

Proceedings

Between Utopian Image and Heterotopic Reality. Thinking/Imagining Participatory Planning (and also Hospitality) Starting from Reality †

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Abstract: Utopia is a place that does not exist; utopia is a non-existent model society in a non-existent model space. Utopia is an image. According to the definition given by Michel Foucault, *hétéropies*, unlike utopias, are places that actually exist. Heterotopias are at the same time non-physical and real and physical spaces. In the modern Western world, characterised by multiculturalism and by an increasing number of coerced migrations, is it possible to create tangible utopias (that is heterotopias) places where the foreigner can be welcomed thanks to the reclamation of abandoned areas? One tool for facilitating such a process could be participatory planning based with a visual/image basis.

Keywords: utopia; heterotopia; participatory planning; images; immigration

1. Introduction

In the research field of social sciences, in the research field of urban planning and design, in the research field of environmental education, in the research field of policy making theories, participatory planning is a methodological perspective which involves the collaboration of the various actors of communities, citizens or groups of community stakeholders. By sharing spaces, by sharing moments, by sharing images, citizens or groups of community stakeholders are involved in designing/planning projects concerning territories they live in [1].

2. A First Assumption, a First Starting Point: Utopia, Unreality, Image-Imagination, Fiction

A (very important) starting point: utopia. The first question we have to deal with is: what's utopia? Or rather: how can we define utopia? Firstly we can say that utopia is unreal space. According to the definition in the strict sense we can say that utopia is an unreal space: *ou-topia* can mean 'not space'. Utopia is a space but it is not a real space. Secondly we can say that *utopia* is an *image*. Utopia is not reality, it's an image: utopia is an image made in/by its author's mind. We may say utopia is made by its author's imagination. We have to underline that since 1516, when Thomas More wrote *Utopia*, the first utopian tale that inaugurated the literary-philosophical-politic genre utopia, the word *utopia* keeps a dual value about both meaning and etymological source. *Utopia* can derive from/can be understood as *ou-topia*, as mentioned above, but it also can derive from/can be understood as *eu-topia*. *Utopia* can be the compound *ou-topia* that means 'not (*ou*) place (*topia*)'. Otherwise the word *utopia* can derive from the compound *eu-topia* that means 'good (*eu*) place (*topia*)'. Utopian space doesn't exist; it's not locatable in the real world. At the same time utopian space is a *model* space, it's a *good space*. It's a space in which a good and happy society—happy because good society namely well-

organized society. *Utopia* is a fiction made by human imagination, that represents a model of space by which a real society, considered bad/unjust/no longer liveable, is improved and made perfect. This is done by direct or indirect analogy or by reversal (e.g., in More's work the island of Utopia has the same territorial morphology and the same territorial look as England. The island of Utopia is England improved according to More's view).

For the purpose of this discussion I think it's extremely indicative reading what Françoise Choay wrote about utopia some years ago (during the eighties). She defined utopia by seven points [2]. We can summarize them as: 1. utopia is a signed book/utopia is a signed work; 2. utopian tale's author, or his alter ego, is witness (eyewitness) of utopian space and he tells about utopia in the first person; 3. utopia is a description of a model society, telling at the present; 4. model society told by utopian tale is opposite of a real society that is criticized by model society building; 5. model society is built in a model space; 6. model society and its space are situated outside of our space and time coordinates system; 7. model society is not subject to natural laws of change and duration.

3. A Second Assumption, a Second Starting Point: Heterotopia, Reality, Imaginary, Function

In the same years as Françoise Choay writes her analysis about *utopian* tales, Michel Foucault defines *utopia* in consonance with her view and her seven points reflection quoted above. In one of his most well-known and read works, *Des Espaces Autres* [3], In addition to the notion of utopia, Michel Foucault established the concept of *heterotopia* and coined its original term: *heterotopia*, i.e., the space of *otherness*. Michel Foucault says:

il y a d'abord les utopies. Les utopies, ce sont les emplacements sans lieu réel. Ce sont les emplacements qui entretiennent avec l'espace réel de la société un rapport general d'analogie directe ou inverse. C'est la société elle-même perfectionnée ou c'est l'envers de la société, mais de toute façon, ces utopies sont des espaces qui sont fondamentalement essentiellement irréels. Il y a également, et ceci probablement dans toute culture, dans toute civilisation, des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui sont dessinés dans l'institution même de la société, et qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées dans lesquelles tous les autres emplacements réels que l'on peut trouver à l'intérieur de la culture sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés, des sortes de lieux qui sont hors de tous les lieux, bien que pourtant ils soient effectivement localisables. Ces lieux, parce qu'ils sont absolument autres que tous les emplacements qu'ils reflètent et don't ils parlent, je les appellerai par opposition aux utopies, les hétérotopies [...]. Il n'y a certainement pas une seule culture au monde qui ne constitue des hétérotopies. C'est là une constant de tout groupe humain. Mais les heterotopies prennent évidemment des forms qui sont très variées, et peut-être est-ce qu'on ne trouverait pas une seule forme d'hétérotopie qui soit absolument universelle. On peut cependant les classer en deux grands types. Dans les sociétés dites primitives, il y a une certaine forme d'hétérotopie que j'appellerais hétérotopie de crise, c'est-à-dire qu'il y a des lieux privilégiés, ou sacrés, ou interdits, réservés aux individus qui se trouvent, par rapport à la société et au milieu humain à l'intérieur duquel ils vivent, en état de crise. Les adolescents, les femmes à l'époque des règles, les femmes en couches, les vieillards [...]. Mais ces heterotopies de crise disparaissent aujourd'hui et elles sont remplacées, je crois, par des heterotopies qu'on pourrait appeler de deviation: celle dans laquelle on place les individus don't le comportement est deviant par rapport à la moyenne ou à la norme exigée. [3] (pp. 46–47) [ENGLISH TRANSLATION: first there are utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopias in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, *heterotopias* [...]. There is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias.

That is a constant of every human group. But the heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms, and perhaps no one absolutely universal form of heterotopia would be found. We can however class them in two main categories. In the so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopia that I would call crisis heterotopias, i.e., there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. [...]. But these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today and are being replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed.]

Starting from Foucault's now 'canonical' definition of *heterotopia*, it is fundamental to underline that the main, founding difference between utopias and heterotopias lies in the reality/unreality duality, where the former is not real and the latter is real/realized [4,5]. Unreal utopias and real heterotopias share a direct or inverted connection with a given social and territorial situation existing at their same time: utopias are inventions based on a reference existing situation; heterotopias are real spaces as alternatives to a reference existing situation. Utopias and heterotopias share their goal to 'become alternatives' to a given, existing social and territorial situation, which is ruled and considered 'normal'. Whereas the utopian space is a sign for a critical otherness implemented by setting up a fiction, the heterotopic space shows an otherness relationship towards the existing reality by setting up places associated to defined functions. Utopias are images, i.e., they are 'the figment of imagination', where imagination shall be intended here in its Aristotelian meaning as the ability to represent things not given to a current sensation [6]. Heterotopias are concrete spaces that, for their function in all human societies, cannot but be associated to (and feed) imagination, actually collective and cultural imagination, i.e., a repertoire of representations collectively and culturally associated to specific situations.

4. Questions

The reflection on the philosophical suggestions described above is food for thought. First, what basic suggestions can let us devise a form of participatory planning, specifically a visual participatory planning practice? Second, starting from the philosophical suggestions above, can we think about a visual participatory planning practice for our current multicultural society? In other words, could a visual participatory planning practice involve citizens and migrants in planning and building their own dwelling space? This would aim to foster positive social-territorial processes to include and integrate migrants as an alternative to emergency reception and hospitality modalities [7]. It also aims at preserving unused territories. In a metaphor: to (hope to) have territories that might turn into sort of 'concrete utopias'.

5. Discussion

Here follows the description of a phenomenon that has lately become a real case history within sociological and migration studies [8]. It is the case of Riace. In the past twenty years, Riace—a village in Calabria with 2000 inhabitants—has received several waves of forced migrants from over fifteen different countries, totalling about 6000 people. The migrants arriving in the territory of Riace were offered by the Municipal authorities not only emergency and temporary shelter but also a sort of free leasing agreement to use most of the unproductive wastelands and of the buildings scarcely employed or totally unused at the time. The aim was to specifically restart the (even minimum) production cycles on the territory and fight the depopulation wave that was strongly affecting the municipality of Riace in those years, like most small villages in Southern Italy [9]. Altogether, the repopulation measures, the reuse of old buildings and the relaunch of (small) traditional handicraft manufacturing activities by the migrants produced very positive outcome in Riace [8]. These outcomes were fully satisfactory and, in 2009, the Calabria Regional Authorities approved the law No. 18/2009 specifically aiming at fostering local initiatives like those in Riace. The Riace experience has symbolically turned into the 'Riace reception model'. They have created a concrete utopia in Riace. The village of Riace, now 'reused/revived' by the foreigners, could be defined as heterotopia,

the other place: a local place populated by foreigners [10]. Let us start from the example of the Municipality of Riace, which has gained national and international fame, and let us think. How could we develop a sort of participatory planning modality in a situation like Riace? How could we develop a sort of participatory planning modality in a situation characterised by multiculturalism and immigration (and/or forced migration)? How could we develop this sort of ‘practice’ to relaunch a territory already receiving foreigners that is being abandoned by non-foreigners at the same time?

Participatory planning must be based on the concept of the perception of places held by the inhabitants contained in the European Convention of Landscape. In defining *landscape* the Convention states that “the landscape is part of the land, as perceived by local people or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings” [11]. It is, therefore, above all the perception of the community that defines a given place/landscape as such. The Convention, in expressing this concept, indirectly admits the perception by groups of immigrants as ‘new inhabitants’ of a territory [12]. In the case of participatory practices in both multicultural and non-multicultural settings, the images (intended as perceptions and not as the fruit of imagination) are pivotal.

Participatory practices in both multicultural and non-multicultural environments require thinking in terms of sharing images/perceptions. It is a question of thinking in terms of comparison of the different perceptions of the same object. To paraphrase linguistics and psycholinguistics we can say that it is a matter of thinking almost in contrastive analytical terms [13]. It is a sort of contrastive analysis between the different perceptions of an inhabited place with the aim of planning it, or re-planning it. In the case of multiculturalism, there are three perspectives to this confrontation. Firstly, the perception of the territorial image belonging to those who have lived there for some time, the ‘home’ territory; secondly, the perception of the territorial image of those who have recently arrived there, an ‘outsider’s’ image and thirdly, the ‘institutional and universally codified’ territorial image, that is the map of the territory. This latter perception is, in some ways, ‘neutral’ for the purposes of a participatory project, because it is the perception of a territory through the ‘neutral’ Cartesian image of the bi-dimensional geographical map [14]. The perception of the territory by those who are inhabitants may be based on a sort of ‘identitary habitude’ towards the place in which they live [15]. It shows only certain particulars and which could be considered ‘usual’ or ‘sedimented’; it is, however, possible that the vision of the immigrant resident may include that which the perception of the non-immigrant cannot see. This is possible thanks to the *distance* that is the lack of total familiarity with places and culture, the *distance* that marks the ‘not belonging’ to a community and a territory and a birth culture. Just as ethnography and the theory of estrangement have strongly emphasised [16,17], being in any case always (slightly) distant from the object of our perception allows us to notice details that it is not possible to see clearly and habitually in the object of our personal perception.

6. Proposal

One proposal for participatory planning is the construction of a *parish map*, a *community map*. What is a *parish map*? It is an image of the territory that is not geographically codified in a universal sense, not constructed by cartographers using scientific methods, but created by the inhabitants of the territory on the basis of their perceptions and their affective bonds with the territory [18]. Constructing a parish map may allow a project to intervene not only ‘from outside’ but also on the basis of the bonds and the perception that the inhabitants of that territory have with the place they live in, its culture, its social and productive characteristics. There are four phases in the construction of a parish map. These four phases can be used in general for what we call “community”. In the first place, it is necessary to present and formalise a proposal for the construction of a community map. This proposal generally comes from a local body, such as the council. Secondly, it is absolutely necessary to involve in the project the various components of the community through awareness-raising activities (for example public meetings in which the aims of the community map project are illustrated, perhaps by a speaker identified by the proponent to supervise the entire process of construction of the map). Thirdly, it is necessary that the entire community be involved in the project,

together with the supervisor, where one is named, in identifying the geographical area to be represented, that is the confines of their *own inhabited landscape*. Then, it is necessary to form an open work group with the task of defining, on a strictly democratic and participatory basis, what should be shown on the map and what should not appear. To do this two steps are necessary. Firstly, all the members of the group should identify precise answers to certain questions. These questions can be summarised as: what is the appearance of this place? What about this place is important to me? What characterises this place and makes it different to other places? Secondly, it is necessary for the members of the workgroup to visualise the answers to these questions through photographs. Images will be created that could be called images-punctum, according to the definition given by Roland Barthes [18]: images of details and particulars that are emotionally and affectively significant. It is necessary to reconsider the sequence identified. How could it be adapted to the content in relation to the participation of immigrants in the construction of the community map? It is now necessary to rethink the entire process. First of all, it is necessary to present a proposal for the construction of the community map. Secondly, it is necessary to involve in the project the various members of the autochthonous community and the community (or communities) of immigrants through a process of awareness-raising which, in the case of the foreign community, can be entrusted to a linguistic/cultural mediator. Thirdly, it is necessary for the entire community involved in the project—immigrants and non-immigrants—to identify the geographical area to be represented. Finally, it is necessary to form an open work group composed of autochthonous and immigrant residents, with the task of defining, on a strictly democratic, participatory and potentially interlinguistic basis, that which will be shown on the map. To do this it is necessary to take two steps. In the first place it is necessary for all the components of the group to identify precise responses to certain questions. These questions can be summarised in: what does this place look like? How important is this place for me? What characterises this place and makes it different from other places? Secondly, it is necessary for the members of the work group to visualise the answers to these questions through photographs. Images will be created that can be considered images-punctum according to the definition given by Roland Barthes [19], that is images of emotionally and affectively significant details or particulars. The comparison of the photographic images (seen through the eye of a local and/or the eye of a ‘distant’ foreigner) and the relative consequent visual synthesis will make it possible to construct the parish map as a real but non-codified image of a territory; an image, so to speak, experienced and emotionally active of a territory in which people live (locals or immigrants). This confrontation can (and perhaps must) be the basis for the dialogue finalised in the intercultural integration and planning for the future: “taking care of the territory in which we live together, starting from the different images and perceptions of that same territory.”



(a)

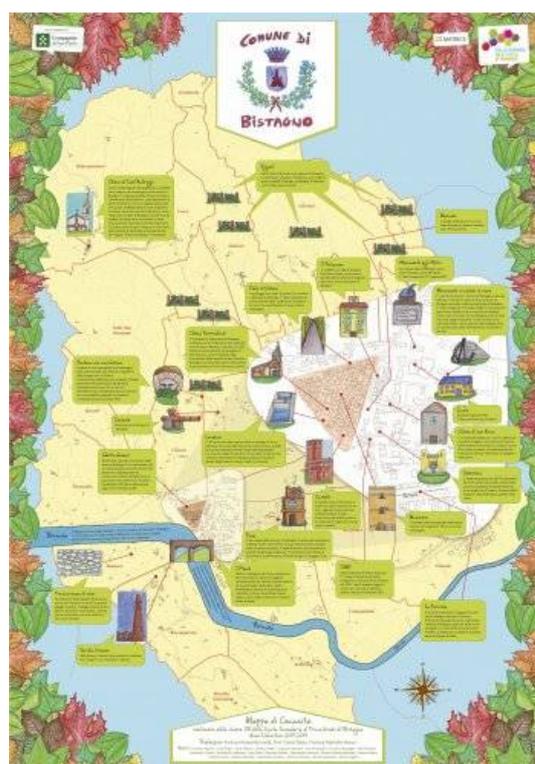


(b)

Figure 1. (a) Town of Muchelney (UK): codified image of territory. Image source: Google Map; (b) One of Muchelney’s Parish Maps. Image source: www.commonground.org.uk.



(a)



(b)

Figure 2. (a) Village of Bistagno (Italy): codified image of territory. Image source: Google Map; (b) One of Bistagno's Parish Maps. Image source: www.visionscarto.net.

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