner, current director of the Artisans' Union]

Trento, unlike several other Italian and European cities which chose to adopt SP to respond to particular challenges such as the reconversion of their development model within a post-fordist global system or a deep economic and/ or social crisis, is a "happy" city vaunting very low unemployment rates (between 2.8 and 3 percent), with a development model strongly dependent on public investments. Today Trento ranks high in Italian statistics for quality of life and public services, whilst its status as an autonomous Province so far has represented a strong financial guarantee (Pasqui et al

2010). The rationale behind the plan was instead the need to re-interpret the old welfare system in light of declining public finances to ensure sustainable development in the long term; thus, the idea was that deliberation with all local stakeholders would help to identify critical issues that could generate problems in the future (Detassis and Penasa 2005). Within a few years, a new season of participatory planning was launched as a series of plans were produced: an important change to the Town Plan, the Social Plan, and the Cultural Plan.<sup>14</sup> The SP, although following its own participatory course, acted as a “container” to incorporate all these sector-based plans and give order to policy-making within an inter-sectoral strategic agenda.

All interviewees agreed that the SP represented a chance for the city to collectively reflect on itself and its future, but also to reaffirm a more prominent role at regional, national and international level. In a way SP also interpreted the new Pacher administration’s intention to adjust the power balance in favour of the local government vis-à-vis a very strong Province. This new approach to planning has been reinforced, the only case in Italy, through introducing art. 96 in the City Council’s statute, which institutionalises participation; planning must now be, by law, strategic and participatory.

The local administration had a strong leadership role, as initiator and facilitator of the process. Politically the mayor and the then commissioner for Local Development, already familiar with governance mechanisms such as the territorial pact for Mount Bondone which he directly coordinated, fully endorsed the SP process. The local University was immediately involved through the creation of a *mixed working group*, consisting of academic experts and two public service directors.<sup>15</sup> The council, and part of the executive, were often left at the margins, although the reason was to be found as much in the lack of formal mechanisms of involvement as in their scepticism towards the new approach to planning. The then mayor, Alberto Pacher, admitted that one of his main regrets was in fact the council’s little involvement in the process.

[The reforms] have encouraged some dynamism [in local administration] thanks to a lighter relationship between the mayor and political parties. The mayor is legitimised by the popular vote and this has pros and cons. The role of councillors is clearly away from the political limelight and this can be a bit frustrating [for the council]. Today I wouldn’t do it [the strategic planning process] like I did it and I’ll care more about involving the council.  
 (Former mayor – current provincial vice-president)

The issue was partly addressed through *ad hoc* meetings to inform councillors about the various phases of the process and through the ratification of the final document by the council. However, in the end, it was up to councillors whether to participate or not.

The *mixed group* carried out an articulated analysis to elaborate a final diagnostic document concerning all dimensions of local development to be circulated among participants in the deliberative forums ahead of the meetings. In summer 2001 three thematic roundtables on territory, culture and services involved 250 representatives of citizen associations, institutions and the private sector. A second round of roundtables took place between July and October 2002, when 321 people, representing 163 associations, participated in five thematic groups concerning infrastructure, quality of service delivery, education and training, cultural and tourist promotion, environment and liveability. So-called *cognitive maps*, short files that would summarise the outcomes of previous meetings, were prepared and distributed to participants by the administrative

office of the Local Development department, which offered technical support throughout the process (Detassis and Penasa 2005).<sup>16</sup> The final plan was approved by the Council in 2003.<sup>17</sup>

Based on the number of projects implemented, Trento's SP could be considered as a success case;<sup>18</sup> however coordination mechanisms to ensure involvement of all participants in the implementation phase were weak.

If I'm honest, there have not been in these past few years formal moments to monitor the [implementation of] the plan. We did not have clear strategic objectives. I feel the plan never translated into a strategic project, it remained as a plan, as guidelines. Perhaps this was the City Council's intention [...] [Director of the Science Museum]

Most of the measures listed in the final SP were actually implemented by the City Council, but with very little input from other actors. A permanent office was created to overlook and coordinate the implementation phase, but this was an internal organisation and did not involve representatives of private or social actors. In fact the SP became very much a *government tool* of the municipal government (Pasqui et al 2010), whilst other institutional actors, such as the Province, stayed at the margins, somehow limiting the overall impact of the process. In terms of reinforcing local networks the plan had a very limited impact, whilst the value added of the process, and of other plans – and in particular the Social Plan - is more evident in terms of organisational learning within the public service since a new integrated approach to planning, albeit among some resistance, has been metabolised.<sup>19</sup>

The most important effect produced [by the planning season] has been within the public administration. Because it has fostered some repositioning in terms of strategic vision of the City Council's organisation and it has encouraged some changes in the way we work and we deliver services. [City Council's general director]

No newsletter was in place to ensure communication with the other actors; the little information available was communicated through the City Council's bulletin. A dedicated website was designed and set up but it was not supported by more incisive and interactive communication tools (i.e. online forums and polls). Although representatives of several private, social and cultural interests took part in the process, the involvement of the city at large and simple citizens was intentionally limited, since the organisers believed that the themes discussed required structured interlocutors. Citizen participation had a bigger space within the Social Plan, on social policies. This was based on the outcomes of two complementary participatory processes, carried out at the ward level and coordinated by ward councils. The first one involved individual citizens through assemblies where 800 participants formed 40 working groups, whilst the second one consisted of three focus groups with third-sector organisations, several associations and institutional representatives, including representatives of the provincial government and the health service trusts (Fazzi and Scaglia 2001).

I have to say that the Social Plan in particular has had the biggest impact, [...] not just an internal impact within the public service in terms of its organisation, but also an external one, since it has helped to move service delivery closer to the citizens [through a decentralisation process] [City Council's general director]

Perhaps the main merit of Trento's SP is to have ensured greater coherence within local administration, through elaborating a collective vision that would guide future planning. In this respect the administrators conceived the plan not simply in terms of the projects it listed, but as process and a strategic agenda, incorporating measures from all the other sector-based plans produced simultaneously. The influence of the amendment to the Town Plan (March 2002), coordinated by famous Harvard architect Joan Busquets, was particularly important and one project - which entailed the rebuilding of the old railway underground, giving way to a boulevard on the surface that would have reconnected the city to the river - became the SP's flagship project. However, due to costs, but mainly because the Province actually had different plans (i.e. a high capacity railway line) which would conflict with this project, the idea was abandoned. This had a very negative effect on the credibility of the local executive; several interviewees perceived the SP process as partly unsuccessful because the very project that had captured the city's imagination never materialised.

Politically there was a long latency period (2005-2009) which translated into very little communication about the advancement of the implementation phase; once the plan was elaborated and approved, it gradually faded away from the local political limelight. The fact that the commissioner of Local Development left, at the end of Pacher's first administration, and the director of the SP office was transferred to the department of Culture and Tourism,<sup>20</sup> certainly weakened the emphasis on the Plan. The presence of some public service directors, who had been involved in the process since its inception, ensured that the SP had a long term impact within the public administration; however, continuity is always difficult to guarantee.

[T]here are people that are implementing the Social Plan, or the Cultural Plan, but that have not been involved in the elaboration of these documents. So, many times I wonder how can someone implement something without knowing what the starting point was and understanding the aims of the plan? This should be a matter of concern for the administration. So far we've managed to overcome this problem very well, because we made SP compulsory under our Statute. So SP, in all its nuances, articulations and declinations, is the source which constantly guides our checks and balances system. [Director of the SP office]

The new mayor, Alberto Andreatta, reaffirmed a strong commitment to the strategic agenda and a participatory approach, however he stressed how difficult and tiring participation has proved and pointed out how the real challenge was to reconcile the need for substantive and meaningful participation of civil society with political protagonism and need for visibility.<sup>21</sup>

*The case of Sassari: "Sassari bella, buona e forte"*<sup>22</sup>

Sassari is the second city in size and importance of the special status Region of Sardinia. During the First Republic, Sardinian politics was also dominated by the DC, although some of the secular and autonomist parties also had a large consensus. Until the first direct mayoral election in 1995, Sassari's local politics was controlled by a variegated elite that mainly relied on directives from regional and national authorities. Local politics was perceived as toothless and lacked visibility, and it was often deserted by prominent

politicians, who preferred regional and national arenas (Della Porta, 1999).

In 1995, after five tormented years during which about four different executives and three mayors took power, the direct mayoral elections represented a major turning point and a chance to finally ensure some political stability. The centre-left coalition won and a woman, Anna Sanna, a primary school teacher with previous political experience as a Communist MP, was elected mayor. However, divisions within the left-wing coalition meant that Anna Sanna ran for the following elections, in 2000, as an independent. As the Left split, the centre-right coalition won the elections and the candidate of the post-fascist party Alleanza Nazionale (AN), Gian Vittorio Campus, became the new mayor. The new administration was also characterised by deep divisions and Campus' administration was incapable of taking any strategic decisions. Civil society often accused the new mayor and his executive of excessive authoritarianism and of refusing any kind of dialogue with local associations. At the following elections, in 2005, the centre-left coalition was back in power.<sup>23</sup>

The current mayor Gianfranco Ganau and his administration, who, at the end of their first mandate, still enjoy high consensus rates, have adopted a very different approach to power and, assisted by the University, have introduced several participatory mechanisms to encourage cooperation with the local civil society and engage with citizens, in an effort to promote local development and tackle the deepening economic and cultural crisis. The current mayor seems to have learnt the lesson that the *decisional illusion* that characterised the previous two administrations was not a winning strategy and he is far more inclined to mediation with all sides. However, few interviewees perceived him as fully autonomous and recognised he was sometimes too responsive to the influence of specific political tendencies, within the party that supported his candidature.

This mayor, unlike the previous two, is quite nice, personality wise. The two previous mayors, outside formal council meeting, never met anyone, not even people from their own coalition. Not only does this mayor see his majority but also he helps the opposition. [...] Clearly as a mayor is also subject to... and we clearly saw what pressures from those political tendencies he had to respond to. [...] He was forced to replace commissioners that he would have never changed, only because of threats from these currents, which would say, "either you do it or I won't support you". [...] And these pressures always respond to personal rather than collective needs. (Councillor opposition)

Sassari's new participatory approach to planning was not born in isolation, but it built upon several governance experiences within the last decade. The city launched its Strategic Plan in 2006; here as well the plan was introduced on the initiative of the local administration,<sup>24</sup> which also coordinated the process. However, the City Council was assisted by a provincial government agency for local planning and sustainable development, DEMOS, which has an autonomous administrative structure and whose main function is to offer technical support for socio-economic and territorial planning.<sup>25</sup> The first phase of SP, based on listening to and collecting ideas from citizens through postcards distributed in the most degraded areas and in local schools, was concluded with a week of collective meetings (*settimana strategica*), in September 2006. Each of five working days was dedicated to the discussion of a particular aspect of local development and social policies, whereby citizens could interact with experts and local

administrators.<sup>26</sup> In the morning experts from the local University and various political and civil society figures would give lectures to illustrate the diagnostic documents produced in preparation of the SP process by a team of local academics. In the afternoon experts from Demos and an agency specialising in deliberative instruments for policy-making, Policy, coordinated working groups, using particular methodologies, such as the European Awareness Scenario Workshop (EASW),<sup>27</sup> whereby people were divided in several groups, according to whether they participated as administrators, citizens, experts and private sector representatives, to envisage the future of the city, in terms of best and worst case scenarios. Later groups mixed, according to interest and expertise, so as to ensure interactions among all categories and each group focused on a particular theme, whether environment, social policies or local development. These events were open to everyone, however, as the manager of Policy pointed out “simple citizens were not truly involved, also because there was not real interest in involving them.”

The debate on each issue was taken forward through thematic roundtables that met regularly over a few months and were chaired by experts from University and coordinated by facilitators from Demos and Policy. Although these meetings were open to all those that took part in the *strategic week*, some stakeholders were specifically invited.<sup>28</sup> Generally there was a very high response from local stakeholders but some interviewees highlighted how difficult it was to involve some actors, and in particular private companies and banks, but also some trade associations.

The president of the Chamber of Commerce was always invited but he never participated. Also with the Bank of Sardinia there was very little interaction. Banks generally, although they were all invited, did not participate. [Office of the general director]

The administration made a special effort to engage with the most degraded neighbourhoods, in Sassari’s periphery, S. Maria di Pisa. During a one day workshop, which took place locally in December 2006, concrete strategies to reduce the socio-economic gap between these areas and the rest of the city were elaborated. Here simple citizens and citizen associations actively engaged with the administrators, and the Church and the local schools in particular emerged as two important local players in the regeneration process.

In this case citizens and association representatives were very much involved and important problems concerning that neighbourhood emerged [during the forums]. We used EASW, because there were too many people to employ just focus groups. EASW was better than other methodologies also because we were discussing specific issues, about the neighbourhood and its development. [Manager of Policy]

We had high response for the working groups, where we debated... At my table there were citizens that asked me questions and discussed issues that we are now trying to address. And everything started with those forums. [...] Now the local administration will soon fund a project whereby the whole local square will be rebuilt and within 15 days we’re going to have a special meeting with the executive which will be open to all citizens. And this new opened approach was encouraged by that initiative [the SP]. [President of local ward council]

Similar methodologies were also employed for the area-based SP, at inter-municipal level (*Piano strategico d’area vasta*), introduced in 2007 and involving 6

municipalities; thematic focus groups were held about the environment, connectivity and mobility, productive chains, training and culture, welfare, governance and transports, with the assistance of DEMOS and a committee of experts from the local university.<sup>29</sup> Here though, although all meetings were open to the public, the process mainly involved administrators and a few private stakeholders, perhaps because identity incentives at a higher administrative level are more difficult to communicate to and be perceived by the wider community.

Sassari's SP process had already been agreed by the previous centre-right administration, since, in this case, there were regional and European structural funds available to finance these new mechanisms.<sup>30</sup> The fact that the SP was bound to deadlines imposed by the Region meant that the whole process had to be "compressed" within a few months, leaving very little time for communication and awareness building. However, tight deadlines also encouraged a more innovative approach.

[The tight deadlines] paradoxically gave us – well, we chose to do that – the most innovative element of Sassari's SP, this strategic week. We had these time constraints, particularly for the collective process of elaboration of ideas – since all the desk analysis and diagnostic documents had already been produced. [...] But the most original part was this horizontal debate employing all these different methodologies to foster... [these new ideas]. And the fact that we had to squeeze everything within this week, which we called *strategic*, actually worked out, because in a context where people are not used to [this sort of involvement] something like that is more effective, it's like when you launch a big festival... So there was a very high response. [Expert]

A very efficient press office working closely with the main local newspaper, a dedicated website and the opening of a forum that would encourage and sustain the debate following the strategic week were all effective tools that tried to offset the negative impact of tight deadlines.

Several interviewees pointed out that the political awareness of the process was however very limited and other institutional leaderships proved more important in coordinating the process: an economist from the University and the director of the Local Development department, who became the main champion of the process, albeit availing herself of the local administration's support. Only a few political figures - the mayor and a few commissioners who were directly involved - fully endorsed the process, which was mainly administrative, whilst the rest of the executive and the council kept at the margins.

The involvement of the council was mediated by the mayor. [...] Overall the council perceived it [the SP] as something of little importance; they didn't feel as they owned it. The fact that it was ratified with virtually no votes against... Because you can't really vote against something that was the product of meetings with the citizens. [...] Let's say that beyond the usual political dynamics the council didn't understand the concrete usefulness of the process, because it does not appear to affect every day life. It was perceived as the book of "What I will do in the future, but who knows when". (President of the council)

An *ad hoc* administrative office consisting of City Council employees and a few scholarship holders supported the whole process ensuring coordination mechanisms among all participants were in place throughout the process. Although the office only existed until the approval of the final plan, the students involved were later employed by the Council and they are still strongly committed to a participatory and integrated

approach. In this respect the process was important in training new institutional figures that might facilitate organisational learning. After the approval of the plan, the director of the Local Development department moved to another position within the national health trust. The new director, albeit an expert in planning, had a very different approach and there was a lesser effort in sustaining coordination mechanisms among all the actors. Several interviewees pointed out that unless one is directly involved in the participatory mechanisms since their inception, it is difficult to understand their utility, since these instruments often entail much extra work. Continuity is thus crucial for success, but really difficult to secure. The then director of Local Development recently went back to working for the City Council, as the director of the Social Policies department and she is committed go back to the SP and use it as reference framework within her ordinary administration.<sup>31</sup>

In Sassari, as well as in Trento, the elaboration of the new local urban plan, after over 20 years, proceeded parallel to the SP and, being a much stronger and well known government tool, it catalysed the attention of the community. Several other interviewees, such as experts and environmentalist associations, which took part in SP lamented very little synergy between the two plans, since it was clear that the town plan, where stronger and more conflictual interests were at stake requiring several compromises, followed its own path.

The implementation phase has proved particularly challenging in Sassari. Since the SP process was initially encouraged through regional and European funds, the local administration expected further funds to finance the projects, and, perhaps due to lack of political awareness and initiative, the plan was never fully integrated within the ordinary local planning and using local resources.

There was a timetable issue, since the SP was launched at the very end of the European programme period 2000-6 and the new funds to finance the projects have only been available recently. So there has been a void for a few years. [...] We lacked external inputs [from civil society] but also internal coordination [Office of the general director]

Few minor projects were implemented, mainly involving the department for Youth and Education, where a very committed commissioner, who also has a delegation for citizen participation, encouraged a strong participatory and integrated approach within her department. These were small and little integrated projects that would have most likely been implemented even without the Plan; however the participatory forums served to reinforce the commissioner's intention to pursue these initiatives, since some of the issues the projects aimed at addressing were in fact raised within the deliberative arenas.<sup>32</sup>

The input from other institutional levels was fairly limited if not of outright ostracism. There were severe clashes with the Provincial government – although the same centre-left coalition is in power - which, in order to reaffirm its planning functions, decided to launch its own SP, when Sassari had already started its area-based plan (which already covers most of the Province). The two plans were somehow in conflict, also due to a very different understanding of the SP process, and the Province took very little part in Sassari's plan, though it could have played an important steering role. Several stakeholders complained about “an inflation” of plans and lamented that having to attend

dozens of meetings for different plans that lacked synergy proved time-consuming and unconstructive. Eventually very few stakeholders were involved in either Sassari's area-based plan or the Province's SP.

The role of the Regional government was twofold. On the one hand it disbursed funds to promote SP, also drawing on EU structural funds; furthermore the then centre-left administration initially invested greatly on integrated planning at regional level.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand the centralising vocation of the Region, both at political and administrative level, meant that little space was given to local governments and very little of what elaborated locally through a bottom-up process was incorporated into regional level planning. Instead bargaining between local and regional government proceeded through political channels, between the President of the Region and individual mayors.

Municipal administrations found they had to respond to the community's bottom-up requests and to the regional government's centralism. [...] You would have expected that the regional president would come and say: "OK, if there are projects that were elaborated collectively or through the SP they should have priority" No, it wasn't like that, there was one man in power who would bargain directly with each mayor. [Expert]

The few cities that immediately responded to the regional funds announcement for the SP expected a faster lane to access further funds, but for the following five years there was not much talk of SP at regional level.

After that [the conclusion of the SP process] neither the European Community nor the Region kept their promises. From neither side you had something like: "OK, only those who carried out a good SP process will have access to funds". There has been no attempt to incorporate projects [from local SPs] within the regional development programmes... Even in terms of timetable they [the two levels] were completely disconnected and only by chance certain ideas were synergic. This was another reason for frustration for those who took part in the SP process. [Expert]

However, as several Sardinian municipalities chose to adopt SP,<sup>34</sup> the new centre-right administration's regional development plan does contemplate new funds to finance collective and integrated projects elaborated through SP.

I think that now that it's clear that cities that have a strategic plan will be able to access regional funds through the so-called PISU [integrated plans of urban development] people will start to understand its validity, at least because it guarantees access to funding. (Councillor, majority)

### **Conclusion: What difference does context make?**

Local development is increasingly conceived in terms of structural projects that require integration and coordination of policies at several jurisdictional levels, in a logic of multi-level governance, and it rests on the central role of territorial institutions. Local leaders are expected to coordinate and engage different interests, in order to elaborate a collective vision of development that can enhance the territory's social capital. New modes of governance, based on an integrated and participatory approach might represent an opportunity for local governments to reinforce cross-sectoral relations and foster more coordinated and collaborative interactions with higher institutional levels, in order to

respond to the challenge of multi-level policies promoted by the EU. Thus, instruments that foster collective decision-making and build consensus around local issues, such as SP, continue to gain popularity, albeit with mixed results.

The two experiences examined above, notwithstanding very different contexts and results in terms of project implementation, show several similarities and demonstrate the difficulty in guaranteeing continuity and encouraging the city's engagement with the process through effective communication and coordination mechanisms, which are pivotal to sustain participation even in a context naturally inclined to cooperation and participation. Trento is a wealthy city always ranking high in Italian statistics on quality of life and characterised by high political continuity (also across institutional tiers), strong leadership at local and provincial level, and a highly cooperative social context, with a dense network of voluntary and civic associations. Sassari, which has long been coping with a deepening economic and cultural crisis, displays a fragmented political structure, though the current mayor has showed good mediation and leadership qualities; there are several voluntary associations, some really small, however the social context is generally little oriented towards cooperation.

In each city SP had very different incentives and aims. In Trento it was a voluntary process based on the initiative of the new mayor, Pacher, and his Local Development commissioner, who had already embraced a participatory and integrated approach through his role as a coordinator of a territorial pact. The mayor soon became the real champion of the process, supported by two public service directors, who ensured good levels of internal coordination. Trento changed its statute to make SP compulsory and the plan became an important government tool to coordinate a series of sector-based plans, all elaborated almost simultaneously through participatory mechanisms. In Sassari, SP had already been agreed by the previous centre-right administration since there were regional financial incentives to start the process. However, the presence of a highly committed Local Development director, whose efforts were fully supported by the newly elected centre-left mayor, translated into very innovative choices to engage the local civil society; thus, in Sassari SP was very much an administrative process. Political parties and the council tended to remain at the margins. Even in Trento, where the mayor showed high political awareness, he was generally supported by one or two commissioners directly involved in the process, whilst the rest of the executive and the council kept at a distance, between scepticism and outright ostracism. Politics, with its need for visibility, seems to struggle to understand the advantages of a participatory and long-term approach to planning.

Whilst in Trento the whole elaboration process took over two years, in Sassari tight deadlines imposed from above to access funds meant the plan had to be prepared and approved within less than one year. However, this had some positive side-effects, since it forced the administrators to organise very innovative events concentrated within a short period of time. This facilitated the awareness-raising process in a context not used to participation and cooperation.

In both cities most private and social actors recognised the importance of these new mechanisms and enjoyed the buzz and the enthusiasm surrounding those years of frenetic planning. However, in both cases most participants were structured stakeholders rather than small businesses and simple citizens. Furthermore, not all trade and industry

associations actively took part. In Sassari there was some scepticism due to previous participatory mechanisms at regional level that failed to produce tangible results, whilst an inflation of plans at different institutional levels caused a *planning fatigue* among stakeholders. In Trento, most stakeholders, especially on issues concerning local economic development, felt the Province was their main interlocutor and, since the latter was not fully involved in the SP process, they thought it would be more constructive to look for different channels to engage with local political institutions. Generally Trento's trade and industry associations thought the SP was an important space for the city to reflect on its future, but they perceived it more as a process that would give coherence to local planning. Thus, they did not feel it was something they had to engage with in a more proactive way and showed little interest in being involved in the implementation phase. In Sassari, the focus was rather on individual projects and measures and, at least initially, trade and industry associations perceived the SP as an arena where to push through projects they already had in the pipeline and that could be financed through regional funds, rather than a space of public deliberation and elaboration of new projects. In both cities, the third sector and cultural and civic associations tried to capitalise on the process and participated actively; however a few associations, particularly in Sassari, complained about lack of access to enough information, which they believed hampered their clout on the process. In Sassari, however, the innovative methodologies employed were generally very successful in facilitating a horizontal dialogue among very different actors and the forums and roundtables did help to strengthen some networks and open new channels between some associations and the new centre-left administration. Pretty soon, though, the general perception was that the plan had just been a way to access funds allocated for promoting SP and that there was not enough political awareness or commitment to implement it.

In both cases, there was not real intention to engage with simple citizens, since administrators believed a dialogue with more structured actors (not only economic associations but also voluntary and civic organisations) would prove more constructive. Citizen participation proved more substantive at the neighbourhood level (i.e. the Social Plan in Trento and the forums in Sassari's degraded periphery), perhaps because the objectives were more tangible and easier to understand than a *vision* of the future of the city. In fact, the higher the institutional level the harder it is to create and foster identity incentives or resources that will encourage identification with an overall vision of development, as demonstrated by the poor impact of participatory efforts at the provincial level, both in Trento and Sassari. In general, beyond the degree of associational density, voluntary and civic associations, which normally enjoy fewer direct channels with the local administrations, were eager to capitalise on these arenas, whilst more institutionalised bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce did not feel the need to participate actively.

The local councils and political parties, particularly the opposition, were highly sceptical and mainly saw the plan as a fairytale book or a publicity stunt to increase the mayor's popularity. Although some councillors recognised the need to regenerate local democracies and open to civil society to respond to the challenges of more complex societies, most felt that the political class was not ready and as yet there were no instruments in place that could guarantee the representativeness of these new political

arenas. Generally councillors refrained from conceding that participatory democracy could in any way threaten their role as representatives of the citizens' will, but fear of being delegitimated might explain such a dismissive attitude towards, and lack of interest in, these mechanisms.

Greater support came from within the public administration, especially where there were some highly committed and innovative individuals. Albeit some initial resistance, the public administration is slowly metabolising a more open and integrated approach to planning and service delivery, particularly within those departments, such as Education or Social Policies, which are at the forefront of service delivery and have a more direct relationship with the citizens. The presence of internal leaders committed to the process, such as the Local Development director in Sassari and the director of the SP office in Trento, was pivotal to ensure coordination, motivate staff and support them through change. In both cities, in fact, the role of leadership was paramount, at every level, and successful participatory initiatives or implementation of collectively elaborated projects most often depended on the initiative of a particular public service director or commissioner. This is why ensuring continuity at both political and administrative level is crucial for sustaining coordination mechanisms and securing success, and yet it is difficult to guarantee.

If endogenous factors, such as leadership, are powerful explanatory variables, exogenous factors are just as important, since these processes can only work in a framework of multi-level governance that can ensure consistency at all administrative levels. One of the main constraints was certainly lack of coordination and a different *modus operandi* between tiers of government, which can determine fragmentation of local initiatives and hinder the credibility of the local government. A clear connection between regional/ provincial policies and local SP seems necessary, and regional-level institutions could have their ideal interlocutors in existing local partnerships and networks (Gangemi and Gelli 2006). The two experiences deeply suffered from lack of multi-level governance, as demonstrated by the uncompromising stance of Trento's Province, which did not feel the need to participate in the elaboration of the SP, but had the political and financial authority to undermine it; by poor communication between Sassari's local government and the Province, which chose to launch its own SP in competition with Sassari's area-based plan; and by Sardinian regional government's dualistic attitude, on the one hand encouraging strategic and participatory planning through financial incentives, on the other hand hindering it through a centralising approach.

Broadening participation in policy-making certainly poses many challenges and even raises issues of representativeness and legitimacy. At the local level, however, it may well help to legitimise local democracy and enhance the potential of the city as a *collective actor* (Le Galès 2002). These two experiences of SP though are yet another testimony to the fact that the impact of participatory mechanisms on the local polity cannot be taken for granted, but the challenge raised by governance and the practice of deliberative democracy is triggering a wider reflexion on the way we understand local government and development, and on the role of traditional political institutions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The comparative case-study includes two other medium-sized Italian cities, which have adopted SP: Prato in Tuscany and Lecce in Apulia.

<sup>2</sup> The literature tends to focus either on large cities or regions (Bukowski et al 2003; Keating et al 2003; Piattoni 2003) and their new role vis-à-vis nation states and supranational centres of power in elaborating local development strategies. Medium-sized cities also face several new challenges (Les Galès 2002), following the rescaling of politics (Brenner 2004) and fierce economic competition at national and global level, and they struggle to increase their territorial competitive advantage (Scott 1998). However, medium-sized cities enjoy considerably fewer resources and less bargaining power vis-à-vis higher tiers of government, whilst they also need to manage ever complex challenges from below and from above.

<sup>3</sup> A total of 46 interviews were conducted in Sassari between November and December 2009; 36 interviews were conducted in Trento between January and February 2010. All interviews were carried out in Italian; translations of all quotes are mine.

<sup>4</sup> “Incumbent democracy is primarily motivated to preserve and improve existing institutions by maximizing and managing orderly participation. Critical democracy seeks, instead, to resist such management and empower excluded voices in such a way as to directly challenge existing institutions. Incumbent democrats assume that effectiveness is only achieved through institutions, and that participation requires institutionalisation in order to be compatible with the central representative structures of the democratic state. Critical democracy upholds a rather different assumption: that effectiveness can arise out of a collective adherence to common concerns. Here, the institutionalisation of participation is seen as an attempt to tame radical energy.” (Blaug 2002:107).

<sup>5</sup> SP generally develops through several stages: the initial phase, whereby all the interested institutional, private and social actors elaborate a collective strategy for local development; a second phase where a diagnostic document is produced, which identifies the potential and the limits of the locality, the issues that the participants perceive as priorities; a planning phase, whereby individual projects are elaborated, which will have to be consistent with the overall development model; the approval of the final plan (officially presented to the community at large and subscribed by all the actors involved); the implementation phase; and finally monitoring and evaluation of project implementation (Segatori 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Formez is an agency of the Department of Public Function that helps local administrations to implement and monitor innovative programmes and projects, by offering technical support and training. ([http://www.formez.it/chi\\_siamo.html](http://www.formez.it/chi_siamo.html)).

<sup>7</sup> These were Turin, Florence, La Spezia, Pesaro, Trento, Venice and Verona. Sassari and several other municipalities have since joined the network. In its website ([www.recs.it](http://www.recs.it)), the Network states among its objectives, to disseminate information about the approach of SP as a local and European model of governance; to promote benchmarking activities; to reinforce the role of cities within at national and international level; to research support tools for the implementation of SP; to create an International Observatory of Cities; to expand the number of competent institutional actors.

<sup>8</sup> This title encapsulates the *vision* Trento’s SP which is well interpreted by then Mayor Pacher’s words in December 2000 when the protocols of agreements were signed: “The city of Trento intends to look at its future with a strong anticipatory capacity [...], first and foremost with regard to the awareness that a development cycle based on a strong welfare model and public investment is coming to an end. But also with regard to the understanding that the capacity to develop strictly depends on a city and on a territory to generate value” (cited in Detassis and Penasa 2005:26; the translation is mine).

<sup>9</sup> Trentino-Alto Adige’s special status had been promulgated in 1948, following the 1946 agreement between then Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, originally from Trento, and the Austrian Home Secretary, Gruber.

<sup>10</sup> The 1992 Act 266 prevents national laws from having direct effect in the Region, allowing the two Provinces the time to enact them.

<sup>11</sup> A member of the former PCI, later DS, in 2008 he was also elected provincial secretary of the new Democratic Party (PD).

<sup>12</sup> Andreatta’s political experience has followed a similar path to Dellai, since he was first a member of the People’s Party (born from the ashes of DC) and was later elected under the Daisy civic list.

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<sup>13</sup> It should be pointed out that the phenomenon of voluntary associationism has been subject to a deep transformation, from several social networks of catholic and secular associations to smaller groups where specific cultural identities and interest representation are prevalent (see also Losito 1997).

<sup>14</sup> A new plan on mobility and one on tourist policies were recently passed.

<sup>15</sup> One *ad hoc* role as Head of Strategic Planning was created to ensure coordination of the whole process; this figure was supported by the director of the Local Development department, which had already promoted the 1999 forum.

<sup>16</sup> Three scholarships were awarded by the City Council to research students from the local University to support the organisation of the SP, as well as carry out research and analysis on the outcomes.

<sup>17</sup> The council resolution for the approval of the final plan in 2003 passed with 27 votes in favour, 4 votes against and 7 abstainers. This means the opposition was united in voting against it.

<sup>18</sup> 2/3 of the 73 measures listed in the final plan were implemented within a few years since ratification by the council. This apparent success could also raise some suspicions over the causal relationship between the plan and its projects, given that a strategic plan has generally a very long-term span (i.e. ten years): were these projects implemented because of SP or would they have been implemented anyway, as the strategic plan simply had the merit to intercept and organise inertial dynamics?

<sup>19</sup> One of the strengths of Trento's SP in terms of cognitive effects is the adoption of quantitative evaluation as an instrument to assess the feasibility of each project and the coherence of the plan in its entirety (Pasqui et al 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Since 2009 he has been re-appointed as director of the SP office.

<sup>21</sup> The second strategic plan (2010-2020) was already launched in 2005, but the participatory mechanisms were abandoned and there was a stronger emphasis on the idea of a strategic process, rather than a plan listing measures and project, with a focus on just a few strategic areas.

<sup>22</sup> This was the title of Sassari's strategic plan: Sassari beautiful, good and strong. The *vision* of the plan envisaged a city characterised by a coherent and harmonious development; a welcoming city that cares about all its citizens' needs, especially the weakest sectors of the population; and finally a city that can develop a strong and sustainable economy.

<sup>23</sup> The new council counts 40 elected representatives, with a majority of 24 for the winning coalition. At regional level, the centre-left was in power between 2004 and 2009, with Tiscali tycoon Renato Soru as president. In 2009 the centre-right coalition won the regional elections, and Ugo Cappellacci is the new president.

<sup>24</sup> Like in other Objective 1 Italian cities, Sassari's SP was financed through European and regional funds under Misura 5.1 for urban policies. Misura 5.1 includes several government initiatives for urban regeneration: it promotes projects that improve the quality of life of provincial capital cities and the competitiveness of regional urban systems within a regional strategy that aims to coordinate and organise urban and metropolitan functions.

<sup>25</sup> In 2006 the City Council of Sassari has become a shareholder of DEMOS.

<sup>26</sup> Each day entailed lectures and forums on a particular aspect of Sassari, its cultural life, development potential, the local University, services and quality of life, and each day had a different and symbolic title: A competitive Sassari, A caring Sassari, A sustainable Sassari, Sassari as a University city, A liveable Sassari.

<sup>27</sup> This is a methodology introduced by the European Commission DG Enterprise, in order to promote participatory democracy in local government through workshops, with the aim to identify and plan solutions to existing problems regarding the environment, urban planning and/ or regeneration and sustainable development.

<sup>28</sup> About a month since the end of the strategic week in Ottobre 2006 a further workshop was organized, the "Forum of cultures" where all main cultural associations operating in the area were invited to debate about how to enhance and promote cultural activities in Sassari. At the same time another forum, on Youth, coordinated by the Department on Youth and Education and the agency Policy, was launched. OST (Open Space Technology) and focus groups were among the methodologies employed to facilitate the debate. OST is used for citizen assemblies involving high numbers of people. Participants freely decide what to focus the debate on, within the thematic areas agreed; the assembly, coordinated by a facilitator, defines concrete actions. This methodology facilitates spontaneous collection of ideas and suggestions that would otherwise struggle to emerge (Bobbio 2007; Sassari's SP, available at [www.comune.sassari.it](http://www.comune.sassari.it)).

<sup>29</sup> The final plan of the urban SP was ratified by the council in June 2007 with 20 votes in favour, out of 28

councillors present. Eight councillors abstained. The area-based plan was approved in September 2008, with 18 votes in favour and 11 abstainers.

<sup>30</sup> Since 2004 CIPE is actively promoting SP in *Mezzogiorno*. However a national strategy of financial transfers to sustain SP could engender the same perverse effects as in the case of other development policies already experimented in the South, such as fragmented initiatives and waste of public resources. A rather more fruitful approach might entail the provision of technical expertise and know-how, as well as greater coordination between national and municipal policies, following the French *Contrats de Ville* (Perulli 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Several interviewees lamented the lack of a dedicated SP Office that could overlook the implementation of the plan and coordinate the different actors involved. The mayor's presentation speech for the SP did contemplate the creation of a "control cabin" (*cabina di regia*) that would include also representatives of private and social actors, but that was never set up.

<sup>32</sup> For instance one of the projects, *Ludobus*, consists of a van containing various entertainment tools and interactive games, driven by playworkers through deprived areas to engage local children.

<sup>33</sup> In 2004 the new regional government launched a process of integrated planning for local development, to invest new EU funds (Bobbio 2007). Different bodies – a regional group in charge of coordination, local planning workshops and technical provincial groups - overviewed the management of the process, which covered several sectors: industry, agriculture, rural development, tourism, environment and social inclusion. The workshops on local planning were the most innovative part of the process; these were technical units with a stable presence in each of the eight provinces to facilitate inter-institutional cooperation among local actors (*ibid.*). About 1600 people took part in the forums, with high attendance of individual citizens (from 100 at the beginning of the process to 500) (*ibid.*). The money initially allocated for integrated planning has been doubled (to €700 million), by adding new regional and national funds; the Centre of Regional Planning received 14,000 applications to take part in the project partnerships, attesting to the success of the process. To date very few projects have been implemented.

<sup>34</sup> To date 34 Sardinian municipalities are members of the Network of Strategic Cities.

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