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The Work Culture of Social Planners in Apulia. A Contentious Balance between Education, Professional Skills and Labour Market

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The Work Culture of Social Planners in Apulia. A Contentious Balance between Education, Professional Skills and Labour Market

Emiliano Bevilacqua * and *Katia Lotteria* **

Abstract: This essay illustrates the role of social planners in the field of professionals of the knowledge economy, drawing from the results of a research carried out in Puglia from 2013 onwards. The social planners are professionals who plan and manage the local policies that are capable of transforming their own territories. They play a complex work that exemplifies the post-Fordist change of advanced societies. This paper demonstrates the difficulty of positioning planning work within the traditional occupational sector and develops a critical look on the empirical evidence that emerged from the research, with special attention to education, training, professional skills and work culture. Planning activities appear suspended between an ethos directed to personal fulfillment and socio-economic conditions that hinder the pursuit of this very goal. The professional skills of social planners seem to express a world view and a cognitive approach that is in harmony with predominantly social science based training but in contradiction with the structural features of the economy and society of southern Italy.

Keywords: planning, work culture, education, labour market

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Planning and the labour market

Planning work attracts an extremely wide range of responsibilities and skills, and, illustrates the changing aspects that characterise the professionals in cognitive work fields (Banfi & Bologna, 2011; Boutang, 2002; Chicchi & Roggero, 2009). Social planners are experts in programming and in the techniques of realizing projects through the sourcing of national and international funding, motivated by the goal of mobilising local resources capable of realizing pathways of exchange within the scope of community and participation (Bifulco & Facchini, 2013; De Ambrogio & Dessi & Ghetti, 2013; ISFOL-ISTAT, 2012; Taronna, 2007). Over time, they have honed specific forms of socializing and communication. The relationship between institutions and citizens has gradually moved towards a less hierarchical and more horizontal style of communication (Bifulco & Facchini, 2013; della Porta 2005; Moro 2013) that has contributed to the establishment of more flexible relationship forms, heading in the direction of greater dialogue between workers and end users (Bassoli & Polizzi 2011; Hinna & Marcantoni 2011). This transformation has altered the role of planners who inhabit the public sphere (Amirian, 2012; Cipolla, 2014; Levi, 2014), encouraging an interpretation that equates to such change. The aggressive emergence of other players - both private and non-profit - has also contributed to the further enlivenment of the planning world (De Ambrogio, Dessi & Ghetti, 2013; Frisanco, 2013; Siza, 2002).

The professional skills of planners seem to express a world view and a cognitive approach that is in harmony with predominantly social science based training. The social and cultural consequences of the post-Fordism evolution of the labour market (Harrison, 1994; Harvey, 1989; Piore & Sabel, 1984) present a more complex and varied setting into which to place the roles of new professions, even if the more unique characteristics of these occupations have not yet been sufficiently analysed to result in a clear profile. This contribution intends to head in this direction, offering some reflections that will help to illuminate this particular area of the labour market.

Section two briefly illustrates the goals and methodology of our research, and, where necessary, underlines the contextual elements within which it was carried out. Section three demonstrates the difficulty of positioning planning work within the traditional occupational sector while section four offers a critical reflection on the empirical evidence that emerged from the research, proffering an interpretive analysis on the

material that surfaced through the course of the research. Experiences attributable to the planning profession point to a number of tendencies, the most interesting of which is probably the way in which it directly calls into question the ambivalent nature of post-Fordism labour, whose boundaries are not immediately discernible and whose nature is not yet unequivocally determined. These boundaries shift in an environment in which aspirations and individual skills can diverge from the socio-organisational context, allowing the profile of formally stimulating and engaging work to emerge, even if it is substantially weighed down by cultural and economic constraints that significantly compromise the everyday experience.

Planners and their context

The social planners are professionals who plan and manage the local policies that are capable of transforming their own territories. Each of these elements illustrates the specific range of competencies required of these professional figures. The social planners are, therefore, equipped with different skills, from a discrete vision of the institutional and local contexts in which they work, to an understanding of the politics of governance and sustainable development, culminating in a disposition to cooperative work that accompanies the diverse phases of planning, implementation and the eventual analysis of the interventions that are realized. The services of planners can be delivered through direct employment or through a form of consultancy, and are often requested by different players including the public and private sectors, social organisations, associations and training entities. On the whole, the services relate to requests that require an elevated level of technical and relational competency, the balance of which varies greatly depending on the individual contexts and the circumstances. Education and university also play an important role in the kinds of competencies that characterise this figure.

The planning designer is a relatively new professional figure in Italy, having arisen from the allocated European Union funds dedicated to the development policies of member nations (Tagliaferro, 2007). They are experts in “fund raising” and possess different subjective qualities: namely dynamism and technical skills that have been accumulated from their university training and refined through the various national and European training opportunities that are available throughout the sector. Planning design has its own rules in terms of the development phases of projects, but also when it comes to skills that apply to expertise in the field. This means

that the job of planning design can only take place as a team, the composition of which - including the role of vocational education – varies according to the sectors defined by the same funding lines.

The research here has revealed that in Puglia - and in southern Italy in general – the areas of planning that have been able to realize projects resulting from EU funds, are those that concern national security policies, the non-profit sector and environmental policies. This information is supported by ministerial reports and those published on the EU website.

We would like to underline that planning is an essential reality for Italy, and in particular, for southern Italy, forming a framework of interventions capable of mobilising human and economic resources that continues to be significant in stature. If we consider, for example, that the funds sourced for this kind of activity have, in the Italian context, amounted to around 29 billion euro, and that between structural and FAS funds, it is predicted that between 2014 and 2020 total funding will reach 111 billion euro. Italy ranks first in the number of organizations and companies that benefit from directly managed EU funds, that is, those paid directly by the European commission in the form of contracts and projects. In 2011, almost 7,000 Italian companies and national entities received financing directly from Brussels, significantly outnumbering those in France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Even if the resources destined for the central and northern regions are growing, the volume directed towards the south accounts for 75% of the overall total, with the identification of a thematic objective aimed explicitly towards the South. It was not the regional Italian authorities who fully benefited from these funds but rather professionals in project design from a range of companies, universities and associations. From the Salento's point of view, it is particularly exciting to see how it is the focus of significant political and economic investment, which is enhanced by the status that Puglia has as a target area in the European Union's policies.

The research group initially arranged for mapping of a research area made up of the provinces of Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto, deepening in complexity to allow for the range between completed projects and the realization of spin offs (in university structures for example), through to the planning in the training field and in the non-profit sector, with a series of intermediary articulations: complexity that additionally assigns dimensions to the local units where the activities take place (in large companies or small centres) and to the contractual aspects. The mapping that followed led to an initial written survey which was interested in the professional contexts of planners and their connection to the public sector rather than to

the private one. This distinction need not be emphasised in that the uniqueness of the working figure discussed here distances it from a simplified identification with its legal status as an employee, particularly because of the relative autonomy it has, even at contractual level, and for the roles in this area played by private associations or cooperative forms of labour management.

The research followed a qualitative methodology, favouring an approach that was capable of re-establishing the complexity of a study aimed at a thorough understanding of the contextual elements (skills, occupational profiles, the dynamics of the labour market) as well as of the subjective aspects (training pathways, work pathways, professional experiences, ethos and visions of self). The outcome of this choice brought to life a research path that has contextualised and deepened the understanding of the study field (projects/planning sector) but which placed particular attention on the narratives of the planner through the summoning of three qualitative research techniques, i.e. in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Cardano, Manocchi & Venturini, 2012): the first essentially aimed at experts in the European project planning field (key informants), the second and third at designers who generally have trained in the social sciences. We have analysed what was offered up from the body of research work, seeking to evoke a current and complete picture of the social planner and have attempted to offer up a spectrum of the contradictions with which they struggle. The experiences and narratives that emerged through the use of qualitative interview techniques and focus groups informed the entire research structure, providing important support to the description and analysis of the planning world while some accounts from the key interviews have been cited to more efficiently highlight the often profound diversity which distinguishes social planner work in the public sector from that carried out in the private sector.

We spoke to and recorded the comments of twenty interviewees, of whom eight were deemed key informants, while three focus groups were also run. The qualitative approach made it possible to enhance both the subjective narratives predominantly solicited during the course of the interviews as well as the public element which was clearly implicit from the use of focus groups. The identification of the types of subjects contacted was formulated on the basis of a reasoned, theoretical sampling (Silverman, 2011), taking into account the significance and importance these subjects assumed in relation to the dynamics of the study (Mason, 1996). The subjects were selected through a snow ball sampling with the

exception of the testimonials that came from the public sector such as from the university. In fact, in the latter case, recourse was made to the form of rational choice, an approach followed in order to allow the research group the possibility of better appreciating the networks and capabilities and to contact experienced representatives from the sector. The number of subjects chosen for interview was not established strictly a priori just as the criteria used to assess the coherency and universal significance stemmed from an ongoing evaluation of the evidence. One of the criteria used to evaluate the weight of the collected empirical evidence was the saturation criteria (Bertaux, 1981).

The empirical evidence gathered in this way allowed for the formulation of interesting analytical prospects, based on the possible congruence between formative skills, potential for autonomy and the implicit appreciation of planning work and the daily experience which rewards its players. The considerations made in the following section develop the centrality of these dimensions and are presented as an in-depth, more specialised contribution on labour and its representations.

Planning work across the public and private spheres

The emergence of the planning figure within the scope of the public administration began around 1994-1995, when, throughout almost all of Italy, the provinces strengthened the Community policies departments by setting up the European Offices:

This without any particular regulatory stress, but for motives of economic opportunities, or perhaps, to be ready to use EU funds, and to encourage greater regional cooperation with the municipalities in order to optimise resources and have greater territorial returns with the projects (C., male, 54 years old).

The European Office of the Province of Lecce is still a complete structure, despite how the exodus from the province has slowed down the work. The service is organised with an executive and a unit of sixteen internal staff: they are mostly concerned with community policies and local development. Of the staff in the unit, seven are concretely dedicated to planning design, the implementation of projects won and to the eventual reporting on these. The staff are constantly in training within a particularly significant context:

The office has, for years, had the core function of collaborating with municipalities, creating more and more interconnected networks and realizing projects with major impact on the local area, conducted as they are across vast areas. In 2006 it was named the best European Office in Italy, and counted 57-58 projects in the areas of internationalization, scouting for local businesses in collaboration with other European and Mediterranean nations and in bringing best practice into the network (C., male, 54 years old).

In fact, the survey to which we refer, clearly shows that project work is not conducted in solitude, neither in the general governmental sector nor for private companies. Indeed, access to the generous European funding such as the various funds available under the *Bandi Europei Horizon 2020* banner, involves the deployment of subjects who differ both in profession and skills. This seems to be the key strength of both areas:

Throughout Italy, the European Offices only operate in national networks, just as they also organize their work in groups (including internal groups). An example of this is the Provinces of the Adriatic network, which included southern European cities, north Africa, Greece, Albania and Turkey, and that, on the basis of common interests, worked together in preparing for and participating in the tenders that best adhered to their development interests. The design planning required constant interaction between people of different nationalities, through dozens of work groups and preparatory seminars for the tender processes. The staff who worked there were dynamic, always open to training, interaction and group work and to learning foreign languages (C., male, 54 years old).

In public offices, the “project team” is formed by the same personnel, brought together for reasons beyond the original formation to instead reflect personal aptitudes, working dynamics, greater flexibility of working hours, mobility, and skill acquisition including languages and of course, strong interpersonal skills. The administrations in turn, turn to public notices and professional bulletin boards, to add professionalism to the ranks in accordance to the specific projects. In the private sector however, only a part of the project team remains stable, the rest being determined by the context in which they are competing. Another interview reads:

We work with a basic, fixed staff that is well versed on the preparation of projects and timing. Doing this work requires special, continuous training, beginning with the assumption that the projects that work are those in which

people are humble, know their place and where everyone is willing to continuously learn, get involved and work in a team (G., male, 43 years old).

Multiple figures are necessary from time to time, and they are selected one by one based on the following criteria: basic training, vocational training and experience, and the ability to understand the costs of business.

Planning technicalities are such that you may identify the need for a figure with an accounting background, but on paper or in some projects which refer to training itself or to the welfare sector however, things change, and somebody with a liberal arts background becomes necessary instead (G., male, 43 years old).

Even the income of these workers can differ depending on some specific characteristics as well as on whether the roles require specialized recruitment from managed funds at the regional level, or whether the roles appear as part of an overall package to attract the direct funding of the European Commission itself. As such, the positive or negative perception of income in relation to this working dimension can vary significantly based on these basic distinctions alone. The level of remuneration in the former will be low, uncertain and tied to relationships which also include the political at local level. In the latter category, both the remuneration and the level of professionalism will be higher, with a more rewarding level of contract on offer with private companies who are specialised in European Projects or in the related training sector. In the public sector, the distinctions are in fact, legally defined (indefinite, project budgets, professional bodies and short lists for areas of competence).

If however, the analysis shifts from occupational impact of this profession to the subjective dimension, another interpretation of the aforementioned professional is possible in the space that Saskia Sassen (2014) would refer to as belonging to the expelled, i.e. those people who remain outside the traditional channels of social security and the benefits that come permanent work positions: pension protection, access to bank loans, instalment plan purchases and other advantageous policies that are denied to those on temporary contracts.

Millions of individuals renounce certainty partly in virtue of the concrete need to fill occupational positions and partly to fulfil their desire to work autonomously (Barbier & Nadal, 2000; Beck, 1999; Formenti, 2011; Piore & Sabel, 1984). The interviews revealed, almost obsessively, a sort of Schumpeterian narrative, namely that of an entrepreneurial man who leverages himself. But what are the actual forms of inclusion and what are

the dynamics and the subjective dimensions like in this slice of the market? Are there conflictual elements between the self and the working dynamics in terms of desires, representations and life plans?

There is no doubting that there are differences between the public and private sectors that are in diametric opposition when it comes to self-perception. In the public sector, project planning is a perfectly organised act thanks to the professionalism that has by now been acquired, and to the network of agencies and contracted planners has been consolidated over time. The complexity however becomes a question of management.

In regards to the private sector:

those who work in the private sector have different perspectives with which they approach work. They have personal interests and the need to earn an income. In the public sector the motivations are more widespread. Income is already predetermined there so it's less a question about income as it is one about ethical growth. This perspective allows people to break free from the anxiety/anguish of receiving an income from a project. He who divests himself from the role of civil servant with its fixed working hours and associated wage instead is marked by motivation, enthusiasm, inventiveness, flexible hours and the willingness to learn new things including languages (G., male, 43 years old).

In the private sector we see high incomes and less anxiety for the future in the planning sector in small and medium sized enterprises, while the non-profit sector is characterized by greater preoccupation wherein less professionalism corresponds with greater competition:

The private worker is listed on the projects, so he has a greater incentive to be productive. At the highest level of project work this can be rewarding, allowing one to manage their time and methods. The more organised the staff are, the more efficient the work. At the lower levels of project work there is a lot of improvisation which decreases the productivity and even the ability to gain access to the projects themselves. By rule, budgets are very low on these kinds of projects. The stress comes with the success or failure of the project but this forces the private worker to adapt in order to be able to win. The more he aligns himself with the set project criteria, the more of a chance he has in winning and therefore in earning (G., male, 43 years old).

The contradictions of project work. Training, professional skills and the labour market

Although civic roles play an important role within the cognitive work environment, it is equally true that the variety of profiles present within the environment have a tendency towards a growing internal structure. Cognitive work professionals are informed by the change that is transforming the educational and social skills required of those who work within the sector. This prevailing tendency seems to project these figures into directions of significant openness in relation to the demands of society, revealing, in the process, the adhesion to inbuilt, individual values that are capable of enhancing subjective experiences, placing them at the service of the local contexts in which they operate. Therefore, the role of education in the training of future public professionals becomes crucial, positioning itself upon the uncertain crest of change, that, in any case, requires first and foremost, flexibility in the face of innovation and uncertainty. The emergence of professions in which an individual working style applies itself to a context of co-operative interdependence derives from the development of a labour market that has bid farewell to the stiff organization and management of the past, at least as it relates to the highly specialized service sector (Banfi & Bologna, 2011; Bonomi & Rullani, 2005; Rullani, 2004). The interpersonal and communicative dimensions built into this work culminate in added value to a context which considers human resources as determinants within a market that is greatly focused on the sharing of knowledge, networking, and other, ultimately intangible goods (Aronowitz, 2006; Benkler, 2006; Boutang, 2002; Florida, 2002).

Skills gathered through training in social sciences seem to offer an interesting cognitive positioning as well as an overview of the dimensions involved. The public profile of a planner therefore, seems to identify with practice that focuses on the elaboration of skills, information and knowledge that are successively communicated and shared horizontally within a broader context that is more or less structured. Both the interviews and the evidence collected by way of the focus groups show how the qualities required for good project work are related to a socio-humanist competence, capable of guiding the subjects towards a profitable balance between context and policy knowledge on the one hand, and, quality communication and public relations skills on the other. While social science graduates offer a discrete awareness of these nexus, interviewees in possession of other qualifications complain about their relative lacking in the analytical flexibility and interpersonal skills necessary to achieving their goals.

The public role of the state administration and the privatized nature of the market roles seem to be challenged by and overshadowed by the figure

of the planner, able as it is to weave individual inclinations and social questions into structural forms.

Planners are experts at programming and in design techniques aimed at social interventions, which they achieve through the sourcing of funding and the mobilization of local resources, as well as through inclusive, participatory development processes (ISFOL-ISTAT, 2012). The skills and sensibilities useful to the carrying out of this work are extremely articulated, carrying with them an awareness of the social context, the parties involved, the implied politics and the intervention tools and methodologies as well as the act of monitoring project activities. Equally diverse are the broad range of contracts at play: both atypical and permanent in nature, which are present in the public and private sectors as well as in social co-operation. These aspects indicate how planning work expresses values and practices that go beyond those of the public/private dichotomy since it is connected structurally along boundaries that are often redrawn due to essentially cultural variables. Even if planners have the most diverse contractual profiles, varied patrons and are engaged in areas of multiple interests, they seem to find a balance through the communal carrying out of services that have the effect of rendering collective work more visible and transparent, and which are orientated towards the solving of different social problems.

The empirical evidence from the research suggests a hypothesis where significant importance is attributable to aspects such as personal development and inter-communication, and one that may actually constitute a genuine work culture that correlates to the training paths and the lives of each worker. The planning sphere as a context in which services correspond to the need to individually contribute to the realization of social goals through equal and cooperative interaction, relates to the planner's ethos which is aimed at a mix of subjectivity and cooperation. It is a complex culture which tends to distance itself from the collective conscience of the Fordist-salaried worker and heads instead towards the idea of a competitive, self-employed individual or to small businesses in the professional field. Planners, throughout the course of their day, take their cue from an awareness that is unusual within the area in which they work, by weaving relations between subjects and organisations which are often different and by developing the act of mapping and connecting information: this practice follows an attempt at reflecting on and organising the collated material, the formulization of proposals and solutions, and is marked by an openness towards monitoring the interventions thus initiated over time. It's clear that some of these actions highlight a subjective

autonomy that is capable of combining organizational capabilities and foreseeing problems while others bring with them an inclination towards relationship management and communication. While the outlines of these diverse elements contribute towards the more substantial determination of the quality of work, the alternation between skills and attitudes influences the development of an ethos that tends to blend the individual and cooperative dimensions, or, more precisely, the private and public.

The planners we interviewed gave this impression, and, at the same time, expressed a positive impression of self-development and the interpersonal dimension that is present in their work: additionally, they also demonstrate a tendency to be willing to listen and remain open to inter-professional cooperation which are distinguishing aspects of this kind of attitude. The meeting point of the diverse elements investigated during the course of our research is right on the trend of planners to contributing, through the form of their ethos, to the plurality of the practices they all live by. The picture with which the researcher is confronted corresponds to a profession charged with subjectivity, in which a potentially virtuous cycle between training, individuality and social motivations contributes towards a discreet satisfaction with the life experiences that can be drawn from design and planning work. This evidence does not indicate the absence of questionable elements, to which we will return briefly, but instead demonstrates a discrete kinship between the motivations of individuals and the activities of these people carried out in the public sphere. It also strongly illuminates the individual investment that takes place in the planning field as seen from the subjective points of view of interested parties who feel they are making a positive contribution to local life.

The research findings indicate then, a relatively positive assessment of the training skills acquired by social science graduates and one which was shared across the majority of subjects contacted. Although the elements of knowledge acquired in this way prove interesting in that they are able to provide a general understanding of the context within which project work is delivered, the respondents also offered a more refined account of their studies, emphasizing intellectual curiosity, attention to interpersonal dynamics and an awareness of the social and political complexities that characterise them.

The impression given is that the learning assets acquired in this way, can result in cognitive practices and intangible behaviours that are capable of offering concrete solutions to organizational problems posed by project work. These aspects don't cancel out other more general problems related to the weak social recognition that seems to negatively impact on the

identity of planners, not only through the very definition of ‘planner’, but also to that as ‘social scientist’.

This awareness points to the limits of the Italian labour market, and particularly to the slim economic and cultural rewards offered in qualified work in the fields of political science, sociology and communication. Respondents gave the impression of a lack of protection and legitimacy in relation to planning but one that also extends beyond its borders, creating concern which affects the future of all graduates in the field. A contradiction that exists among the professional skills and the labour market emerges from the accounts given by the interviewees, and relates to the extent of the fragile institutionalization of the planner, as well as to the relative weakness of social science degrees, which help in responding to changes, but at the same time, fail to offer the solidity needed to safely deal with society and the labour world.

The accounts heard during the course of the research, effectively underline the dynamism that characterises their work. The element of creativity is thus positioned in a professional environment with a low hierarchy, resolving itself through the emphasis placed on the interpersonal and communicative dimensions of service that often take the form of subjectively innovative experiences. The planners we spoke to, at the same time, highlighted the difficulty in defining their profession in clear and exhaustive terms, indicating the still elusive element to profiling and defining their roles. These results allow us to consider planning work an example of a condition that has flourished from the occupational boundaries that came into being through the division of industrial labour, loosely transforming towards a professional dimension open to the heterodox superimposition of individual and collective dimensions (Amendola & Bazzicalupo & Chicchi & Tucci, 2008; Banfi & Bologna, 2011; Bonomi & Rullani, 2005; Chicchi & Roggero, 2009). Planners work on complex materials in order to make a contribution to a social enterprise from blurred boundaries.

The need for critical thinking on the daily experience emerges directly from the occupational context within which our stakeholders are permanently placed. The reflexivity that would guide social action as a result of the institutional and socialization agents of the twentieth century (Giddens, 1990), help us, in our case, to understand the twofold evidence: on the one hand, that which is informed by subjective attitudes and the people’s world view, and on the other hand, is characterised both by the professional and social relationships that constitute the planning context. The dynamics of professional collaboration that emerge from the research

express a superimposing of the individual and cooperative dimensions, tending towards the tension of the reflective reconstruction of the experiences involved. Moreover, project design also implies networking of diverse subjects at the institutional level, as well as the capability to enter into working relationships from the prospective of the communal pursuit of a social intervention (De Ambrogio & Dessi & Getti, 2013; Siza, 2002). Additionally, the collected evidence suggests that a free and effective development of these synergies will lead to the realization of projects that are not only subjectively stimulating but also innovative.

The literature dedicated to describing the cultural change that has come with the transformation of the labour world often insists on the reformulation of the relationship between the individual and society, heading towards a growing margin of the autonomy of the subject in the face of the social obligations that organisations and social institutions typically request (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1999; Giddens, 1990; Paci, 2006; Sennett, 2009). Even though the theme is broad in complexity, it is worth underlining as an important variable in promoting the sustainability of individualizing change and as an effective social regulation of the emerging questions of individualization (Castel, 2003; Sennett, 2006; Paci, 2006). If it is true that individuals aspire to greater freedom and autonomy, it is essential that these needs are balanced in social and cultural terms: emerging cases in the labour market are similar to those in other spheres, such as in affective relationships or in the management of leisure time (Giddens, 1990; Touraine, 2005).

The educational system is challenged by the changes that ask it to offer more flexible training skills that are able to follow the evolution of the labour market. More generally, any educational guidance aims at critically assessing the political and social conditions in which the subject operates, thus offering cognitive support to the questions of reflexive individualisation and appearing to be a solid support to the change processes that affect the relationship between the individual and society. Regardless of the merits of the historical processes that led to the current employment scene, we can be sure that institutional stiffness and cultural delays in responding to the process of individualization can only serve to worsen quality of life.

The more controversial aspects of design/planning work can possibly be explained within this framework. The interviewed subjects seem to suffer significantly when it comes to income and their professional status. The current trend of the labour market encourages widespread dissatisfaction in regards to salary aspects. The variables that contribute to these results are

varied, as is obvious in a sector which plays host to a combination of public, private and social cooperative players: the delays and inefficiencies of the state administration are flanked by the undesirable effects of weak deregulation, which helps to further weaken the consistency and regularity of remuneration, while the weakened institutions and the fragility of the network of associations prevents the non-profit sector from overcoming these shortcomings (Paci, 2006).

A latent difficulty is also perceptible in relation to the ever delicate theme of social recognition of the work, in this case, in the role of the planner. Training that is predominantly based on social science contributes to this, but, as the planners highlight, this is often characterised by weak institutionalization and a lack of social legitimization. Although economic variables have some influence on the negative perception planners have of their work in terms of status, the dissatisfaction related to social recognition seems to significantly go beyond this. This can be explained by recalling certain important phenomenon: above all the conditioned reflex that is cultural in nature which pushes us to recognize and legitimize work if it is done well and with a certain regularity within a clearly defined space. This is clearly not the case when it comes to project/planning work. Furthermore, those interviewed drew attention to the difficulties that the cultural and organizational context throws up along the way to the ultimate goal of realizing a good project. They illustrate different kinds of obstacles that come from the public administration's lack of preparedness as well as those presented by the limitations of a territorial culture which considers eclectic interventions on local development to be possible regardless of the lengthy times that more complex planning and design work entails.

All of these criticisms impact on the negative view that our subjects expressed in terms of status, condemning an ever weaker professional identity in the process. The same criticisms probably also influence the dissatisfaction related to the economic dimension: this evidence in any case, calls for social recognition of planning design roles, as well for those within the wider spectrum of cognitive work. It's recognition that, judging from the comments made to us by the interviewees, is capable of ensuring a public elevation of these professions, which, despite being carried out within difficult economic and social contexts, are an attempt at experiencing a positive convergence between individual expectations and communal goals of social transformation.

Concluding remarks. A contradictory balance for planning work

Ultimately, the research offers a guiding framework of planning work in southern Italy and proves useful in reflecting on the relationship between ethos and work in the contemporary dimension. The changes to the Post-Fordist market, and the dynamics that have been a part of globalization in the last few decades, have had, amongst other effects, that of bringing profound change to the nature of work. But, according to some analysts they have also determined the change and very nature of risk, contributing towards a greater social vulnerability right that has led to the radicalization of this idea in every individual's everyday life to the point that it is perceived as being a 'normal' aspect of work (Beck, 1986; Castel, 2003).

Cognitive work is in fact a complex system in which many labour figures are positioned. Beyond their biographical and professional specificities, they share a commonality of postulates. On the one hand, their identity is not linked to their occupation, career or future, but rather to what some analysts call a chronic insecurity, which takes ever increasing control of individual freedom: on the other hand, the logic of the market is writ large: the winner takes it all and a place where the individual's performance and competitiveness stands in opposition to the homo economicus of the past in an attempt to maximise their own human capital (Dardot & Laval, 2009).

The quality of education and the more general training processes of the subjects play an important role in a context in which competition and security impact on the lives of individuals in new ways. The analytical abilities developed through the course of training processes in the social sciences seem to push towards the direction of a pluralism of anthropological models, within which the opportunity to experience individualization appears axiologically removed from the values of selfish individualism. Expertise in political science, sociology and communication emerge as important elements of mediation between the skills necessary to critically assess the dominant values and the contextual conditions in which cognitive work is carried out.

The "precariat" to authors like Guy Standing (2011), represent a new social class, whom he defines across the board to the extent that flexibility is ever increasing in the world and the only relational element connecting the individual to work. For this new class, concepts like risk and security take on new values and significance, and, although fragmented, this class becomes dangerous for its role as a global phenomenon at the centre of a kind of double conflict: on the one hand gripped by neo-liberal politics which restricts individual socialisation to the labour market, and on the

other hand, by social-democratic visions and labourers who still identify salaried work as the only access to citizenship.

Within the logic in which growth and development depend on the level of competition present in the market every effort should maximise competition and competitiveness, so that every aspect of social life is permeated by the logic of the market (Standing, 2011), the precariat, go beyond the factual conflict, looking for security beyond work and the institutions that have historically clung to ideas such as trade unions, political representation and the grand educational institutions. The empirical research conducted within a professional context within southern Italy and on a group of “experts in European and local planning” has in fact shown the emergence of a new categories, a new working ethos and of a change in the perception of social risk, where flexibility becomes synonymous with dynamism, increased production and a positive alteration of the self.

Finally, a further suggestion based on the reflection on the words “ethos” and “flexibility,” would deem them to be directly proportionate to other entries like the words ‘rights’ and ‘democracy’. Legally, Italy is a State-Community, founded in part on the recognition of social and civil rights and in the centrality of “work” as a principal instrument. Starting from the premise within contemporary thought “to define the post-industrial paradigm of work no longer as industrial work but that which reflects intellectual work, then ‘knowledge’, and not ‘capital’, becomes the tangible reproduction of the mechanisms that regulate society” (Eder, 2002, p. 733). It is estimated that in 2000, ninety million people left the traditional work force in industrialized countries. Man’s relationship with work has changed: substituting work with services without pay or wages. The ethos of the individual living in the new Neo liberal state has changed, and its mutation redefines the previous categories, and, first and foremost, the relationship between citizens and State and that between citizens and community. “The nineteenth century set into motion a process which eliminated work from the word of life. The Fordism of the first half of the twentieth century has further polarized the remains of professional culture, which has been replaced by a culture of consumption which sees work as the means through which to self-realize consumption” (Eder, 2002, p. 731). The logic of the market and of enterprise, lay down a new ethos of Labour: a “flexible” ethos in which the individual is in a dimension of conflict where people, groups and the individual himself exists in the affirmation of his self at the expense of the other (Gallino, 2014; Lasch, 1984).

The jobs crisis and the classical forms of protection coincide with the crisis of the State and with the recognition of this through rights (Barcellona, 1994, 1998). The procedural changes for access to professions, and the types of professions included in this analysis, the politics connected to supporting Labour and the crisis of representative institutions all point to the emergence of a new ethic associated with flexibility itself, where in the progressive reformulation of social rights, the final analysis suggests that this becomes the paradigm through which to redefine the individual's membership to the political community. In the planning field, for example, the centrality of social science degrees is associated with the same planners and to the elements of cognitive and relational flexibility that appear in harmony with the outlined framework. Through the denial at the basis of the role of the institution which is instead chasing the market, community dissolves, leaving only the individual with an essentially personal ethic where it is extremely probable that only the ethic of the strongest wins.

But another theoretical suggestion could give pause to the question that “in the world of a changing society, the individual shouldn't consider himself as a worker, but rather a company that sells a service on the market. In this change the ‘company of me, myself’ becomes a psychological entity and, also a social one, because it is active in all fields and in all relationships (Dardot & Laval, 2009). And where ultimately, the process of self-valorisation read as modern *epiméleia heautou* could also be read as a modern form of self-care (Eder, 2002; Foucault, 2001a; Foucault, 2001b).

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