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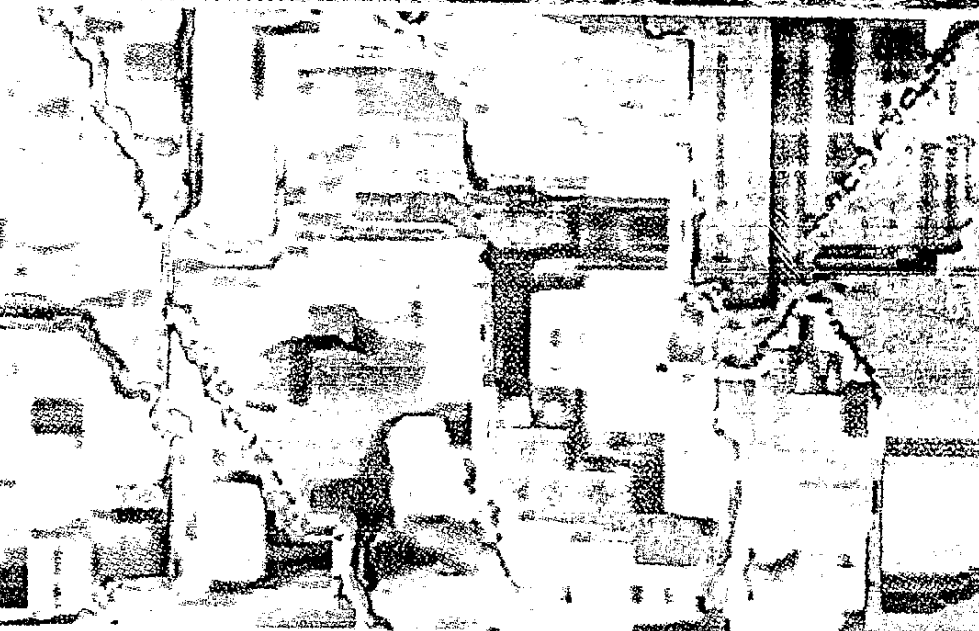
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CITIES



PLANNING WITH THE COMMUNITY:

THE VICENZA PROJECT

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Are planners autocratic experts or are they enablers with no proper claim to specialized knowledge? Or is there a third way for the would-be community planner? This article describes and evaluates an experiment in community planning that was conducted in a small village, Casale (1,700 people) within the boundaries of the municipality of Vicenza, a middle-sized city (nearly 100,000 people) of central Veneto in Italy. The outcome suggests that there is a third way, one that is also more effective than either top-down autocracy or than those forms of bottom-up idealism that do not address the problem of the necessary knowledge-base for effective action.

This was not a proposal that came from the community, but instead a decision by the Municipality. It faced the problem of revising the Master Plan in the belt of villages surrounding the core city. It was a problem that was difficult to solve with ordinary tools because there had been many conflicts with the communities of the villages and it was difficult to impose choices from above.

As consultants to the Municipality of Vicenza we proposed to start a community planning experiment with the precise objective of establishing a trusting relationship between communities and the local authority and of eliciting through a group process the choices upon which the revision of the Master Plan

The main aspects of our proposals were the following:

- this had to be *a real process of public participation*, not just a consultation over a possible set of choices; this meant that no decision had to be arrived at the group process;
- the objective had to be *a comprehensive community plan*, not just a proposal for the revision of the Master Plan, and the local authority had to be committed to find ways to carry out different kinds of initiative for the improvement of the community situation;
- *the period* for developing the project *had to be short* (5 months) because it is difficult to engage local people for a longer period, because you have to show results in a reasonable span of time, and finally because we wanted to replay the same methodology in other villages within a reasonable period;
- the technical assistance for *the project had to be significantly based upon the existing human resources of the Planning Bureau* with the precise objective of training its members in the approach of participatory community planning, so that the staff of our Institute could gradually leave the responsibility of the project to local actors.

The local authority accepted these conditions and assigned to us, as a kind of challenge, the most conflictual and turbulent village, where two community groups with sharply different

visions of local problems were active, and where on many issues in the past the local community had been opposed to the municipal administration.

In the Institute for Social Research we were excited about the challenge of the proposed venture, and decided to set up an interdisciplinary steering committee* that would meet every week during the five months of field work to define the methodological approach and to evaluate the project's development.

The general idea was to have three main phases:

(a) First contact

During this first phase we scheduled meetings with local community groups, local leaders, municipal officers, to gather a list of the representations of Casale's problems. This gave us a general overview of all the different perspectives, an important basis for setting out the methodological choices.

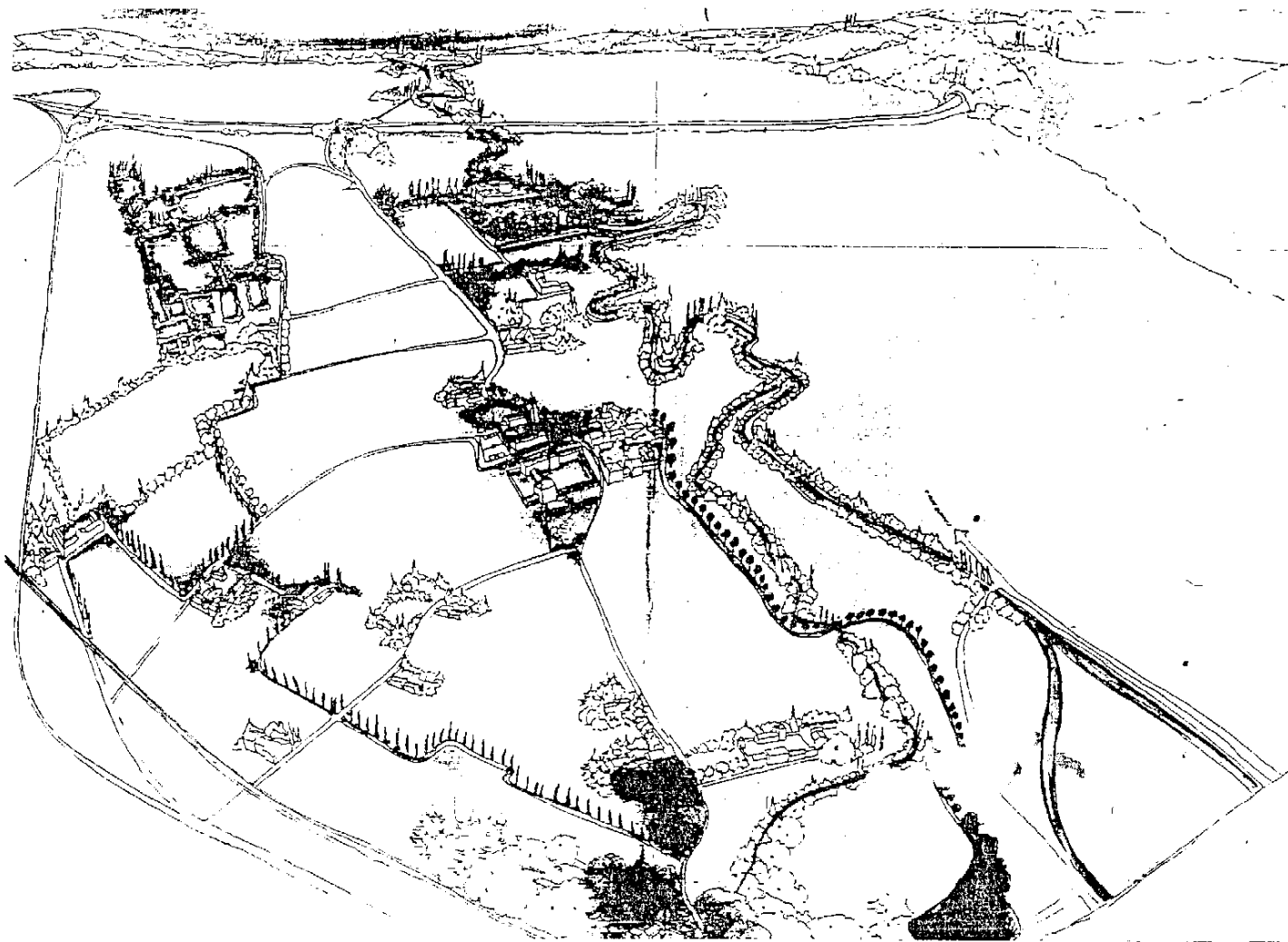
We then distributed a questionnaire to all people aged over 15, intended to give a first survey of the perceived problems, to verify the attitudes about the village and its future, and to ascertain their readiness and availability for participation in the community planning exercise. We gathered 600 questionnaires out of the 1400 distributed, filled in by people who had carried them personally to the collection box in the local church. Finally we organized a first general meeting of the community in which we presented the project, its objectives and methodology, a set of rules to be followed so as to allow everyone to participate effectively, and finally we gathered the registrations for the more intensive work of the community planning exercise.

(b) Design workshops

During the second and crucial phase we scheduled 5 workshops of nearly 4 hours each. About 30 people registered for this kind of work and most of them participated continuously. The workshops were to define (a specific task for each workshop):

- (1) the territorial structure and the activity structure of Casale
- (2) problems
- (3) priorities and the conditions for dealing with problems
- (4) possible solutions
- (5) the overall plan.

The planning workshops had been prepared and accompanied by intense work undertaken by the Planning Bureau to make all the relevant information available to the project team – from statistics to any kind of thematic maps about land use, state of infrastructures, constraints for development and so on. Intense work was also undertaken in the different workshops by participants organized in small groups: structured direct observation in the village of places and activities that had been the object of analysis and discussion during the previous workshop, interviews with local people in order to go deeply into some relevant issues; project development in the final phases of the activity.



Every work session was designed in detail to offer to each member a clear understanding of the project building process.

(c) Presentation of results

A third and concluding phase was the presentation and discussion of the Project with the local community in a general meeting. It was agreed that the project would be valuable for the entire village. After this we tried to start actions in different administrative fields: from the reorganization of the local school to the repair of local streets, and finally we started the process of Master Plan revision that would translate the indication of our informal plan into a formal planning tool.

What we have done, in general terms, has been to give a strong methodological framework to the process with the objective of assuring the development of a process of collective 'rational' choice.

To reach a conclusion, given the conflicts among participants, we had to step backward from the biases of the various actors, and then to go forward making any step toward the definition of the plan as clear and justified as possible. This is the reason why there is a strong emphasis in our general scheme on problem definition activities rather than on defining solutions. The crucial task was in fact to de-construct biases and received views of local groups, technicians, politicians, and ourselves. The differ-

ent community groups were supporters of two different approaches. One of them interpreted all the local problems (poor services, lack of social life, bad state of the infrastructure, etc.) as a consequence of the small size of the population and consequently thought that all the problems could be solved with a significant increase in population, making it possible to build new residential areas. The other group, on the contrary, appreciated the existing character of the village, were less concerned with the local services problems, and put a strong emphasis on conservation and protection of the environment.

The success of the community planning exercise was therefore linked to the ability to mediate these views, the strong frames through which any local problem was interpreted, and to de-construct them into their original elements in order to be able to build up or re-construct a new representation of the local situation on common ground.

A closer description of some steps in the planning workshops

The first workshop was dedicated to 'defining the territorial and activity structure of Casale'. The point of the work was to elicit a new description of the village that could be a basis for the project.

We divided the project team of 25-30 people into three smaller

groups of 7-10 participants.

As a *first step* we asked people in each group to design a map of the village; we then put up on a wall all the different maps and discussed the general image that emerged underlying common elements upon which to design a new general abstract map.

As a *second step* we asked them to record individually the three best places, the worst ones and those most used by participants; on this basis we reported all the choices on a map and then discussed the result of the two steps registering the different comments on a wall poster.

As a *third step* we asked everyone to register their activities in and outside the village during a working day, a Saturday and a Sunday.

We then recorded the individual work on a wall poster, in which all the group members' activities were put together so as to open up discussion about what pattern of activities came out of this exercise and about what we could say in terms of the poverty or richness of these activities.

Every one of these steps had therefore a phase of individual work, a phase of small group discussion and a phase of comparison and discussion of the results of the small group activity in the total group.

What we found out from these activities and from this gradual way of analyzing the local situation was very important as a source of information and as a tool for building a common representation.

From individual mapping we found a clear view of the structural elements forming the village's collective image:

- its very important boundaries: the river, the highway, the railway; all elements that had prevented the inclusion of Casale in the anonymous periphery of the city but which had also been barriers for a better relationship with the city;

- its sub-units: the different groups of houses to which every participant felt able to belong (together with a sense of belonging to the village as a whole);
- the very weak centre, made up of the church, its connected buildings and the open space that was the only public place in the village;
- the distribution of the historical villas dispersed throughout the territory of the village, which usually gave the name and a particular architectural quality to the groups of houses;
- the other elements of identification: the central street, parallel to the river Bacchiglione, where all the other public structures like the church, the two restaurants, the school, were located.

From the work on good and bad places we found important common elements in terms of places considered resources and places considered problems; we also noticed the ambiguous character of some places marked by conflicting judgements. From the work on activities we found a structure very different from the dominant view of a neighbourhood where people return each day just to sleep. There was in fact a rich mix of residential, leisure and agricultural activities that give the village a particular character. At the same time we found a list of external activities needing to be analyzed in order to see what could be conceived as missing in the village.

This approach was used in every step of our design activity. In the workshop dedicated to problem definition we discussed in small groups why any problem was a problem, for whom, what kind of resources could be available to treat it, we found out whether all the group agreed about the nature and importance of the problem; and then we compared and aggregated the results in the total group. Through this process we arrived at both a first identification of priorities and a rich elaboration of each problem. In the workshop dedicated to developing solutions for the identified problems we put different groups to work



with different positions on the controversial issues so that we could profit from the different stages of debate, among people in the small groups and among the different groups; trying to find an agreement.²

It is not possible here to analyze the planning activity in detail and the combination of internal and external work; my intention has been just to indicate the approach and style adopted.

The results of the community planning exercise

Many proposals were very practical: to provide a mail box, public lighting in some streets where it is missing, to build missing parts of the incomplete drain system, to outline a programme of road maintenance, etc.

Some proposals were for management solutions for the improvement of local services: to experiment with a call-system for re-organizing local transport; to involve teachers, parents and local government in a project to turn the local school to better account, etc. Some were identifications of problems that should be treated in turn with participatory techniques: the problem of creating events and physical structures that would facilitate socialization in the village.

Some proposals were indications of the need for a revision of the Master Plan, the criteria to identify new areas of development, the re-design of the road system with a particular focus on the internal functions of the roads rather than on the external need to quickly cross the village.

The Casale Project is, then, based upon a careful description of the village: its parts, problems and resources. It involves a possible description of the village as a rural neighbourhood that, through designing an appropriate local development could turn the barriers that excluded it from ordinary continuous development into opportunities to preserve and enhance its character.

The final project was divided up into five main sub-projects:

- (1) needs to be met as priorities in the public works sector: roads, drain, housing, etc.;
- (2) strategies for the improvement of local services: school, transport, civic centre.
- (3) environmental rehabilitation as a way to turn to better account the particular quality of the village; and as a project that can be offered to the entire city: the river, the agricultural landscape, the historical villas and the old church would be connected by a system of pedestrian and cycle paths that easily and quickly lead to the centre of Vicenza.
- (4) the strengthening of the centre of the village with a new development area around the church for nearly 60 families and the gradual realization of the new civic centre, the school, the redesign of the open space etc.
- (5) the improvement of the image of the different groups of houses that form the village through the realization of small opportunities for development for resident families and for the realization of small public spaces.

All these projects have been conceived in a very pragmatic and realistic way being careful about resources and means of implementation.

The wider significance of the project: points for further discussion

(1) *How can we judge the product of the community planning exercise compared with the possible results of traditional approaches to planning?* I think that in this uncertain field we cannot say following some scientific standard if the results are good or bad. What we can say is that the results we reached have been tested against many points of view and particularly against those of people that have to live in the village; and also that the plan is considered to belong to the community. This is of course an important condition for a successful plan because it facilitates its implementation.

If we consider the results from the point of view of the contents, I would observe that the choices are deeply linked to the interpretation of the character of the village rather than to some other abstract disciplinary criteria. This seems to be consistent with the style of good practice at the moment in Italy, but, while it is deeply linked to the methodology of community planning, it cannot be said to be part of normal professional practice.

(2) *These methodologies can be thought of as means to improve political and administrative work.* We have been struck by the rapid change in the attitudes of politicians and bureaucrats from distrust or indifference to complete trust towards the project. This is due, I think, to the opportunity that the methodology gives for experimentation with a different role for decision makers and technicians: a role much closer to local people and their needs.

(3) This point is also about trust. *An important aspect of our experiment was the opportunity this case gave us to observe how these methodologies work in a situation characterized by deep conflicts:* conflicts among local groups, among land owners and other people, conflicts between the interests of the entire city and of the village. Our hypothesis was that, put in a setting in which every actor is forced to assume a public role and a public responsibility – linked also to the real recognition of a power to decide (not just to express judgements about others' decisions) – the achievement of consensual choices would be highly possible. The hypothesis was verified. Aren't perhaps many failures in reaching consensus among actors the result of a strategy that tries to avoid conflicts and therefore that does not recognize and treat them explicitly in a public arena?

(4) *The extraordinary effectiveness of participatory techniques in producing relevant information in a quick and fundamental way.* The knowledge produced in these contexts is of great value and could usefully integrate with other kinds of scientific knowledge, even in other (tradition) kinds of practice.

(5) *The change in the role of planner implied by this approach.* He or she is not of course the provider of solutions any more but at the same time does not have to hide his/her substantive knowledge. The most important role is that of the designer of the appropriate methodology to deal with problems in their context. A second important role is that of trustee of the memory of the group: who recalls what has been said and the agreements reached at the different stages of the process. There is also the role of the technician but only when it is really required by the project team (i.e. the people). It involves clearly explaining and arguing what contribution planning knowledge can make to the specific problem. It is close to the *reflective practitioner* of Donald Schön and to the *attention shaper* of John

Forester, but with a particular commitment towards the definition of the appropriate methodological framework through which the group can work.

(6) *The strength and weakness of this work.* The major strength is linked to the consensus expressed about the plan by all the actors involved that produced a sort of 'common legacy' of knowledge, trust and communication channels. This is an important resource for coping with implementation problems.

The weakness is the fragile character of the result: an informal planning tool that can be set aside at any moment. This weakness forces us towards a commitment to find plural ways to put into practice the indications of the community plan. Using this

kind of approach leads in fact to re-thinking the entire way in which public administration works.

Note

- The steering committee consisted of: Paolo Faren, Ph.D., policy analyst; Antonio Tosi, Professor of Urban Sociology; the project coordinator, Mauro Giusti, who had recently got his Ph.D. in City Planning with a dissertation on community planning, and myself

This paper is based on one presented at a seminar on 'Public Participation and Planning Strategies: Practice and Theory', organized by IRS and 'Regenerating Cities' in Milan in July 1994.

THE EVENING ECONOMY OF CITIES

JOHN MONTGOMERY WITH PAUL OWENS

What is meant by 'the evening economy of cities'? Why should city planners and policy makers take a more enlightened view as to what may or may not go on or be allowed to open in towns and cities after 6 p.m.? What are the policy areas which need to be addressed if a city or town wishes to develop its night-time economy?

Most city people are wedded to their jobs, and when you take these jobs away they soon become as empty and brittle as blown eggs. Work is for the idle. It gives a chaptered, tramline narrative to life... empties suburbs and estates and provides the display... residents with dramas structured by the city... provides the wages note, the cheque, the cash, the banking draft which, more than where you're born or live, is what it takes to be a citizen. An empty purse... makes strangers of us all. – Jim Crace, *Arcadia*, Jonathan Cape, 1992, p188.

On successful city streets, people must appear at different times. This is time considered on a small scale, at different times throughout the day. – Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vantage Books, 1961, p152.

If people are out in the evening, going to the theatre, the cinema or filmhouse, the gym, the photography gallery, the jazz club or whatever, they will also use the restaurants, bars and cafes. This is what we mean when we refer to the evening economy. – Comedia, *Out of Hours*, published by the Gulbenkian Foundation, 1991.

Nine-to-five: *pertaining to the standard working day in a forty hour week.*

Night and Day: *all the time, at all hours.*

Time: *a dimension of reality characterised by flows of events and phenomena through an irreversible procession of moments. Also: a systemised demarcation of the passage of such moments into units of seconds, minutes, hours, days and years*

The quotations set out above, between them get to the heart of what we mean by the evening or night-time economy, or rather

to why we do not yet have fully developed evening economies in British cities. For the evening economy, where it exists, is largely defined – at least in the minds of people who make decisions about cities – by what it is not. It is a segment of time, micro-time, which repeats itself seven days a week, when the shops have closed and everyone has gone home. By and large it is empty time.

And yet the possibilities of more activity around the clock are there. For the evening economy is all about business, enterprise and transactions. People meet, they trade, buy and sell – a meal, a drink, a newspaper, a hotel room, a theatre performance; they also are stimulated by the possibility of meeting others, of seeing their friends, of enjoying the company of strangers. In many UK cities, a pattern has emerged over the past 10 years of there being more, at least a little more, activity in the evenings. For some people, this is viewed not as an opportunity or a potential, but a problem. Something to be controlled. This is not a view I share.

Providing the space for transactions, across the day and night is what cities have always done, in any culture at any point in time (macro-time). It is what cities are good at. It is what humans do. In this sense, the evening economy is really only about opening up the possibilities for transactions to take place in longer and more extended segments of time. The diversity of transactions which combine to make a lively and vibrant place can only really occur in urban places, mostly city and town centres, but sometimes neighbourhoods scattered around cities and towns such as Rusholme in Manchester or Upper Street in Islington. For this reason, the notion of the evening economy is bound up in a larger debate about urban culture, the way people live in urban places.

Of course, for many people, cities and large towns are to be avoided at almost any cost. They are dark, dangerous and threatening places. The evening rush hour is in part a consequence of a basic desire to get home to one's family and a sense of security. We might have to work there, but we're not going to live there. The reason we left the city was to get away from it, the dirt, the danger and the unpredictability. This is fine for some