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Abstract

The paper focuses on the concept of technical rules (according to an Aristotelian interpretation, that is to say as propositions that express a necessity: if you want *x*, you must do *y*). The thesis argued is that this concept is helpful in coping with some of the problems of both teleological and deontological planning theories. In particular the concept is useful in emphasizing the role of technical knowledge in planning and in 'solving the relationship' between planning and politics in a way consistent with the characteristics of liberal and pluralist democracies.

Keywords

technical rules, technical knowledge in planning, politics

Introduction: the usefulness of the concept of technical rules

Planning theory has essentially been characterized (and probably is still characterized) by the predominance of what we can call a teleocratic approach. Generally speaking, I refer to the teleocratic approach of planning theory (from the Greek *τέλος*, *telos*: end, purpose) as a theory maintaining that planning's aim is to reach a desired (substantive) state of things (e.g. a preferred idea of a good life, of a good city or of a good society). According to this view, a plan is the (central) means of 'end-purpose coordination of a system' (Moroni, 2010: 139). As Mandelbaum (1979: 60) states: 'The classic texts in planning theory deal, for the most part, with the nature of a good society, organization, city, or building. The process … of change to the preferred state … [is] embedded in this vision.' John Friedmann, Susan Fainstein and Patsy Healey are, among many others, representatives of such a teleocratic idea of planning (Alexander, 2009).

One of the main problems with many of these teleocratic approaches[1] is that, because of the growing pluralism/individualism characterizing Western urban societies, it is difficult to reach consensus on a substantive idea of a good city/society (Hillier, 2003).[2]

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Decades ago, in a different society (probably less complex, definitely less pluralistic), this was perhaps less problematic.[3] It is not by chance that the idea of the public interest has been central to planning's justification for a long time – regardless of whether this concept was employed in an ambiguous and ambivalent way, to 'bestow a self evident tone' (Reade, 1987: 70) on planning statements. On the contrary, today (and at least since some decades), 'the dominant contemporary view within the planning academy is … dismissive of the public interest' (Campbell and Marshall, 2002: 173).

Without a shared idea of a good life, or without a concept like the public interest which can act as a palliative, it is more and more difficult today to justify, theoretically base and evaluate planning and its products in a teleological way.[4] Or, rather, it is more and more difficult to posit a satisfactory and coherent teleocratic planning theory.

As it is very difficult to find outside planning (in shared societal values) a *telos* at which to direct planning, many planning theorists have focused on the self-definition of such a *telos*. For instance, we can think of Susan Fainstein's 'just city' idea, or John Friedmann's good society to be produced through radical planning. These are surely significant contributions to planning theory; however, generally speaking, the risk of focusing planning theory on the definition of a substantive idea of a good city/society is that it detracts attention from the technical components of planning. The definition of a *telos* is more a political task than a planning/technical task. Obviously, planning is deeply connected to politics (in this paper I refer to politics as, generally speaking, a specific activity of allocation of value); nevertheless, the essence of planning rests in its technical contents. Transforming planning theory mainly into political science theory risks weakening planning specificity, precisely by spreading the idea that the core of planning is the definition of a substantive idea of a good city/society (if so, what would be the specific technical competences of planning, the reason for its existence as a specific discipline?). Moreover, as I will argue later, the risk is also to autonomize planning from politics, moving on (consciously or unconsciously) to an interpretation of planning as a sort of fourth power, as an independent and self-sufficient sphere able to self-define its (political) aims.

To avoid the *telos* problem of a teleological approach, it is possible to follow a deontological planning path (from the Greek *δέον*, *deon*: duty, obligation). A deontological approach, contrary to a teleological one, does not need a *telos* because it is 'procedurally focused' (Campbell and Marshall, 2002: 174), that is to say it is not focused on the results, but rather on the process and prerequisites. Deontological approaches include, for instance, dialogical and rights-based theories. Nevertheless, such procedural approaches too, even if they avoid the *telos* problem, run the risk of losing the technical specificity of planning: focusing on the principles and process, they risk not giving a good explanation for why planning should continue to be a specific discipline/profession.[5] Furthermore, referring again to the specific question of the relationship between planning and politics, some of these approaches (in particular dialogical ones) do not answer this tricky question: not only, as Flyvbjerg (1996; 1998) states, because proposing a communicative approach in a conflict-ridden society is quite naïve;[6] as I'll argue, it is also quite risky in terms of having only a 'disguising function' referring to the value choices that, at any rate, are practiced by planning.[7]

In this paper I will argue that, independently of the chosen approach (teleological or deontological), in my opinion the 'way of technical rules' (according to an Aristotelian

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interpretation, i.e. technical rules as propositions that express a necessity) is useful for avoiding some of the problems just underlined. Moreover, one of the merits of such a proposal is its ability to help to clarify theoretically the (central) role of technical knowledge in planning and, in so doing, to help to 'solve the relationship' between planning and politics in a way consistent with the characteristics of liberal and pluralistic democracies and with the prevailing teleological use of planning within them.[8]

It is useful to specify that the aim of this paper is not to propose an alternative theory of planning resting on the concept of technical rules, but simply to clarify the role of the technical component of planning in many planning theories. According to this, my interest lies not in describing how planning works today, referring to a particular institutional system, but in describing how planning would have to work, in abstract terms, independently of a certain particular context.

Technical rules in planning

What technical rules are and how they work

Technical rules are prepositions that express a necessity: if we want *x*, we must do *y*; they refer to the so-called *anankastic* sphere (from the Greek Ἀνάγκη: necessity) (see Azzoni, 1991). According to Aristotle, this relation of necessity is the core of any technical knowledge (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, IV); in other words, we can state that the purpose of any technical knowledge is that of formulating technical rules.

A technical rule does not prescribe conduct per se but as a condition for achieving a contingent goal. The constitutive characteristic of a technical rule is its *hypotheticality*. Technical rules are doubly conditioned. The conduct they prescribe is prescribed: (i) under the (subjective) condition that the agent follows a particular purpose; (ii) as an (objective) condition for the realization of the aim pursued by the same agent. As a consequence, we can state that the technical duty of a technical rule becomes active only for the subject that targets a specific goal *x* (Conte, 1983).

If technical rules are at the core of any technical knowledge, they are at the core of technical knowledge of planning as well. Talking about planning, we can argue that, generally speaking, the agent who subjectively defines *x* (the goal) is the political sphere; planning technical knowledge should take care of expressing *y*, that is to say the tools concerning space that permit the goal to be achieved.[9] Since planning has distributive, inclusive and exclusive effects, the choice of these aims belongs to politics. Planning's duty is to establish a connection between all these purposes (e.g. economic, social and any other kind of aims as well) and the different spatial operations.[10]

Consequently, precisely because technical knowledge is concerned with means,

> empirical knowledge excludes certain decisions, but it can never indicate which decisions ought to be taken. Thus, knowledge indicates the limits of freedom within which decision makers can make their choices. (Faludi, 1983: 273)

Planning indicates the limits of freedom of decision-makers not because it is a sort of 'fourth power' over and above politics, but simply because it indicates which means do not achieve a certain goal. In other words, technical knowledge does *not* determine

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policies (i.e. there are always some non-technical reasons to choose a policy), but can only validate or invalidate them, trying to justify them by (technical) reasons.

Technical rules evaluation

Generally speaking, technical rules can be subjected to *empirical control*. This is not sufficient to confirm them, but it can be sufficient to disprove them: a technical rule is confuted after an empirical survey that establishes there is no proof of the effectiveness of the prescribed conduct compared with the event undertaken as the purpose (Gometz, 2008). From this perspective, within the technical rules a falsification perspective of a Popperian matrix can be introduced.[11]

Nevertheless, as regards technical rules in planning, the situation is different. Faludi (1983: 269) is right in arguing that 'it is … quite inappropriate to talk about plans, planning statements and the like being falsified', but the reason is not that planning statements are contextual statements (i.e. singular, specific statements) – and not universal statements, like Popper requires. Generally speaking, singular statements can also be falsified. The problem with the falsification of technical rules concerning social sciences (e.g. planning) is that this falsification does not produce directly a general theory, in other words it does not have a general value; at most it produces some fragments of contextual knowledge. For technical rules in planning there exists no equivalent of what physical scientists do in their laboratories. Therefore there cannot be any empirical falsification in a strictly Popperian sense. But this does not mean that it is impossible to develop substantive knowledge about the validity of planning technical rules; precisely because it seems possible to identify similarities among numerous planning contexts where technical rules may be employed, we can constitute, with patience, cumulative and incremental planning knowledge based on analogies within similar contexts.[12]

Anankastic degrees of the tools–aims relation

It is essential to specify that arguing for technical rules does not imply a necessary relation nor even any determinism between aims and tools. In fact, technical rules are characterized by different anankastic degrees (i.e. levels of necessity) (Azzoni, 1991):

> *maximum*: the expressed condition y is a necessary and sufficient condition, or a necessary condition to the aim x. In any case y implies x. If we do not follow the technical rule it is totally impossible to carry out the purpose x.
> *medium*: the expressed condition y is a sufficient condition; it is possible that the pursued aim x can be achieved even if the rule has not been followed at all;
> *minimum*: this is the case of 'stochastic rules'. These kinds of rules prescribe a behaviour as a 'probabilistic coefficient' for reaching a goal. Nevertheless the goal can remain unrealized despite the observance of the rule.

Planning knowledge can plausibly express meaningful technical rules that reach at worst a minimum (sometimes medium) anankastic degree. This is above all connected with the nature of the 'objects' which planning deals with.[13] It does not mean, however, that the

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technical nature of the rule decays, or that there is no place for some cumulative knowledge of a causal kind: 'Knowledge of causation is not *entirely* impossible in the social sciences. … While the *exact* attribution of cause is impossible, it is often possible nevertheless to get *some* understanding' (Reade, 1987: 91).

Since planning rules can be stochastic rules as well, this has another important implication: usually, there is no single tool for achieving a specific goal connected to planning matters (there is no univocal solution to a single problem). The practicable ways of achieving a purpose are very different. Planning's aim is to highlight several alternatives, and the distinct consequences of these possible alternatives, too.[14] The choice of the preferred alternative is not a neutral choice, but, like the purpose, it is a value judgement; consequently, from a theoretical point of view, it belongs to politics as well.

The relationship between technique and politics according to technical rules

'Planning is a component of politics. There is no escaping that truism' (Rittel and Webber, 1973: 169): each decision about space organization is a political choice because it has a value content (and distributive, inclusive, exclusive effects) and because it is taken in close relation with polity.[15]

What does the concept of technical rules imply for the relationship between the technical knowledge of planning and politics?[16]

As is commonly acknowledged, some decades ago the so-called 'technocratic approach'[17] argued the independence of planning compared with politics. It claimed for planning the possibility to take decisions and to solve problems in a neutral (i.e. 'technical') way. The 'technocratic approach' was brought into question in the 1960s and 1970s: since then the idea that it is necessary to politicize planning (and, as a consequence, the planner's function as well) has developed. In the last decades, a lot of planning theories related precisely to this idea have been formulated.

Independently of both the teleological and the deontological approach actually assumed, a common idea argued by some of these theories (albeit in several different forms) is that planning is an essentially normative discipline (i.e. planning has to achieve some kind of judgement) (Mazza, 1995). For instance: from the deontological perspective of communicative ethics, this idea finds its expression in the 'non-neutrality axiom'[18] ('however technical it is, planning is an inescapably normative enterprise', Forester, 1998: 201);[19] within the (teleological) perspective of radical planning proposed by John Friedmann (1987: 501) 'the central theme is the constitution of an alternative order'; in that of the just-city of Susan Fainstein (2000), the aim to be achieved is the 'good/right city'.[20] The underlying idea is the same: the competence field of planning is mainly placed in the value judgements' sphere.

According to this view, the aim of planning is to define and reach some preferred state of things, some values (democracy, social justice …). From this viewpoint, planning overwhelms politics; in a certain sense planning autonomizes itself from politics (i.e. it self-defines the values and the substantive idea of a good city/society to reach). As Mazza (1993) argues, one of the results of this assumption is a progressive marginalization of the specific function for a technical-disciplinary knowledge. So, referring to such approaches,

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a central question is: within many of these theories, what really distinguishes a planner from a political activist? Does specific technical planning knowledge continue to exist and to have a specific/distinguishing role?

According to these perspectives, the planner can be considered as a *sui generis* actor, different from all the other subjects involved in the planning process, just because s/he associates some peculiar competences of '*technical judgement*' with an element of *political judgement* (common to all the different actors involved in the process). This is, for instance, the case of Friedmann's (1987: 306) 'red *and* expert' planner and Forester's (1989: 244) 'political-critics' planner. All the same, the legitimacy of this position is doubtful. A political activist has the right to use technical arguments in order to support a political thesis; by contrast, a technician (e.g. a planner) who uses technical arguments to support a policy can suggest that some *decisive* technical reasons exist in order to choose a specific policy, but this is false in nearly every case.[21] There are always some reasons exceeding technical arguments to choose a specific policy; this is true not only in the real world of professional/administrative practice (for instance because of the key role played by specific interests, such as personal, ideological and symbolical interests), but also – and this is what is relevant to the perspective of this paper – from a philosophical point of view.

Speaking in terms of analytical philosophy, there cannot be any *more competent* judgement (about value). In other words the definition by a successful planner or ordinary citizen of the good/right city has the same legitimacy – it cannot be based on any technical argument at all, but only on political/moral/aesthetic reasons; the kind of process that leads to the judgement (e.g. communicative or collaborative) has no influence in this direction. If we accept the assumption that there is a separation between assertive and normative fields (i.e. we accept Hume's law or ethical divisionism), the conclusion is that there cannot be logical consequentiality between fact and values, that is to say every judgement may be equally competent and legitimate independently of the speaker.[22] Ethical divisionism is not a universal precondition and it is a problematic and controversial assumption;[23] social sciences have called it into question, but, from a logical and a philosophical point of view, it remains the main perspective in contemporary Western society, and for this reason it is the perspective we must deal with. Furthermore, the alternative is to maintain a position of ethical objectivism or natural determinism, which is not realistically acceptable. *Tertium non datur*. Also for this reason, 'the ideal of a pluralist democracy cannot be to reach a rational consensus in the public sphere' (Mouffe, 2000: 17), nor, consequently, in the planning sphere (Hillier, 2003; Pløger, 2004):[24] as I argued in the first paragraph, it is very difficult to identify a universally recognized *telos* (i.e. some shared end-values) on which planning can rest.

In my opinion, one of the results of the (wrong) assumption of the logical homogeneity of facts and values is '[to] obfuscate our understanding of what planning is and how it works' (Flyvbjerg, 1996: 385). It obfuscates the politicality of decisions about space because it upholds, directly or indirectly, the idea that the aims of planning can be defined by planning itself; it obfuscates how planning works, because it creates the illusion that planning legitimacy can be grounded on some specific procedural rationality deriving (quite automatically) values from facts, independently of the power sphere – as Chantal Mouffe reminds us, the link is between legitimacy and power, because of 'the hegemonic

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nature of any kind of social order' (Mouffe, 2000: 14). Sure enough, all this happens despite the good faith of planners and in spite of the significant contribution of these reflections to the progress of planning theory and practice.

Planning's core

As I have argued, in my opinion the technical rules (as they have been described) are at planning's core.[25] The specific function of planning is to try to translate some non-neutral objectives into spatial forms. At any rate (independently of both the teleological and the deontological approach assumed), planning has to focus mainly on *means concerning space*. The definition of aims is not at the core of planning, but, from a general point of view, it is primarily a 'political function', a function referring to the value sphere and concerning mostly elected official and social forces.[26] The problem of *telos* is secondary for planning theory: even in those cases in which planning theory has a more utopian-visionary character (for instance, aiming at defining the nature of a good society), to remain *planning* theory, theory has to focus at least on the technical rules (concerning space) necessary to achieve that good society. Its effectiveness as a *planning* theory rests on the validity of its technical rules (i.e. in the validity of the *anankastic connection* between facts and values).[27]

The heart of the discipline is not made up of analytical-descriptive knowledge (more typical of geography and sociology), or of value judgement (more typical of the political field, broadly speaking) or of procedural knowledge (more typical of administrative sciences). All these knowledge fields are very important for planning, but it is fair to say that all of them are situated on its outer edge. The core (and the specificity) of the discipline is located instead, as I have argued, in substantive-technical knowledge.

It is very important to highlight that I am not claiming that all planning is exhausted in the technical rules, or that hybridizations and connections with other disciplines must be cut off. Nor does it mean forgetting the circular and complicated relation that exists between decision and implementation, or between theory and practice as well; or forgetting that in their professional practice planners are constantly involved in some degree of political judgement, so it is difficult to draw a clear division between facts and values (as well as between the political role and the technical role).[28] Nevertheless it is fundamental to wonder about the specificity of planning. Quoting Friedmann (1998: 251):

> What, I asked, was our unique competence as planners, the body of knowledge which no one else could legitimately claim as their own? If we were unable to identify such a domain, then, indeed, planning, as a field of professional study, was perhaps not worth saving.

My reflection about technical rules may sound quite abstract and far from reality (like Fichte's 'bad infinity'). For planning theory, however, abstraction and distance from reality are not necessarily weak points.[29] As I said, the aim of this paper in fact is not a sociological one (i.e. to describe how planning works today); my interest is to propose how planning would have to work from a theoretical point of view, so 'it's hard to see … why its lack of realism should be considered a defect' (Banfield, 1959: 367). The value of this discussion (of a general theory) is inherent 'in the tension it generates against

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practice' (Mandelbaum, 1979: 70). And I think my proposal generates many tensions against actual practice: nowadays planning practice (as well as theory) often goes in another direction, for instance in a communicative direction, paying little attention to technical knowledge; in many cases it seems to have very few technical points of reference and mostly 'moral-practical' knowledge (see for instance Healey, 1992) and, sometimes, it still seems consciously or unconsciously guided by the will to be the 'fourth division within [the] governmental system' (Tugwell, 1939: 1).

For this reason it is important to try to outline the competence field of planning from a theoretical point of view. Sure enough, this is not intended to be a fortress in which to withdraw. On the contrary, it should be considered as an anchorage point or a coordinate system useful for reorientating theory and practice attention.

Conclusion: strengthening technical knowledge to re-politicize space

For many decades the different teleological planning perspectives have marked positively the history of planning. Even today they are very strong. Nevertheless, nowadays they are experiencing some difficulties, some of which seem to be linked to the nature of contemporary (pluralist) societies and in particular to the lack of shared end-values on which to rest. Facing these difficulties, many theorists have moved their attention to (value-oriented) aims. Nevertheless, in so doing, the risk is to neglect the technical core of planning, that is to say its specificity and one of its main reasons for existence as an autonomous and unique field of knowledge and competence.

This is the reason why, independently of both the teleological and the deontological approach assumed, the choice of a 'technical emphasis' (according to the concept of technical rules) in planning seems to be useful.[30]

Let it be clear that this does not mean renouncing the political component of planning (which is in any case impossible, as planning is imbued with politics). On the contrary, through the strengthening of technical rules it is possible to re-politicize the *role* of planning, but in a way more consistent with the democratic system in which we live.

Recognizing that the political contents of all planning decisions pertain to politics allows the space to regain all the political value that it actually has. As Lefebvre (2000: 52) states, 'space is not a pure scientific object outside both politics and ideology; it is always strategic and political'.[31] For decades this political value of space has been hidden (also) by planning, not only by the technocratic approaches, but, paradoxically, even by the more 'politicized' planning approaches focusing on the definition of a good society, of a good city and of objectives of democracy and participation for planning. In so doing they (unintentionally, of course) sustained the idea that the design and organization of space are operations that are distinguished (i.e. separated) from politics, and, as a consequence, that space is, in a certain sense, an object outside politics and ideology. However, precisely because space is always political, decisions about space pertain to politics. Accordingly, it is possible to argue that the role of planning is political *clarification*, 'to engage in analysis and the revelation of the distributional effects of those policies which are actually pursued, and to make clear the probable distributional effects of those policies which the politicians advocate' (Reade, 1987: 173). Engaging in political

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clarification means focusing on technical rules, in other words on means concerning space, not per se, but in their relationship with a political *telos*. The political role of planning is political clarification: the politicality of planning does not rely primarily on its prerogative to define the aims autonomously (as I said, in a pluralistic and liberal society this prerogative pertains to the political sphere); the politicality of planning rests in the nature of its technical knowledge, that is, the link between spatial means and value-oriented aims. This can also help to re-politicize space, to allow space to regain all the political value that it actually has by removing the 'veil of Maya' (i.e. the veil of a purely technical and neutral design of space) sometimes provided by planning.

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Notes

1 Here, I refer in particular to a teleological definition of planning that has some substantive content; I do not refer to purely instrumental definitions (see Alexander, 2009), which have partially different problems.

2 In Mouffe's (2000, 2005) opinion, this is the thorniest problem facing liberal democracies.

3 For instance, in Foley's opinion, in post-war decades British town planning was characterized by certain substantive features that were more or less fully accepted: 'It was fully accepted in principle that it is the function of British government to safeguard the public interest by providing a civic approach to land planning' (Foley, 1973: 75). See also Glass, 1973; Rittel and Webber, 1973.

4 Luigi Mazza (2009a) is probably right when he affirms that nowadays it would be possible to design and implement a complete planning system only in a 'republican perspective', i.e. within a model able to create among citizens some shared bonds (so acting as the *telos* of planning) that are beyond all their ethical concepts. The problem is that this 'republican idea' is generally lacking nowadays (at least in Italy, as well as in the majority of Western societies).

5 'It is very doubtful … that there does or could exist an analytically distinct method of decision-making, "planning", which can be applied to any one of a range of substantive policy areas' (Reade, 1982: 71). Or, quoting Wildavsky (1973: 135): 'It becomes hard to distinguish [planning] from any other process of decision. … Almost any process for making decision in a social context can be considered to be planning.'

6 'Why use the force of the better argument when force alone will suffice? Power knows its privilege and knows how to use it' (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 80).

7 In the presence of a collision between contrasting values, it is more likely we will find the solution within the power field (Schmitt, 1967, 2007); as Mouffe (2000: 17) argues, any kind of social order has a hegemonic nature; every consensus 'entails some form of exclusion' and exists 'as a stabilization of power'. Actually, it seems unlikely that a real consensus on most planning choices can be discursively constructed (see Fainstein, 2000; Hillier, 2003). Maybe, if we choose to adopt a deontological approach, a meaningfully nomocratic approach like that proposed for instance by Stefano Moroni (2007, 2010) appears more consistent and coherent.

8 Nowadays Western societies are still characterized by an intimately teleological use of planning, i.e. a use of planning to reach specific substantive idea of a good city (or, more modestly, some substantive aim). Politics seems not disposed to give up this use of planning.

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9 This is surely a simplification. I do not forget that in their professional practice planners are constantly involved in some degree of political judgement, so it is difficult to draw a clear division between statements and judgements (and, sometimes also between politicians' roles and technicians' roles, as administrative literature has shown very well). I'll come back to this question later in this paper. Nevertheless, this abstraction is useful to reach the core of the matter.

10 'It could be said that planning has its own "grammar", in other words a group of technical and scientific rules, but that it does not have its own "logic": the logic of planning is delineated by political decisions' (Mazza, 2009b: 133).

11 See, for instance, Popper (1959).

12 To develop this kind of knowledge it is necessary to include in the planning process constant monitoring and (ex post) evaluation activities. As Alexander (1981: 139) states: 'Planning activities should be designed to include an evaluative component from the beginning and, in specifying goals, every effort should be made to operationalise the assessment of their achievement as an integral part of continuous plan-implementation monitoring.'

13 This is partly linked also to the low level of maturation of substantive planning knowledge: 'planning is still in a rudimentary stage … [so] learning is perhaps the most important task of planning today' (Alexander, 1981: 139).

14 In practice this process is surely complicated: it is impossible to take into account all the different alternatives; anyway some approximations appear quite possible.

15 Quoting Mazza (2009b: 125): 'planning is advanced not only as an activity that is political, because it entrusts decisions to political rationale and judgement, but, in a more profound sense, as an activity that has above all a political end.'

16 As already noted, in this paper by politics I mean the activity concerning decisions about publicly relevant values.

17 I define 'technocratic approaches' as all the perspectives that, albeit from different points of view, propose some sort of 'scientific' approach to the planning process, depending on the applicability of the scientific method to urban questions. Among them, for instance, there are both the rational model approach and physical outcome-oriented visions (see Fainstein, 2000).

18 According to the 'non-neutrality axiom' it is possible to discuss in a rational manner both facts and values.

19 Also Healey's collaborative planning rests on a similar idea (see Healey, 1998).

20 '[I take] an explicitly normative position concerning the distribution of social benefits' (Fainstein, 2000: 467).

21 A public policy can be 'technically evaluated' if we want to emphasize both the expected costs and the expected benefits, but it cannot be 'technically judged', because the judgement of both costs or benefits changes according to political aims (Mazza, 2009a).

22 This does not necessarily mean accepting a purely relativistic position in which every judgement has the same value; it simply means accepting the logical heterogeneity of facts and values and the non-derivability of values from facts (and vice versa).

23 On this topic see, for instance, Schmitt (1967).

24 As Brand and Gaffikin (2007: 293) argue 'agreement can often be provisional and ragged rather than neatly consensual and terminal; certain divisions remain intractable despite repeated effort at resolution; the multiple meanings and interpretative rivalries of a very differentiated world offer fragile references points for building a shared context of norms, values and perceptions'.

25 Not all the rules produced in the planning process can be traced back to technical ones. All the same, the technical rules are those generally required of planners.

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26 Obviously, these 'political objectives' are not always clearly defined. Quite often, for several reasons, politics gives the planner considerable delegated power. This, however, cannot deceive: at any rate, by definition, in contemporary liberal societies the value choice referring to a public sphere like a territory and the people who live there is a political responsibility, especially when important urban strategies and policies are at stake.

27 As Wildavsky (1973: 131) states: 'the first requisite of … planning is causal knowledge: the existence of theory with at least some evidence to support it specifying causal relationships.' Or, rather, as I said, the first requisite of planning is technical-anankastic knowledge.

28 See for instance the huge debate about the relationship between politicians and administrators in the public administration literature. Nevertheless, even if there is a wide agreement about the criticism of the classical (Weberian) 'dichotomical model' (i.e. the strict separation between politicians and administrators), all the same 'the dichotomy is a many-side construct that cannot be discarded' (Overeem, 2008: 42), and the relation between politicians and administrators 'rests on an *active exchange within limits.* This is a relationship in which the actors in one sphere cannot take over a function that is essential to the actors in the other sphere …. The nature of the interaction can vary considerably within these limits, but the limits cannot be removed completely without changing the nature of the relationship' (Svara, 2008: 49. See also Svara 1990, 2001).

29 Particularly if we assume that 'in planning … knowledge is not "translated" into practice. … Planning must rely on an "enlightenment" model of knowledge diffusion' (Alexander, 2010: 103).

30 Am I arguing for a sort of neo-positivism? Yes, I am, if it means underlining the centrality of a technical-substantive component inside planning. No, I am not, if it means arguing for a rational decision-making process, an entirely possible causal knowledge, the irrelevance of procedural or descriptive knowledge in planning, the rejection of the political nature of the spatial activities, and so on.

31 On this topic, see also Lefebvre (1991).

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