

TAKING CARE OF EACH OTHER: THE TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION FOR THE REBUILDING OF NEW ORLEANS AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

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Abstract: *In the framework of Disaster Studies, this article talks about the rebuilding of New Orleans after hurricane Katrina in 2005. It discusses about the effects of transformative education with the aim to promote different approaches to facing disasters. Focusing the attention on the participatory planning processes, this article draws attention to the importance for a resilient community to develop a vision of its own future. For this reason, "taking care of each others" means the evaluation of the inner feelings of a community as crucial step both for the enlargement of citizenship awareness and for the social power improvement.*

Key words: *participative planning, social empowerment, multi-modal deliberative practice, learning network, university civic engagement.*

1. Introduction

The work presented in the following pages aims to study the theme of the urban reconstruction of an area affected by a natural disaster, identified in Hurricane Katrina in 2005 destroyed the city of New Orleans. Thus, in this article two macro-themes are intertwined, interesting from the point of view of social analysis: on the one hand, the environmental disasters that have returned to the fore due to climate change; on the other hand the themes of reconstruction and urban planning that cross the question of participation in the definition of urban plans and public policies (Forester, 2022; Pellizzoni, 2021; Bianchetti, 2008).

According to the definition that K. Reardon and J. Forester (2016) propose in their essay, planning cannot be separated from participation because it consists essentially in an activity that allows each planner to help a community to develop its specific vision. As social practice, planning becomes an extraordinary opportunity to identify the real needs of citizens, to discuss the role of a community and, at last, to rethink the relationship between planning and urban condition. Since the idea of Reardon and Forester concerns a methodological proposal, we can consider it as an innovative one and impacting on Disaster Studies (D.S.). The scientific relevance of their "taking care of each other approach" fits perfectly with two important aspects of D.S. field of research:

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1) it offers a practical and thoughtful starting point regarding the ability of communities to deal with major changes in a self-organized way;

2) it explains how urban planning can contribute both to civic-engagement growth and public space enlargement.

The key factors of Reardon and Forester proposal involve either the spread of an effective political awareness in public policies and the lead of transformative education program in reference to the disaster caused in New Orleans by hurricane Katrina in 2005. Both aspects are strictly connected to the tools useful for organizing a community after a disaster or, in general, when people must face difficulties.

2. Disaster Studies: beyond the Natural Dimension of Disasters

The comparison between disaster analysis approaches reveals how important the sociological knowledge is because the sociological knowledge represents a challenge and an opportunity to measure the impact that disasters generate in "complex societies". Especially when the "disaster" is used as an "umbrella concept" (Mangone, 2018), the sociological knowledge allows the identification of concepts and analysis categories able to empower interdisciplinary views. These latest concur to increase the possibility of comparison and, of course, to a proper identification of problems and phenomena.

Starting from the theoretical points of views by Prince (1920), Carr (1932) and Sorokin (1942), the DS development focused both on the possibility of understanding the effects of disasters on communities political and social organization in a well-defined period (Castorina, Pitzalis, 2019) and on the observations of physical characteristics after a disaster. According to Quarantelli (1987), the DS are social sciences able to connect the observations of physical characteristics after a disaster with the social effects generated into communities and societies. In the light of this, the DS theoretical framework can be traced back to the first structured research of the NORC (National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago). From 1948 to 1954, NORC studied the effects of nuclear weapons on communities with the support of the Chemical Corps Medical Laboratories of the Army Chemical Center in Maryland. Even if the study was based on laboratory tests, NORC research focused on the observation of social behaviors and through the study Quarantelli and Dynes (1977) defined the following research streams related to the development of disasters sociological approach:

- organizational dimension rather than psychological one;
- attention to communities rather than single people;
- assumption of systemic perspective;
- combination of social behavior and social approaches;
- identification of the pre-impact period as a resource for the post-impact period;
- long-term consequences for developing reconstruction models.

As a result, the definition of Disaster Studies grows up as research approach able to codify a disastrous event within a multidisciplinary framework. On account of this, since the second half of the twentieth century many researches on disaster's effects within societies have begun to take shape, so as to make that of the sociology of disasters an increasingly solid branch of studies. In more recent years, the concept of disaster, both as calamity and as an emergency moment, has been linked to resilience (Mela, Mugnano, Olori, 2017). It follows from this that by translating the concept of resilience applied to disasters, the term refers therefore to the ability to manage a disastrous emergency whose effects is closely linked to the possibility of responding to the disaster

in a positive way for communities and the surrounding environment. To this goal, there are key aspects such as: the link between the pre and post disaster situation, the ability to activate communication networks between all the actors involved, development of plans and strategies to overcome the emergency situation caused by the disaster. Therefore, we must recognize that resilience, being certainly linked to the ability to recover after a "trauma", becomes an adaptive "necessity" of modern societies (Pellizzoni, 2017). This latest concept is fundamental to provide a guideline for post-intervention actions towards the territories and communities affected by disasters. Better to say, the disaster framed in a climate of resilience places attention on the management of collective resources, and, on transformative potential collective processes.

So, it is precisely in the previous Disaster Studies framework that this article will demonstrate how transformative education and critical pragmatism (Forester, 2016) represent a salient interdisciplinary factor to face disasters. To explain better, the Disaster Studies represents the theoretical framework in which to insert the reconstruction of the city of New Orleans following hurricane Katrina in August 2005 because in this case-study both critical pragmatism and transformative education configure theoretical subcategories useful for the enlargement of Disaster Studies interdisciplinary view.

3. The Meaning and the Range of Action of Critical Pragmatism within the Planning Practice

Regarding the documentation methodology, the scope of this research has been defined by selecting the theories that specifically concern the strand of Disaster Studies; other relevant topics that affect aspects of primary importance for disaster studies (such as the natural dimension of disasters, collective participation and public policies) have been included only if their relevance emerged from the data and documentary sources, or whether it was indicated within public policy plans and guidelines.

In the second phase, a case study (New Orleans) was identified as an exemplary case in which urban planning was characterized by multi-stakeholder social participation processes (public administrators, citizens, organizations). At this stage, the survey of public policies made it possible to identify, and subsequently to study, politically relevant initiatives to define the specific criteria and characteristics of this case study.

The third step, and last, allowed to focus the research on The People's Plan, that is the elaboration of the synthesis of the reconstruction of the neighbourhoods of New Orleans after the disastrous hurricane of 2005. This plan is presented as a document of dual value:

- heuristically, it is a document that organizes the main features of the network of local policies, the selection of which reflects analytical-descriptive needs and answers to research questions (modalities? Procedures? Tools? Timing?);

- at the political level, The People's Plan draws up an instrument for synthesizing policies and initiatives based on the criterion of solving collective practical problems.

To understand the function of a transformative education program is useful to analyze the meaning and the range of action in critical pragmatism. Critical pragmatism regards what people can do for shaping the world around them. In few words, it can be considered as an inclusive and creative deliberative process to improve cities and neighborhoods (Scavi, 2014). Therefore, it can be defined as a deliberative planning practice when the technical debate arising from community inner feelings is able to

grow the social empowerment (Dryzek, 2010). Far from any kind of generalization, in critical pragmatism, the contamination of social research with planning ones makes the point of view of social practices, particularly interesting for planners. Supported by a permanent and open dialogue with the community, critical pragmatism allows us to make everyone aware of the extent of the problem, to involve everyone in planning and to start a path to organize the life of the whole community (Laws et al., 2015).

In short, the strength of critical pragmatism depends on the qualities of democratic deliberations. Insofar as, critical pragmatism refers to a deliberative design process, it will explore how deliberative committees portray and enact a democratic work (Nabatchi et al., 2012). In this perspective, it is possible to define collective intelligence as a procedure of mutual learning: it regards the way through which everybody looks around for new ideas. Collective intelligence is an increasingly present concept in those social organizations that decide to innovate their status quo. A concept carried out by Pierre Lévy and that can be defined as the ability of the members of an organization to face challenges and therefore to solve problems of collective order through collaboration, sharing of knowledge, through cooperative learning processes (Lévy, 1999). All elements that lead the members of a community to increase the levels of intrinsic cohesion, not only in quantitative terms but also and above all in terms of the quality of processes of sharing and cooperation triggered.

Since all the stakeholders (i.e. citizens, politicians, public institutions, nonprofit associations, enterprises, city planners, etc.) are in a deliberative committee, collective intelligence does not ask what the problem, but firstly ask what the story is (Innes, Booher, 2010). While considering all the stakeholders, collective intelligence shapes the expectations of what is getting out from a public debate. This action of shaping gives style to the choices in the sense that public deliberations become a practical decision-making process. As a result, it implies that learning comes before the resolution of the problems.

4. The Multi-modal Deliberative Practice and the Significance of the Urban Condition

When collective intelligence involves issues referred to the inner feeling of a community, we can argue that it can turn into a transformative education program. This programme is an alternative to the one-sided problem-solving model which views society, communities and individuals as recipients and producers of knowledge (Boyd, Mayers, 1988). In fact, the distinctive feature of the theoretical path of transformative education is to identify education as a real "agent of change", then transformative. In this way, the specific objectives of each transformative education path - which change according to the individual specific cases - converge into a single large general objective: through participatory methodologies, allowing companies to self-help produce forms of change that start from a direct experiential knowledge (Paul, Quiggin, 2020).

The consequence is that in this framework the ability to mobilise communities at local level increases the widespread benefits of participation in urban planning processes. Participatory planning, hearings, workshops, social pacts are also part of the direct implication of critical pragmatism. A pragmatism that represents a theory of action that situates actors in evolving, conflict ridden, structurally shaped settings in which "relationships of power" are hardly monolithic without vulnerabilities and limits of their own. In fact, just declined within the critical pragmatism, the challenge for transformative education remains not only to produce forms of shared knowledge starting from the resolution of a problem, but also coincides with the widening of the critical capacity of social actors acting within a political context.

In the light of a "practical aesthetic view", transformative education allows a larger process of democratic deliberations (Strati, 2014) through which citizens might ask for generative discussions and debates. Therefore, especially when negotiation is assumed as method to draw the urban space, the innovative result of the connection among citizens, urban policies and public space can be accomplished by a multi-modal deliberative practice (participative planning).

The view of the transformative education is completely opposite to what generally results from a top-down planning process, in which planners make the choice and apply criteria of space management through tools and methods not shared with the citizenship. According with the critical pragmatism approach, the meaning of the transformative education program can be understood if all the structural and human elements are in a programmatic vision for giving sense to spaces and places (Forester, 2013). It implies firstly that the view of the transformative education is completely opposite to what generally results from a top-down planning process, in which planners make the choice and apply criteria of space management through tools and methods not shared with the citizenship.

Better to say, even if planners' job is helping a community to achieve a vision into the reality, too often planners try to impose what they evaluate the best. Consequently, they consider participation as a listening activity of what people want, so called "public hearing". Usually, planners collect social needs but very rarely they transform needs into commitments: because without commitments no results are sure, participation risks to be just a talk (Fanizza, 2015). This is to say that planners' job mostly means helping a community to achieve a vision into the reality. Then, instead of the best technical choice, planners like the "public hearing" because they realize they need to know what people really want. Thanks to the "public hearing" planners collect social needs and can transform needs into commitments. These remarks force the discussion even further, especially recalling the Innovation Studies (Ramella, 2013).

Mostly inspired by radically trans-disciplinary approaches, Innovation Studies (IS) seem to have reached a phase of strong structuring precisely because they are nowadays able to provide conceptual and methodological tools to support the effort of a new social design of communities (Fagerberg, Martin 2013). Indeed, as evidenced by the cornerstones of the scientific literature about Innovation Studies, this methodological approach makes it possible to understand innovation not only as an economic, technological, scientific or social process, but as a general model on which to base actions of collective scope starting from a specific and relevant key issue for a given community.

Since in the consolidation of innovation studies (IS) at an international level, many disciplines concur (not only economics, but also engineering and informatics, geology, sociology, and education sciences), it is possible to assert that their effort is focused on the proposal of learning organizations. In the light of this, the IS cultural references place attention to the crossings of scientific paradigms with the intention to go beyond the topics of each single disciplines, not only from the point of view of the analysis tools, but, rather, in the approaches to the methodologies of investigation and analysis (Fanizza, 2019). Since discussing the function of participation involves the role of civic engagement, one of the most important aspects in planning is to avoid frustration. That is to say, in spatial design the solutions must seem not far from what citizens ask for. This is a very complex topic, strictly related to the significance of the urban condition. This one is influenced by planning, and by the trend to consider cities as commodities (Fanizza, 2013 a).

Against the tendency to evaluate a city only from an economic point of view, what

people ask for are new models of living able to develop the different link between the urban environment and the condition of the citizenship (Wagenaar, 2014). Such as in a modern urban dialectic, the interaction between cultural roots and historical memories makes the difference in transformative education, especially because any teamwork sets the planning as a storytelling (Diers, 2004). Sociologically speaking, in a transformative education, program citizens can exercise their urban rights to promote social behaviors and, at last, to look for a new kind of sociality (Fanizza, 2013 b). To do this, planning can adopt an inter-organizational approach for translating the variety of social identities and cultural signs into a code able to put into practice the concept of urbanism (Torres, 2003). More than just an abstract goal, planning can select rules and criteria useful to develop empathy toward government's choices (Desideri, Ilardi, 1997) The strength of empathy is related to the urban fragmentation and is influenced by the lack of communication in the public sphere (Fanizza, 2008). It consists in a problem that involves either the quality of social organization or the state of an inclusive welfare state. This competition slows down social integration processes, and, in any case, it interferes negatively with social practices and behaviors (Amendola, 1997). For this reason, the tale of what happened in New Orleans in 2005 is very interesting (Susskind et al., 1999). The storytelling of the New Orleans Neighborhood Planning Workshop offers the opportunity to test the transformative education for the rebuilding of a community. Overall, challenges collective intelligence because it deals with a lifelong learning program.

5. Planning as Storytelling: The University Practical Partnership in the New Orleans Neighborhood Planning Workshop

The rebuilding of New Orleans after the hurricane Katrina is not simply a story of resistance and not only a particular case of resilience. It is quite a successful experience of transformative education (Reardon, Forester, 2016) accomplished thanks to the valuable work of over 150 students from three different faculties (Cornell-Columbia-Illinois) in “practical partnership” with the residents of Ninth Ward, the New Orleans City Council and the New Orleans Planning Commission. Since October of 2005, under the banner of New Orleans Neighborhood Planning Workshop at Cornell University, they have worked to find a comprehensive strategy for the city. So in January 2007 they published *The People's Plan* (Hayes, Reardon, Beates, 2007) with the aim to help Ninth Ward residents in the rebuilding of their community.

The *People's Plan* plot was about this topic: what kind of relationships might be required if community members want to organize themselves; what community members need to be able to act together and to talk to one another; what community members are missing for maintaining an organization, for reconciling the differences and for discussing about strategies.

What happened in New Orleans was a real challenge, made with the confrontations between community leaders and activists who might wish to partner seriously with university staff, student, and faculties. This educational experience explicitly involved local citizens and even received input from displaced residents in the Katrina diaspora, via the selection of district planners to produce neighborhood and district plans. What emerges from the analysis of the *People's Plan* is that the process has not always been pretty, but it had its heart in the right place, as well as the workforce has committed itself to ensuring results from the short term. Under the supervision of Cornell University, a growing network of citizens representing poor and working-class families,

activist organizations and university scholars mobilized extraordinary human and financial resources to provide a successful multi-modal deliberative strategy. The involvement of local resident in the planning process was something that the Cornell team strongly endorsed. Together with ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), the university teams encouraged people to offer suggestions and options. Better to say, they stimulated an open process of what could be invented for the rebirth of New Orleans. With the aim to recognize not only the interest of the residents of the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, these teams lent their expertise and technical training to a community- driven process. Therefore, they collected concerns, hopes, senses of value, promises, fears, passions and biases to define a deliberative planning able to grow the social empowerment.

In contrast with many planners who started from their own expertise and added community participation as a necessary but secondary component of their proposal and practice, these teams allowed people to frame what they might debate (Rosenberg, 2007). They reduced the scope of dialogue with leaders and politicians because they created a very interesting scenario with ethnographic tools (deep interviews, photographs, and reportages) and surveys (data collection). This scenario was able not only to contain the interferences of designers and planners but also to manage the deliberative meetings with any groups and categories of people. By the way, the teams were able to gather support from the political establishment: the City Council passed a unanimous resolution directing the city planner's staff to incorporate the main elements of The People's plan into their comprehensive plan. This important bit of public recognition was possible because the teams produced a lot of required background documents (the Ninth's physical, economic, and social needs) useful for the comprehensive recovery plan. Of course, the influence of New Orleans Neighborhood Planning Workshop on the lives and education of students and faculty was really significant: students changed their view of empowerment planning thanks to this experience. On its own side, through the community planning students understood the connection between planning and politics.

6. Negotiation versus Conflict. The Cultural Roots and the Perspective of a Lifelong Learning Service for Planning

The matter of The People's plan is very fascinating because it supports a participative process for the emergence of a new political awareness centered on the feelings of belonging. The multi- modal deliberative strategy adopted by New Orleans Neighborhood Planning Workshop brought together people who care about their community to focus the attention on the pursuing of democratic deliberations. Most of these expressed a new citizenship closely related to the need of public policies on social rebirth. Furthermore, many democratic deliberations tried to educate citizens to have a different outlook on the world and on the future. Making the dialogue between public administrators, civil activists and citizens, the New Orleans Neighborhood Planning Workshop fostered a space where it could not only discuss solutions but where it could also enact, perform and explore new ways of being in a community. A sort of deliberative container was created, an infrastructure in which it showed one another new possibilities of living together.

In light of this, two remarkable issues are still worth considering:

- 1.the lifelong learning status;
- 2.the cultural background.

Because each project integrates specifically the collective education of the residents of the Lower Nine Ward of New Orleans, the New Orleans Neighborhood Planning Workshop explains what empowerment planning is and why it can be considered firstly a tool for socialization. Unlike any story of urban regeneration or renewal, planners did not work alone. The interdependence among public administrators, civil activists and citizens transformed a practical agreement into the result of a negotiation on what was important, what they knew and what they had to do. In general, negotiation used the mediation to select options and opportunities. Very important, negotiation set up the cultural background and interpreted the complex of identities to understand what the people were looking for.

7. Conclusion

This article aims to provide a clear analysis of the dynamics and positive interconnections generated by the participatory planning in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina. It demonstrates the strength of innovative practices founded on a "community knowledge". Strongly supported by tools and methods of sociological research, this knowledge stimulates the growth of a proper political awareness.

Whether it is the participatory planning of urban communities, social experiences starting from the recovery of spaces after a disaster, or social empowerment processes starting from the recognition of a common cultural identity, this community knowledge needs a new framework where to consider the transformative education both a theoretical approach linked with IS and a real enrichment for Disaster Studies. Better to say, the Innovation Studies can provide methods, tools and cultural structures to enhance the multidisciplinary aspects of Disaster Studies.

Even if the concept of space of resilience can be functional, to define in detail the implications on the processes of transformative education (Pellizzoni, 2017), what this article tries to underline is the possibility to join Disaster Studies with Innovation Studies. From a sociological point of view, transformative education in New Orleans has been supported by a learning approach. It leads to the improvement of participative citizenship, either because it has gone beyond the involvement of local leaders to consult as broad a cross section of community stakeholders as possible, or because it has been focused on the importance of social identity.

Especially when communities are structurally unable to deal with some specific aspects of urbanism, the negotiation can be important to find, distinguish and select political offers and, at last, to affirm new theoretical systems with reference to an epistemology of social dynamics.

Cultural roots can create new urban geographies to confer significance to urbanism. Together with a substantial re-thinking of planning's social function, cultural roots can be essential for an over-structural and infrastructural filling of an urban area and for reducing any forms of urban discrimination (Low, 2000). In short, cultural roots can ensure a proper use of public space if the replacement of the contents of politics pursues a new communicative code for selecting the government's choice. To conclude with, one last consideration on the function of human and social sciences for planning. Their importance cannot be limited to research methods: their theoretical contents can be assumed just as something conceptual. The story of the rebuilding of New Orleans tells how important human and social sciences are for the improvement of the common good. Human and social sciences can be the stage and not only the frame on which public policies can find the right way to be assumed, understood, and shared.

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