

INTERFACE

## Learning from practice: environmental and community mapping as participatory action research in planning

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### Introduction

In this *Interface* we examine the challenging and innovative work of community and environmental mapping in the Simeto Valley of Sicily. In the Fall of 2015 Daniela De Leo and John Forester interviewed diverse Italian planners to learn about the obstacles, opportunities and surprising turns of their practices. De Leo and Forester hoped, along the way, to explore the work of Laura Saija and her colleague Giusy Pappalardo. While the practice stories of both Saija and Pappalardo will appear in a forthcoming book (De Leo & Forester, 2017), we have selected Pappalardo's account to examine here with the help of five distinguished commentators from Italy, Brazil, Kenya, and the USA.

The detailed practice account that follows reveals specific aspects of innovating in daunting planning contexts. In particular, we learn about new practices that integrate common and traditional plan-making techniques of planners with skills of enabling productive, even transformative engagements with local people and the territories in which they live. We learn here too about new possibilities of teaching by identifying essential skills that are often neither taught nor tested in university curricula.

In Italy, planning is typically taught in schools of architecture and engineering and, with some notable exceptions, with a heavy emphasis upon (1) making plans or rendering projects rather than constructing processes or assessing and formulating public policies, and (2) specifying formal aspects of physical planning rather than crafting incentives and regulations to shape collective behavior. This remains largely true in a “planning world” that has changed and is changing significantly, where challenges of knowledge and public action remain pressing if planners are to address necessary needed social, physical and environmental changes.

The practice story that follows cannot “represent” the diversity of the modes of action of Italian planners, yet it nevertheless has echoes of, and implications for, others' work. We learned too of the uses of community mapping from a deputy mayor of a town in Sardinia as well as from one in the Apulia Region in Southern Italy, and also from a longtime militant planner and community organizer working on the outskirts of Rome. In these different contexts, with differing objectives and interests, planners involved in diverse processes found ways (1) to better understand territories, by facilitating the engagement of multiple stakeholders on different themes and relevant issues, (2) to bring together expert and local knowledge, by advancing proposals and addressing actual transformations, and (3)

to integrate techniques (map-making) and inhabitants (across territories), by enabling local actors to develop active leadership roles capable of changing perspectives and development processes.

We chose, then, to explore Giusy Pappalardo's practice story and to examine the process of community mapping in the Simeto Valley also because it seemed clearly and concretely to respond to the question of how creative planners might deal with issues of political-economic inequalities, power imbalances and, as we shall see, even the presence and influence of organized crime/Mafia (De Leo, 2013).

Without hiding her limits and problems, Pappalardo's story and its practices teach us how we might work in the face of power, standing within a process of co-producing knowledge that is essential to defining new frameworks oriented to changing the inherited status quo. This is true, we posit, even where, to ensure the dominance of criminal powers, local culture suggests that nothing will ever change within a resigned and apathetic society even when local residents do not collude with the powers that be.

Several innovative suggestions arise in Pappalardo's account. The role of associations and universities highlights the value of research for planning practices and the importance of university-public engagement – the third mission, along with teaching and research – with public, private and third sector organizations who can plan effectively with citizens. The tactics used to counter the mistrust of participatory practices here reveal the embarrassment connected to so-called public participation that has so often been ineffective as it has been promoted in Italy. In addition we see here a response to the inability of institutions to use the outcomes of processes that are often informal and unstructured, despite the obvious limitations of top-down planning efforts.

To include participatory mapping practices on the list of elements of essential technical knowledge raises issues both for learning and teaching. We hope here not to emphasize any uniqueness of the community mapping practices in Sicily, but we wish to show and teach through concrete example what skillful planners should be able to do. The co-production of community and environmental planning knowledge is not optional, and it is not another job, for planners must work with others, learning as they go. Giusy Pappalardo tells us what planners can do to work practically and work well (in the time and places at hand, or "because we die", as Danilo Dolci (1954) said) in the most difficult contexts where it is essential that planners know how to do many things very well – not only to make plans and then hope for the best (Forester, 2016).

In the remainder of this introduction, we turn to Laura Saija to put this work in a still more specific context. She writes: Giusy joined our research group at the University of Catania as we were going through a process of self-reflection and change. In the years after 1995, we had carried out experimental projects to explore what it meant, practically, to be something more than technocratic planners. Our research agenda explored hot topics in Italian and international planning debates: the crisis of modern planning and its rational roots, the interest in collaborative forms of planning, and – even more pragmatically – the emergence of a participatory paradigm in the broader European political agenda (Saija, 2014). Despite significant enthusiasm over fresh collaborative planning approaches, our Sicilian context posed specific challenges that forced us to reframe that enthusiasm by systematically reflecting on "what it makes sense to do here and now.

Sicily continued to be dependent upon special development funds, the result of a centuries-old system of power that has historically clashed with both popular mobilization and an imposed administrative system shaped around ideals of the modern state. Democratizing and civil rights efforts have confronted cultural dynamics of a quite different nature: whatever a Sicilian obtained (education, health care, a job, a business contract, a high quality public space) was not a "civil right" but the benefit of being part of a clan that required blind loyalty. Here people exchange favors to advance each other's interest (often in sharp contrast to any public interest). Experts call this a "mafio-genous" (Mafia-generating) sociocultural system, one providing the humus for the criminal organization called the Mafia for which Sicily is so famous. This system is not just a collection of "bad people," but it systematically affects the entire society.

In this context we felt that the participatory planning idea of having the powerless sitting at a decision-making table to negotiate with established powers was not the central goal. We found ourselves more interested in the possibility of using planning processes as collective learning occasions, through which relatively powerless groups might question "tradition," propose new actions and develop new values and identities.

This thinking pushed us toward action research: accepting the challenge to be an internal part of a collective learning process, sharing without imposing our expertise on community mapping and community-based environmental planning. When the Simeto Community contacted us, we discussed the possibility of experimenting for the first time with a long-term reciprocal partnership. The setting was perfect for our research questions: the local mafio-genous system had just generated the official approval of a large incinerator (later shown to advance Mafia interests) in a sensitive area along the river; the "healthy portion" of the local community had successfully mobilized against it, showing sophisticated organizing capacities. Our research group was ready to embrace the challenge to learn how planners might contribute to structural change, helping local community and environmental activists to work against an entire sociocultural system, including established institutional decision-making (see Figure 1).

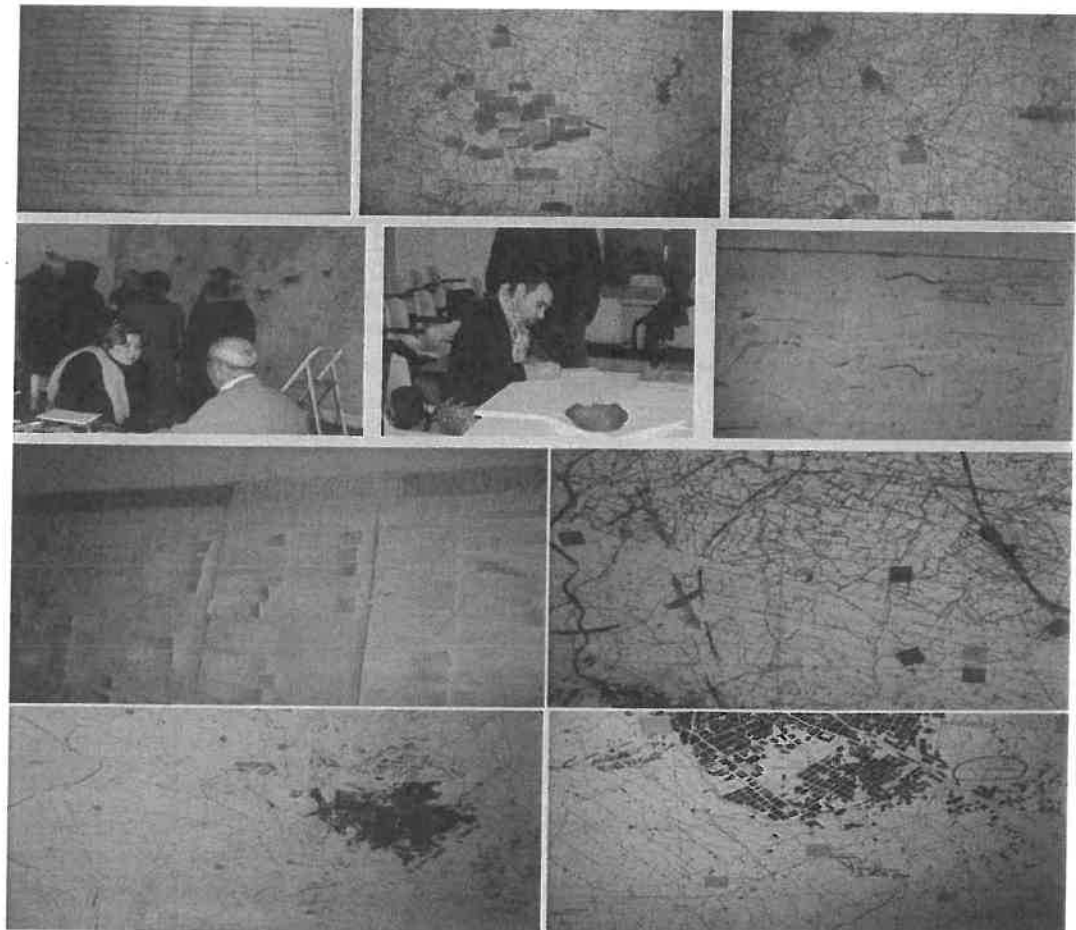


Figure 1. Simeto\_mapping.

## Notes on contributors

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## Community mapping and participatory action research in the Simeto Valley of Sicily: an account by Giusy Pappalardo

John Forester and Daniela De Leo conducted this interview on October 9, 2015. Federica Cefis Colombo provided the transcription and John Forester edited it for presentation as a practice story. Thanks to Jason Corburn and Bjorn Sletto for assistance in identifying astute commentators.

Giusy Pappalardo

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"I was taking classes with Laura Saija while she was helping with a class at the University of Catania, and we were engaged in a participatory action research project in the city center of Catania. Of course I was just a student taking planning classes, and I had no idea of what participatory action research could mean. I was just observing what my professors were doing, and I was engaged in that service-learning project for students.

I was curious because this was different from other approaches, in the sense that we were on the ground doing things with communities for real – instead of studying things in a book, or doing projects that were just on paper. So I was fascinated by the approach of being involved directly with communities and trying to do something that could be, in some way, useful for my city. But I was troubled, too, because it was a first project in the area of an ancient market in Catania that was under control of the Mafia.

There were a lot of troubles [problems] with the people who sell products and who are connected with the Mafia economy. So the project was interesting because we were involved with the community. But it didn't have any physical effect for real, because at one point we had to stop, because the municipality stopped supporting that project.

So the first thing was that, yes, I was curious, but then I was frustrated because we did something nice and different from other classes, but then what happened? Nothing changed on the ground.

So for a couple of months I was frustrated, and I didn't want to do any other planning things, because I thought that it was just useless – that nothing could really change, and then I had to choose my master thesis. I reflected a little bit, and I said,

OK, let's try to do that again. Let's try to investigate a little bit more what planners can actually do in contexts like Sicily where there is a lot of trouble with the relationships between institutions and the Mafia power.

So I said, "OK, let's do it again."

I went back to my professors, to Laura Saija and Filippo Gravagno, who were working together, and I asked to do my master thesis with them. At that time, they were working with the Simeto community, and I chose that project because, again, I was curious, and I thought, "OK, that could be interesting."

What was going on in the Simeto River area at that time was that there was a proposal from the regional board to establish an incinerator in a protected area close to the river. It was not, of course, a wise project, because it was a protected area, and they were trying to transform that into a huge industrial site, with this huge incinerator.

In the meanwhile, the community was asking for other things, and it was opposing the project, so I stepped into the Simeto Valley situation when there was this protest. The Simeto community didn't want the incinerator in their community, and they wanted to do something to stop it, and they asked the University of Catania to establish a partnership to understand what could be done differently.

I was troubled about my role, because at the beginning I couldn't understand what my role was, actually. I was there taking notes during the meetings and trying to understand what my role could be, and I mean that question was in mind for the whole master thesis project. I can answer the question now, because I thought about that after that I finished the project.

I think that my role was actually to try to bridge different ideas and to collect different ideas and to try to make a synthesis, to synthesize what was coming out the discussions. So I was just collecting and putting pieces together, and I was also adding, of course, some of my technical knowledge – but I was aware that my technical knowledge was just a small piece of a very huge and complex system of knowledge of all those people that were participating to the project. Practically what I did was that I developed a community mapping initiative together with Laura Saija and the other participants.

At the very beginning the meetings were just the ones that I was invited to. In the Simeto Valley there are different associations who were networking, but at the beginning they were working kind of separately because there are associations in different municipalities. One association was in one small city called Paternò, but there were different municipalities and different associations involved, so I was invited, and they were discussing what to do, trying to focus on what to do, on strategies, and they were arguing because they were not that sure of what should be done. When they were stating their opposition, let's say, by saying, "We don't want the incinerator," everything was kind of easier, because it was just, "We don't want that thing." But when it came to "We want to do this instead of that" it became more complicated – because everyone wanted to do something different. So in the meeting we were sitting in a circle and talking with a person who was leading the discussion, but that was not me – I was just taking notes.

But at the end of the meeting I found my role was to share my notes with the people. I saw that was helpful for them because it helped them to keep track of what was said in the previous meeting. It was something that they were not doing, so I said, "OK, I can do that, I can take my notes, and I can share my notes with you."

So that was what I did in the beginning. In the meanwhile, Laura sometimes was leading the discussion, so it was the two of us. She was leading the discussion, taking notes onto a blackboard so that everybody could focus and see what we were saying and organize the discussion, and I was sharing a full version of the notes via e-mail after the meeting, and before the next meeting.

Another thing about my role at that time was that I did a lot of case study research about community mapping. So I found myself useful in sharing what I had done, and I said,

OK, in other parts of the world community mapping has been done like this, like this, and like this, and we can do that here in our own way – but we have to be aware that there are other relevant experiences. So let's just learn from others' experiences, and let's just focus on what we want to do here.

So I felt a little bit better when I could do that with them, in the sense that I could feel useful when I was sharing my research, and I was helping them in understanding a little bit better what could be done there, as a community mapping initiative.

Also the frustration was that of course I was in charge of organizing the community mapping initiative, but I felt that other people could do the same thing, and they were not planners, so I said, "OK, so if they can do that, and of course I could do that as well with them, what then is my specificity?"

During my master's thesis it was like I lost myself, but then I understood that my specificity was keeping together all those different pieces, and so we come to the third point.

The community mapping initiative was organizing public meetings that were based – instead of having just discussions – on a map we had, and we asked people to put on that map their different ideas in terms of what they did and cared about, and we did that by asking very simple questions.

We asked, "What do you like? What do you not like? What are your memories? What are your visions and ideas for the future?"

So we asked people to indicate places on the map and to write down some notes related to what they have put on the map, and so we collected a real variety of different ideas. Sometimes there were people, of course, who agreed with each other, and sometimes they didn't – but, at the end of the process that lasted about nine months we had reached out to about five hundred people, and the real problem was to make the synthesis – to try to make sense of what we had collected because, of course, we had different things, different pieces and we wondered how to make something that could be a little bit organic, and that could be, of course, helpful.

So to organize those pieces was the real challenge. At that point I understood that my role was really to try to find a sort of balance in this huge variety of things in terms of the knowledge that people had of their place, in terms of projects or ideas. So instead of having just a list of projects, the challenge was to understand what were the priorities and what has to come next.

So my knowledge acquired as a planner was applied when we had to make the synthesis of that huge variety of ideas, and then I understood, "OK, my role could be to try to make sense of this diversity."

That's what I had studied, you know, about strategic planning and all these things, using the tools that we had studied in class to make sense of the diversity. So the idea, the ideas and the knowledge came from people, the system of values underlying the project came from the people, and what we did as planners was just to try to make sense of that diversity.

Again, the technical knowledge came into play because those people had studied more about, for example, alternative forms of collecting garbage and how to process garbage, or alternative forms of selling products in local markets – so they really had more knowledge than me because they were directly involved into the issue.

When I say "they," I mean local activists in that part of the project. We involved also the institutional people, but that's another story, so when I say "they," I really mean the activists.

There were also people who were activists and at the same time they had their technical knowledge because their job was connected with what they were doing. So we had people who possessed technical knowledge. That happened mostly with organic farmers, who had their small farms there, so they had studied how to run an organic farm. And so they had a lot of knowledge about that, and then they were involved in processes of activism as well, and of course they knew more than me about agriculture, and so their part of knowledge was important in the project, and I learned from them because I've never studied organic farming.

It was useful because of course if you have to develop a project in a rural area, you need to know something about organic farming! So it was OK, they gave that advice to me and the only thing I had to do was to understand what they were saying, and to put that together with other things – because, of course, on the other side you could have fishermen or ecologists for example. They wanted clear water and advocated for rivers so sometimes that could be a little bit in contrast with agriculture, let's say, and they had their knowledge. They know how a river works, and I didn't know anything about that, and so I learned from them, and then I tried to put their needs together with those of the farmers – and then we had people who were, for example, tourism operators.

So they know about their business, and some of them want to develop sustainable tourism, and so you can link that knowledge with the farmers' knowledge and say, "OK, we can do tourism and then do something with the organic farms, linking them to the sustainable tourism system." So you had people who were really different, and they did different jobs, so they had different forms of knowledge, and you don't know that much about each job – but putting them together you can help these ideas flow from one group of actors to another.

Some of them were saying, "Oh, we can put the organic issues together with the tourism issue." Some of them already had that in mind. Some of them understood the importance of doing things in an integrated way, and of course we were pushing toward that, so, some of them knew that, but not everybody. But some of them already understood the importance of working with other pieces of the puzzle.

It was not just me doing all the learning, they were learning from each other too. We had public meetings and it was tense in those meetings, because when you have a public meeting everybody

speaks and says something about his or her own specificity. So after the meetings, then, you could talk to the other participants and hear, "OK, that was interesting because..." or "oh, I didn't know that before."

We could see that they were really learning from each other as we were doing, because of course every person who came to speak had a specific knowledge of something, and if you were in the mood of learning, other people could say, "Oh, that was interesting." So that was thanks to the public meetings.

So yes, these public meetings did involve expertise, and yes, chaos was there. So how did they work? I think it comes back to the question about the role of doing planning action research. Of course there is always chaos, and we experienced that, so I am not saying that everything was perfect of course. But we learned also, developing this, how to organize chaos a little bit. So we found very useful, first, sharing, every time that we did something – again, taking notes and transforming those notes into collective documents so that people could really follow the discussions step by step through the meetings. So they could have the feeling that what they were doing was not just starting from the beginning every time, but that there was a slow, but real progression of the discussion.

That was like keeping a shared record or shared history. We shared that in different forms. It could be just an e-mail or it could be a document that then became part of a huge collection of documents – that then became part of the resulting River Agreement that has been made with these pieces of records that have been produced along the years. So that was very useful because people could have the feeling that they were not just starting every time from the beginning, and they saw that what we were saying were not just words in the air, but that we were really trying to affect reality.

These were not just words, but something more that could be effective in the reality. Because a big part of the chaos, in my experience, came from people who had the feeling that we were just discussing about nothing. During the meetings, of course, they shared their frustration, that nothing's changed, nothing is changing for real, and so during the meetings that was one part of the chaos.

We were trying to keep them focused on the fact that we are building something that has been built step by step, so with this, we tried to say, "Look at the progress that we have made from the beginning to now," so that was one part.

Another thing we did was splitting up the group, so we usually started the meeting with, let's say, a plenary session, with all the participants together and then we split the group into smaller pieces that were focused into specific issues.

It was easier to manage smaller groups, rather than manage a big and huge group of people. When I say "big" it might be a hundred people, and then we split into three or four smaller groups, sometimes five, let's say, twenty, twenty-five people, so they were easier to manage.

In the smaller groups you had one person leading the discussion, another person taking notes. That's the best situation you can have, and of course you have to have facilitators so people that could do that, but that's another story.

So in these groups the first thing that we usually asked people, person by person, was to introduce themselves very briefly. We gave them, say, two minutes to ask them, "Why are you here? What are your expectations?" for example, so we began with a very brief introduction so that everybody could understand who was in the group. That was the first time, and then we focused on the specific issues, let's say, so we had to discuss, "What's the best way to manage the water cycle in a farm?" What are, for example, the projects that can be done in order not to waste water or not to put polluted water into the river, let's say. So everybody shared experiences on that in the small group that was focused on water.

Then there might be another group in the meantime that was working on tourism, say, and they were discussing things in the same way, introducing themselves and then saying, "OK, let's discuss about what's the best, say, greenway that we can do to connect the farms, and so what's the path that we have to design?" and all these things.

And let's say another group in the meanwhile was discussing farming itself; "What's the trouble of [problem for] farmers?" "We have to sell our products and we don't have outlets like other businesses in shopping malls and all these things, so let's try to make links to local markets, farmer's markets and all these things." So these groups are working together, introducing themselves, every person is introducing himself or herself in the group and then discussing specific issues.

Let's say that it takes one hour to do that, and at the end all these groups come together again into, let's say, the plenary session, and there are a couple of people usually who were the facilitators, or there's a facilitator and one person on behalf of the participants, and these people share what they have done as a small group with the other groups.

In the plenary session the facilitator can put things together and try to have a more organic project, and this is what should happen. This is what we have been able to do when we were supported by classes of students doing service learning projects, so we could have a good number of facilitators, so that the groups could be supported by two people leading, one person taking notes and the other leading the discussion. But often you have just a few people involved as facilitators because there are no resources for the project, and our real situation is that you don't usually have the number of facilitators that would be best.

So, there are a lot of troubles [difficulties] because, of course, let's say you don't split in groups, and then it's more complicated to discuss things in a plenary session – or if it is just one person who is facilitating and is taking notes, at the end of the day that person will be very tired – so this kind of things really can work when you have a good team of people who are working together.

Some people just think if you get groups together they are going to spend an hour complaining about how bad everything is. That could happen, and it could happen too that you have people conflicting each other of course, and whenever it happens I have learned that I have to let them for a little bit at least, express their conflicts, their complaining. They have to say what they are concerned about, and they have to share this with others.

That's fine, you are not wasting time if these things happen. If I don't let them share that, I think they are not going to be able to contribute at their best to the discussion because they have in mind what they haven't been able to say, so they have to share whatever is in their mind.

But you have to keep the discussion on track. So, whenever there is a complaint you have to ask, "OK, that's the problem! What do you think could be the solution?" or "OK, that's the conflict, you are right, how can we overcome that, what are the issues?"

All those questions can help them move forward, "OK, we know that, that's the problem. Yes, that's true, you are right, but ..." and just asking the question that can help them move a little more forward is important.

Then someone could say, "OK, but you know this is never going to happen," and whenever they say that you say "No. OK, we know that Sicily is not like California, say, but let's try to do *that*," – So it's always, you know, saying the words that can keep the discussion focused on, "OK, we know that there are problems, and we are not going to solve them tomorrow, we know that. But we are doing *this*, and we don't want to waste time, so we are doing this for a reason, so let's just focus on that reason." So that's how we usually manage to try to keep going forward.

If I have to be honest, completely honest about the Simeto project, we came to one point when we had done so many meetings and we had written so many documents that if we didn't do something real on the ground, real projects that people could touch, we were going to lose all these things, all that work.

So when we started doing these meetings at the beginning, it was just the university with associations, and then we understood that it was necessary to involve institutions, government, all the

agencies at every level in order to transform this discussion into reality – otherwise it's just discussion, so then we were at the point when we shared the documents that we had done as the university in partnership with the associations, with institutions.

They liked what we had done because we had done that with no public money! So it was OK, let's say a sort of gift, that we were giving them our ideas, our time, our work. But then we wanted to transform ideas into something that was real, and the institutions, some of them, were excited and supported us – and then we signed a document that now is a sort of memorandum of understanding. That now is the Simeto River Agreement, and the official document, the last document, was signed in May 2015!

Let me go back a bit. The community mapping initiative started in December 2009 and had a first moment of synthesis in April 2010. After that, it was the first time when we realized that we had to involve governmental agencies, and at that time we were focused on municipalities.

We had the documents with the ideas, projects, and it was in our hands, it was a sort of strategic plan, a community-based strategic plan. And then we thought, "OK, how can we transform it into reality without the municipality? We cannot do that by ourselves." That was what we thought because we understood that the associations didn't have, let's say, the power or the money, or could not do that alone.

So we focused together during discussions, that we had governmental agencies that had the responsibility of doing things, so we did not want to substitute or assume their responsibilities, but we had to bridge them and to include them in what we wanted to do. I think we were able to think about that because in the partnership, within the associations, we had people that had previous experience of public administration.

We had a former mayor who then became an activist, and she is very special as a person; every participant trusts her! I think this is particular to our project, so she was able to let people understand through her words that the governmental agencies were not always just enemies but they needed to be included into the discussion – because she explained to us that's, you know, how our institutions work now, we have institutions that are in charge, they have to do things, so we cannot exclude them.

Some people saw the public institutions as enemies: "They don't do their job! They do bad things," so yes, some people didn't want them, but other people were OK with that. From the university, too, we knew that it was important to involve the institutional part, the governmental agencies, because we wanted to have them as another piece of the puzzle. I mean if you have a puzzle to put together, you have to have every piece to work with, and that was a necessary piece for us. But it took time to focus. It took discussions. It took conflict. It took everything we had, because people didn't think the same way, but in the end, we decided that's the thing we had to do, we had to involve governmental agencies into the project.

People trusted Graziella Ligresti because when she was a mayor she was very good – so she is one of the most trusted leaders that the community has had, as a governmental person and as an activist. Now she is just an activist, but her previous experience gives her the accountability of saying things in the right way, and people in the end trust her, so I think she was very special, she has been one of the unique elements in our work. There might be other people able to do same in other places, to be as trusted as she is but in the process there were things that happened because of the specific people who were who they were.

One of the successful outcomes of the process now, is that different associations became able to network in a sort of umbrella association that now exists, and that didn't exist before. That exists because of the process that we have done, so instead of having associations working and networking but working separately in different municipalities, now you have 10 municipalities, and in every municipality

there is a group that is networking for real, doing things together: organizing meetings, organizing all those things that can help the community stay together in the sense of meeting and keeping this process alive and on the other side pushing institutions to do what they have to do.

In the very beginning of the process they came in just representing their own associations, and at the end they were still representing their own associations but now they were working together in a very, very different way.

The River Agreement Memorandum of Understanding that was signed in May 2015 contains basically a governance system of the River Agreement, saying how these pieces, governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, researchers and educators, have to stay together. So we wrote that there has to be – because we agreed on that all together – an association of associations called the participatory presidium of the Simeto River Agreement that represents the whole non-governmental sector.

So this exists as a new entity, and inside we have all these associations or citizens individually, all these people who can be representatives of an association or of themselves as a single person – but all of them are part of this new entity that is the participatory presidium.

The participatory presidium represents the complexity and the wholeness of the associations that exist in the Simeto Valley, and they are supposed to work together with the other pieces in the general assembly. The assembly is composed of each mayor, so if you have 10 municipalities, you have 10 mayors, two people from the participatory presidium and one person from the University of Catania. So this is how the assembly works: Whenever the assembly meets, you have 10 mayors, someone from the University of Catania and two people from the presidium. These people together are in charge of organizing things, and they are in charge of making things happen for real in the sense now that you have projects.

The community has done a lot of work together, so how do we transform these things into practice? How do we prioritize things? How do we find resources for doing things? In the assembly the most active part has been the participatory presidium, because the mayors are slow – they have a lot of things on their minds, things to do with their municipalities, so the participatory presidium actually leads the discussion.

This is the design that we came up with in the agreement, and we'll see in the future how it works and then it will be adapted as it goes.

Of course, the relationships among all these participants developed slowly over time as they shared information. One nice thing was said by a person during a meeting about this. An activist, during a meeting, said, "OK, thanks to the community mapping initiatives, we finally learned that we have to listen to each other."

So I would say that people finally understood that they were not alone and they had to at least listen to each other. It is not that you always agree on everything of course, but at least you have to understand what other people that live close to you think about the place you are living in – in order to make that place become what it can be together. So listening to each other, I think, is the thing that we all really learned doing that – because we understood things, and it was not just listening in terms of words. Again, you have the map, and in the map you have different signs, different notations, that is not just about words, because you have a map with things that are drawn on the map, that people have drawn. So it is not just listening to words, but you can focus, because you see that on one place there are different ideas or in another place the ideas can be the same, they can be in the same direction. The ideas can be in some ways conflicting, but at least you see that you have this complexity that you have to deal with, and so that was a thing that would happen, listening to each other.

What did people get out of this? They were seeing the process of doing things with specific tools that were planning tools, because we use maps as planners. Before starting the project I couldn't imagine how powerful a map could be. But if you do the act of mapping with people that are not used to having a map in their hands, then when they have one, it's something that really helps them to understand things in a different way. It's a powerful tool that I was happy to show them, and I know that they were happy to use that tool, because it was like, "Oh, we can see where we are."

I don't know how to say it, but I thought the act of mapping was something that made a difference in the process because they could not just talk but deal with the complexity of the space. It was not just saying, "I want to build a greenway," let's say. It was, "OK, let's see, where should we do something like that? What does it affect? Who are the people we have to involve because the greenway is here instead of there?"

So it was keeping the discussion a little more focused on the difficulties that are connected with implementing projects, rather than just saying, "OK, we want a greenway, that's it."

This meant dealing more with the complexity of doing things for real, rather than just saying we want this because we want this. It was like, "OK, we want this, and now how do we do that? Let's take the map and let's see what should be done."

So they are dealing with difficulties but they are also dealing with solutions and not just saying what they want. Now people from the community organize walking along an old rail trail that they want to transform into this green way. They are keeping working with other maps and they are going and doing, and seeing places, so they are actually working on the project. Of course with them is an architect who is doing his job; he wants to do that because it's his job, but he is doing it with the perspective of the activists, too, and with the other participants, so they now know how to work together and through the participatory presidium they are developing this project for real. And the project's difficulties are connected, again, with the institutional authorities – because they have a lot of problems in getting, first the money, and then authorizations and things.

So again the community is vibrant, the institutions are slower, and the big challenge now, I think, is to bridge these two pieces. The community has learned a little bit how to work together, and the problem now is to help the institutions to work together with the community with the same rhythm and not to be that slow compared to the fast pace of the community.

Another thing that I can say about this project is that the project has had different phases, so you start with huge enthusiasm, people were participating, public meetings were vibrant. Then you do a lot of work, you produce documents and at one point – this had already happened in the process, in 2012 or so – it seemed like the process was dying because there was no more enthusiasm. People didn't want to participate anymore, they felt frustrated because nothing had changed. So that happens, and that was only a phase.

I mean in that moment I was, "Oh!" I was frustrated too because I thought, "OK everything is finished, and we have done a lot of things for nothing!" But what I saw is that if you have done things in a certain way, then a new element might have been thrown into the discussion again.

Probably there won't be the same people who have participated before, though some will remain, some new people will start, in the light of what has been done before during the phase of enthusiasm, and they will start doing things again with the same enthusiasm of the very beginning. So a new cycle starts, and then again you have people involved in participating and doing all these things, with enthusiasm, in the high points of the process, and then again it can also happen that people get tired and frustrated again. But my hope is that this is not a short-run process, but a long-run process. But there could be different phases.

You have to be good at maintaining memory of what has been done from the very beginning up to now. So that even if you have phases of frustration where people don't want to participate anymore, it doesn't matter, you are still working in a different way, and then something new will happen. Then you will have new vibrant and energetic meetings and phases.

I am seeing that as a process there can be moments of high enthusiasm and moments of very low enthusiasm, and then as long as there is a group of people that is able to maintain the memory of the history, of what has been done, there will always be a new moment of enthusiasm, probably with new people involved, but with the awareness that something has been done before, so that you are building step by step.

In addition to the technical skills, an important skill is to keep track of what has been done, and not to give up, in the sense that you have to push on when things are not vibrant anymore. So it's like keeping track, it's memory, memory of the process, keeping track of the memory of the process.

Along with keeping track, there's the question always of what can we do now. So, yes, one of the key things that a facilitator would do would be to say, "OK, yes there are problems, but what can we do, what can we do next?" – to pose the right questions at the right time, during meetings, during whatever, and to be focused on the right questions; "OK, we know there are problems but what can we do?"

So it's not giving up on problems, it's just trying to find alternative solutions – and to put them into the discussion, and then people would discuss them, but the point is to trigger these things, to be there to remember what you have to find out about, and to discuss about how to move forward, continuously.

Would I have done anything differently? I would definitely change a lot of things now in the light of what we have done. The first is that we never designed the project, except maybe a little bit, and I know that you cannot design everything, or let's say, plan everything, because you know reality is complex. We knew that; I knew that, but it was like going with the flow at the beginning, and I am saying that because we were not good at having a source of funds that could sustain this project in a reasonable way. We were just, I think, a little bit crazy at the beginning.

Now, the problem is that Laura is in the USA, and we need her a lot because she was another person who helped a lot in this process to be developed as it was. So we are having troubles [problems].

We don't have a lot of facilitators when we have to develop public meetings, as I was saying before. So whenever we had students that could help with a service learning process, that was great, but now that we don't have them – because we don't even have a class involved in the process, because, for example, Laura is not here – how can we deal with this number of people? How can we organize public meetings?

So it's a very important thing, to have a little bit of design of the process in order to get the necessary funds to support and to sustain the process itself – otherwise it's going to be very complicated, very frustrating, very tiring. So I would look for sources of funding a little bit more than we have done!

We kind of skipped that part and that was not good for the sustainability of the process, that was one thing. Another thing would be, and I think it was the main problem, that we have learned to do these things while we were doing them. We were not really very sure what we were doing at the beginning. I am talking about myself, so I was a little bit confused, and because of this confusion, it was more complicated to plan what to do in terms of sustaining the process. So I guess it's a problem of designing things [steps] to be done before doing them, but as we were not fully aware of what we were doing, it was complicated to do that!

I don't know if this is clear or confusing, but it comes down to the fact that Laura now is not here because she did not have continuing support, although she has done a great job. So I am talking about the difficulties connected with the reality of being planners and scholars in Italy.

I think the mood of learning can be facilitated. It is something that you have to have, but it can be facilitated, and it can be stimulated if you provide the right material in terms of documents and devices and tools, all these things that we have done. So again, going back to the community mapping, giving a map to someone is giving them something that you can touch, you can see, and you have something to deal with.

So doing a report and sharing that report can help people to have some material to read or hear in a presentation, and then you can ask people not to be just passive listeners, but you can ask them questions, and say, "OK, what do you think, what is more important, this or that?"

So in this way you can prepare the materials and show the materials that can help people to be focused and to be active learners and not just listeners, but people who can be – and they have to be – directly involved in the process of producing knowledge together through open tools, tools that have been organized before, and then they can add their own part. So you might have, let's say, a report, and at the end of the report you always have white pages where people can add a little bit more, and you say, "OK, this is never a complete report, what more can you add? Please share that with us." So people came to feel more involved in this process, and probably, I think, all this can help to encourage the mood of learning.

There's one more thing. I said there were a lot of things that we were good at doing, but also that during the process we had tons of reframing processes – in the sense that we stopped, and we said, "OK, we are doing this, but probably we are making a lot of mistakes. So let's stop a bit, and let's think." And that was done by the scholars and also by the most active participants. So I think it's very important to point out that there are moments when you stop, you sit down [for] a little bit, you reframe what you are doing, and you change a little bit – because that's the only way things can continue working. That's one thing, one practical [piece of] advice I have to share.

When I was saying that the assembly now is composed of 10 mayors and two people from the participatory presidium, one of those people is actually Graziella Ligresti again, the person who was the former mayor. So this is again to point out that there are some key people in the process who are really investing a lot of time, and a lot of effort. She is one of those people, and it's thanks to these people that the memory of the process is still there – because she's been there from the very beginning until now. A lot of people have changed, but you need to have some people who are always there, and she is one of them, and that is just a detail, but again it's important to point out that you really need people like that in these processes."

### Notes on contributor

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## Community mapping and participatory action research

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Working with participatory methodologies means dealing with the unknown, daily. Our initial ideas are often deconstructed from the very beginning. However, it doesn't exclude the possibility of remaining attentive to the methodological guidelines that are already established in this field. The use of techniques such as participatory listening and development of a local diagnosis, for example, can guide and show which strategies are most appropriate for the moment and for the local reality. Giusy

Pappalardo experienced the whole process of building a participatory diagnosis and seems to have done it intuitively, which is really impressive. Nonetheless, her moments of anguish could have been mitigated if she was in fact seeking the development of a diagnosis for Simeto Valley and the place where they were planning to build an incinerator.

Participatory mapping is a widely used technique in participatory diagnosis and its use has many possibilities: qualifying information on the territory resources, such as government services, community services, business, commerce, churches, networks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), flows of access, use and accessibility of the identified resources/services, monitoring the existing process of interaction and development (which projects exist, for which public, where are they?), as an interactive tool for territorial knowledge-building assessing weaknesses, challenges and opportunities, and for stimulating collective discussions on territorial potentials, among others.

The researcher appropriately used several of these possibilities. I would like to highlight one: the production of information that might be available and viewed quickly, allowing participatory and integrated planning, programs and local actions. As a consequence, the production of such information has created a sense of collective work on Simeto Valley.

The mapping provides the necessary information to discuss the issues and available resources, guides the prioritization of problems to be faced, selects settings or stakeholders and supplies a basis for developing strategies and projects connected with the regional reality. To propose accurate actions you need to know the community deeply, from the perception and opinion of those who live, share and experience it. The project in Sicily proved to be quite useful not only in creating new knowledge about the local situation and mobilizing actors in the territory, but also in realizing its multiple dimensions, such as networks of relationships, needs, opportunities, flows, services, and population circulation around the territory.

The identification of local actors and their backgrounds, interests and possible biases is also an important step to observe. Understanding the role of each one in the territory brings visibility to the local microcosm, partnerships, competences and vulnerabilities. Each local actor has his/her own background and therefore brings a unique vision, endowed with knowledge that is ideally complementary to that brought by the others. This is what makes the participatory methodologies so interesting: due to its collaborative nature, the results tend to be larger than the simple sum of each one's knowledge. In practice, however, we must also carry out a process of articulation and often negotiation and prioritization. For this, the working groups need to rely on facilitators who can listen and give voice to everyone. Giusy may have missed asking people to accomplish this task, and did not report having tried to distribute this role amongst the participants, which would be a good strategy to by-pass this situation. In such a large group it would have been possible that some were willing to do it and this would bring greater autonomy and sustainability, for them and for the process.

Participatory mapping, then, brings to the territory a new point of view, which is complementary to the technical, most commonly included in the maps made by the government. This new approach, however, often goes against other interests, mainly economic ones. And this is a great bottleneck, also perceived by the team from the University of Catania: how to advocate on the municipalities' decision-making.

To achieve better results, we must have proximity and dialogue with decision-makers, and this highlights the need to involve government officials. In this context, we can invite them to participate in working groups or address the demands raised to them. Both options have their pros and cons. On one hand, if the government presence can inhibit the contributions of the grassroots actors, their absence in the whole process may end up generating non-viable proposals to be implemented. On the other hand, the presence of these agents can enable the proposal's incorporation into the city in a more organic way, while its absence guarantees the authenticity and origin of popular demands.

In this scenario, the solution adopted in the action research was the ideal: the creation of an external committee composed by representatives of municipalities and representatives of the groups that were discussing the issue. This kind of committee was intended to be a compromise between the state presence and absence in the working groups: without interfering in the discussions held by the territories, decision-makers were also heard and could contribute, evaluate and refine the proposals – being a bridge between the demands and the changes they want to accomplish.

Finally, I would like to note the discrepancy between the sense of time felt by those in the territory and those in the municipal administrations. For those who are being impacted, the need to stop or change the reality brings a sense of urgency that is not compatible with the time needed for public policy, projects or even for implementing participatory processes such as Giusy reported. This gap often brings a sense of failure, as if all the work were unfruitful. It's not enough to tell them that the creation of a working group and the approach itself – of the actors who previously did not even know each other – are results to celebrate – although in fact these are very positive milestones. With good reason, however, the population expects real changes and the resolution of the problem that is affecting them. Some ways to bring the motivation up for the participants are to design, as soon as possible, a step-by-step plan, with milestones and progress indicators – something like a “treasure map” with a timeline, goals and, always, with the effective local group representatives' participation. The closer to the action the group is, the greater the motivation to move forward. And whenever the motivation decreases, invite them to take a look back and see how much progress has been made, how far the process has developed, how the reality today compares to the beginning.

### Notes on contributor

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## Community-based mapping as creative disruption: commentary to “Community mapping and participatory action research in the Simeto Valley in Sicily: an account by Giusy Pappalardo”

Bjørn Sletto

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Giusy Pappalardo's intriguing practice story in this Interface brings to mind the complex roles of creativity in planning processes under conditions of conflict. The participatory plan-making in the Simeto Valley in Sicily echoed with the latent violence of what Pappalardo refers to as the mafia economy, and it involved residents' groups with different economic interests – in the fishing industry, organic farming, tourism – and with municipal officials of different stripes with different loyalties, environmentalists, and members of the business community. As a result, the community mapping process was inserted into a complex, contentious, and evolving participatory planning space.

Under such contested conditions, community-based maps are inevitably vested with deep representational significance as potentially subversive counternarratives, but as political artifacts they may also be appropriated and resignified in ways that run counter to the interests of their creators. The critical literature on community mapping is replete with concerns of the potential role of community mapping in reproducing unequal relations of power in contradiction to the interests of the marginalized, calling for critical reflection both of mapping as process and maps as artifacts: who participates in mapping projects under what conditions, how are maps re-presented and by whom, how are maps and mapping processes complicit in transforming social relations and imaginaries?

What do we make of creativity under such conditions of conflict and on such fraught theoretical terrains, and to what extent may conditions of violence and unequal relations of power submerge creative potentials to the machinations of power and instrumental rationality? Pappalardo provides a hopeful answer. In the Simeto Valley planning process, community mapping furnished a means of leveraging creativity to focus participants' vision on the future, thus allowing participatory action researchers and residents to at least momentarily move beyond past frustrations and positionings to attend instead to the most difficult question in planning: then what?

Although we are not privy to the tone produced by the intimate engagements among participants during the mapping process – the jostling, joking, bursts of frustration, teasing, eye-rolling laughter that combine to form the affective atmosphere of such projects – Pappalardo suggests that the community mapping process fostered a collaborative tenor that served to defuse the politics of interests that could have derailed the planning project. Thus, she reports, the mapping process modeled productive and perhaps even conflict-resolving forms of engagements, but, at the same time, the mapping work also drew upon or even leveraged conflict to succeed. Herein lies the irony. If creativity is a premise for conflict resolution, the conflicts and latent violence that characterize contested landscapes also serve as a source of creativity.

Pappalardo's practice story, then, illustrates not merely how community mapping projects are shaped by long-simmering conflicts. She also illuminates the ways in which creativity can be deployed as a form of disruption and thus be harnessed for emancipatory purposes, precisely under conditions of conflict. I am speaking here not merely of disrupting social and material relations that drive conflict but also dominant planning rationalities that unfortunately may serve to reproduce unequal relations of power.

In my own participatory mapping to document indigenous territories in Latin America, I have observed how map-makings become moments of creation, where the creative shift from experiencing to representing draws attention from routine activities to the extraordinary meanings of landscapes. By graciously responding to the curious questions posed by the foreign cartographers and their community collaborators – where do hunters walk to hunt for deer, where do families plant their gardens, what spirits inhabit this and that hill, what is the name of this creek, how many days to walk from this mountain to this river – participants in such indigenous mapping workshops deploy memory and story to populate the cartographic representation. By collectively entering this cartographic space they begin to engage critically and differently with the landscape – a landscape which is continually and habitually reproduced through their own mobilities and their everyday practices, but which now is reinvested with extraordinary meanings through the visual and tactile interactions demanded by the map.

In the case of my own research with indigenous people, for example, participatory mapping has the potential to reassert the important associations between memory, everyday practice, and landscape in the reproduction of indigenous identity. As Jesús Peñarando commented following a participatory mapping session in the indigenous Yukpa community of Toromo in Venezuela in 2011, the map with its animal symbols and place names reminded him of the extraordinary significance of his mountain

landscape: "This is where the ancestors have been protecting the sacred sites, here where the animals are (drawn). This map reflects our culture. Because this is not a typical map, but a map made by us, the Yukpa."

In this way, the creative process involved in participatory mapping disrupts the quotidian flows of the everyday, prompting the sort of unexpected dialogues which are particularly important under oppressive conditions, such as those lived by indigenous peoples in Latin America. In my own work, I have rarely had the opportunity to shift from map-making to plan-making – from the speaking of memory via the cartographic process to deliberation of futures – and herein lies perhaps a fruitful area of research going forward. How can the creativity which is so beautifully fostered through participatory mapping serve to disrupt oppressive planning regimes, especially in landscapes that are shaped by extreme inequalities and contested rationalities?

### Notes on contributor

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## Community engagement as a technology of humility

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Giusy Pappalardo's story highlights how planners and practitioners working in public settings ought to act to help co-produce knowledge for action through what we can call "technologies of humility." The wonderful insights by Pappalardo reveal that practitioners do have the discretion in a variety of settings to influence the design and content of democratic strategies and interactions among community members, but, it must be facilitated, as she puts it, by providing the "right material in terms of documents and devices and tools." I suggest that the "right materials" are technologies premised upon planners' humility, technologies that can counteract the more dominant organization of hubris and condescension in professional decision-making settings.

Early in the interview, Pappalardo struggles to define "the community" and her own role in the process: "I couldn't understand what my role was, actually." This uncertainty and humility is exactly what public practitioners need more of when working with communities – rather than the expert arrogance too often encouraged by and embedded in professional training. From the outset of the essay, Pappalardo identifies what Jasanoff (2007) called "technologies of humility," those institutionalized habits of thought and action that give central place to the fragilities of our human understanding – the

unknown, the uncertain, the ambiguous, and the uncontrollable. Acknowledging the limits of prediction and control, such “technologies of humility” confront “head-on” the normative implications of our lack of perfect foresight. They call for different expert capabilities and different forms of engagement between experts, decision-makers, and publics than just mere “participation” or “community engagement.” Pappalardo reveals diverse strategies and techniques for coproducing effective technologies of humility in forums where community members from different persuasions are actively encouraged to bring their knowledge and skills to bear both upon the framing of questions and problems and on the generating of solutions, maps and shared learning about common challenges.

Decisions are coproduced, in Pappalardo’s process, because people will not come together for very long just to discuss shared problems and learn from one another. Coproduction is about bringing multiple perspectives, knowledge and experiences into actions that deliver results for participants (Watson, 2014). Ostrom (1996, p. 1079) suggested that in such coproduction citizens “play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them” as well as processes that capitalize on community members’ knowledge and skills to deliver services, policies, plans or projects. Because coproduction also embraces conflict between citizens and government, these conflicts in turn demand on-going forums for negotiation so that a key result is improved community-based power and strengthened community associations (Mitlin, 2008). This is exactly what Pappalardo describes as having happened in her process; associations were built and strengthened, while community relations and engagement with government were redefined.

As Pappalardo describes it, coproduction does not just happen by accident or on its own. Technologies of humility must include the (not so) simple tasks of clear note-taking, recording points of agreement and disagreement, and also the more complex skill of actively managing multiple stakeholder perspectives into an ongoing dialogue. She notes the internal struggles that professionals often face, regarding, for example, decisions to suspend (even temporarily) technologies of hubris and embrace those of humility. She notes, in what might have been a humbling experience for some professionals, “I learned from them because I’ve never studied organic farming.”

In most public settings, professionals are encouraged to demonstrate their proficiency and fluency with problem solving, and they frequently downplay or just ignore what falls outside their field of vision, perhaps overstating whatever falls within that scope. For instance, statistics offer a choice between type 1 and type 2 errors. The first contribute to false positives while the second to false negatives, which might keep us from acting when we ought. Pappalardo suggests a method for avoiding perhaps the more important type 3 error – getting the “right answer to the wrong question” (Schwartz & Carpenter, 1999). Planners and other professionals are trained to spend far too much time sorting through type 1 and 2 errors, but not on processes for avoiding these more significant type 3 errors.

As important as Pappalardo’s story is, I was left yearning for more. How did she deal with recalcitrant participants? What happened, and how were specific conflicts managed? Did some key stakeholders leave or refuse to enter the process? Technologies of humility must recognize that expert frameworks often create high entry barriers, and claims of professional objectivity often hide the exercise of professional judgment. Opening up different claims – be they by professionals or community residents – is what Pappalardo implies happened when the process focused on implementation challenges. Rather than seeking mono-causal explanations and solutions, the process allowed participants to reflect on the ambiguity of their experiences, and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of alternative actions.

Pappalardo offers us rich details for some of the specific technologies of humility, including:

- (1) Listening actively,
- (2) Recording agreements and disagreement as you go,

- (3) Involving broad stakeholders, including NGOs and government,
- (4) Valuing local knowledge,
- (5) Focusing on shared interests (i.e. what do we want?) not just deficits (i.e. what is wrong here?),
- (6) Learning by doing with participants in real places,
- (7) Drafting ground rules for decision-making,
- (8) Institutionalizing the process.

Of course, these same technologies remind us of those clearly and convincingly articulated by practitioners of consensus building and democratic public policy (Reich, 1990; Susskind et al., 1999).

As mentioned above, Pappalardo's reflections might have offered more on how conflicts were managed throughout the process. We might also ask if the "community" that came together at the end was representative of different interests and allowed the resulting outcomes to be viewed as legitimate to different stakeholders. She notes that people did drop out of the process along the way, and this is common in difficult, on-going public processes. The institutionalization challenge, or how processes might evolve from ad hoc efforts to sustained, meaningful engagement and shifts in the balance of power, also remains uncertain in this case. Clearly some policy "entrepreneurs" benefited and moved into positions of power as a result of the process in the Simeto Valley, but I was left uncertain about whether and how such a rich process might have altered local governance structures. This in no way discounts the important insights that such a process can have for practitioners everywhere – as it emphasizes how technologies of humility are critical for democratic problem solving.

### Notes on contributor

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## On the challenges of participatory mapping

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### *Relevance to education and training of planners*

This story of participatory mapping in the Simeto Valley is a call for planning education to give as much priority to the training of social engagement skills as it gives to the training of technical skills. Even where the technical intervention seems obvious, the process of arriving at that intervention and sustaining it matters significantly. This requires a combination of participatory mapping, research, and planning skills, and applies to both training and professional practice levels. As this case demonstrates, participatory planning is a reciprocal process: it adds value to both planners and local communities. Pappalardo's story is a striking example of participatory research and planning being applied at a collaborative level, where researchers and local stakeholders engage as colleagues, combining their different skills and knowledge in a process of mutual learning. It also further shows that both theoretical and field-based learning of participatory research and planning are critical in planning education, as they help refine theory to inform practice, where lessons learned can refine theory and inform better practical applications, respectively. Further, the story underscores that the way training for participatory planning is conducted will significantly shape the quality of skills that planning students develop.

Learning in the field, therefore, is crucial for training planners in participatory methods. It not only prepares planners to engage with practical issues of participatory planning, but it also helps students and instructors assess theoretical applications vis-à-vis realities on the ground. Such realities include the sociopolitical dynamics and their meaning to decision-making and delivery of development. For instance, informal and even illegal structures, common among vulnerable communities in many parts of the world, present complex contexts that planners have to deal with, and as Pappalardo indicates, finding an entry point is not always easy.

Introducing such projects is often characterised by adversity that demands building dialogue and at times even necessitates redesigning the whole project to accommodate elements that were unforeseen; hence testing its flexibility. As projects advance, adversarial moments are common. Consequently, the success of participatory processes requires managing adversity and facilitating alignment to project objectives, even while applying technical expertise in synthesising issues and working with stakeholders to craft operational solutions. The question is thus: how well are planners equipped to execute such processes? One way to do this is to take learning out of lecture rooms or studios so that students have opportunities to nurture facilitation, communication, negotiation and mediation skills, to test theoretical planning skills and prepare for professional practice.

The experience of Pappalardo also calls upon educators and practitioners to rethink the standardised processes and solutions of planning education and practice to solving familiar problems, now applied in unique contexts. Planning interventions in contexts such as Simeto Valley could disturb or threaten an established business-as-usual, the prevailing normative order. Subsequently, interventions may need to be different, to move towards adopting standards negotiated and endorsed by the stakeholders, including planning authorities.

Indeed, the persistent absence of these authorities and formal planning creates an environment for a parallel system to evolve that conventional planning knowledge and practice may ignore. Hence, the need for planning education and practice to leverage participatory mapping and research as an

opportunity to recast planning theory and practice, paying attention to what prevailing contexts demand of planners and planning systems. For instance, Pappalardo acknowledges that before the project, a map seemed ordinary, and only later did she realise the impact of participatory mapping. Maps facilitated a deeper understanding of the context, opened up reflections from the local community, and relationships improved between planners and the local community. Often, participatory mapping ends up "mapping the un-mapped" – assigning spatial attributes to phenomena that formal mapping and planning would not identify, and provoking critical reflections about alternative solutions. Eventually, various aspects that were underestimated become part of the building blocks towards solving the problem.

Such mapping broadens the scope of planning. Interventions involving participatory research and planning demand that planners and researchers possess interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge of diverse and interconnected issues, as Pappalardo acknowledges: "my knowledge as a planner was applied when we had to make the synthesis of that huge variety of ideas ... my role could be to try to make sense of this diversity". The project would later require appreciation of diverse disciplines such as environment, tourism, farming. For example, planners engaging in an informal settlement improvement project could easily find themselves addressing water and sanitation delivery, housing design issues, for example. Although such interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary learning is increasingly finding space in the training of planners, its practical testing is quite important to improving the quality of applied skills. In addition, such engagement with diversity calls for planners to be trained as critical thinkers, where through reflection one is able to challenge the relevance of classroom skills, to redefine approaches, and to appreciate the value of community knowledge – to recognise the value of reciprocity in engagement.

Both learners and practitioners engaging in participatory process ought to be flexible, yet remain strategic towards attaining objectives. Often, if problems are framed too early, serious set-backs could result, especially where flexibility and management of adversity is overlooked. Indeed, adversity should be interpreted as an opportunity. Pappalardo's story expresses optimism and excitement before the field activities commenced; however, this could quickly turn into frustration after the realisation that the informal institutions, controlled by Mafia power, were not initially welcome to the engagement. Such experience is perhaps typical of first-time enthusiasts of participatory planning processes. But, against that backdrop, the story raises a critical question: what are planners working under such conditions supposed to do?

Ordinarily, such conditions exist in multiple cities, and specifically in developing world cities, as urban informality commands a substantive share of how communities and neighbourhoods operate. It thus calls for our critical reflection on the kinds of skills that planners working in such conditions should acquire. Evidently, the capacity to mobilize and facilitate active stakeholder participation, and the ability to facilitate active participatory mapping and planning workshops and offer project leadership are among the skills that planners will increasingly need.

### ***Drawing lessons for improving methodology***

It is commendable how this project sustained engagement, even during set-backs; the team ensured that confrontational issues were resolved and all stakeholders remain focused. Pappalardo refers to mediating adversities: confrontations were turned into opportunities to obtain opinions from the community about ways to counter emerging conflicts. She reports that "when it came to deciding on a common solution, it became more complicated ... because everyone wanted to do something different". That in itself requires group problem-solving or facilitation skills.

Managing community expectations in such projects can be critical. Pappalardo stresses the importance of implementing "something real on the ground, real projects that people could touch"; otherwise the project would lose all the gains after a long journey of participation. In other cases, cycles of

participation can result in community frustration, because no change is forthcoming. This presents fundamental challenges to the way community mapping and participatory action research projects are designed.

Whereas academia is concerned about research and advancing knowledge, communities are concerned about their welfare improvement, and similarly, municipal authorities would likely be interested in work that translates into tangible change on the ground. This implies that even when projects of this nature are designed for academic (learning) purposes, it is essential to keep in mind that communities expect tangible projects, or at least a roadmap for their potential implementation. This also raises ethical issues: is it right to engage communities in long-term participatory activities, risking that projects terminate without communities accruing real benefits? Planners and researchers alike should take care to generate participation without raising unnecessary hopes.

While the scarcity of resources to initiate real projects cannot be ignored, several measures can help when projects are done by academic institutions.<sup>1</sup> One is to ensure that municipal authorities are actively involved, as in the process they could agree with the local community on a project(s) to implement. Another is to make clear from the start that few resources exist to implement real projects now, but that work will contribute towards developing potential projects. In my experience working with informal settlement communities, even where resources were scarce to design real projects, communities always found that data and plan proposals produced in the projects became powerful tools for advocacy. This process echoes a form of activist urban planning, which in some cases ends up with municipalities adopting community proposals and hence directing more investment into such communities, although often through sociopolitical struggles. Both cases argue for designing participatory action research projects as long-term engagements.

The Simeto Valley project has envisioned such long-term engagement through creating an "assembly". However, the project might have been better designed so that results were achieved incrementally, to counter frustrations that emerge as communities lose patience in waiting for real change. Certainly, participation fatigue can threaten long-term processes, especially where the results of participation are not evident in the short term.

University schedules often restrict work to annual academic calendars, so projects must be designed to be independent of these limits, and to draw on a reliable resource pool that can sustain a longer duration project. At the community level, participation is often motivated by urgency to solve a particular problem, after which dynamics in participation could negatively affect the project, including when communities find solutions to be taking longer than expected. When community structures change, the result could be delays, demotivation, demobilisation and eventually collapse of the entire project. These are vital lessons that need to be captured in a structured learning, over a long period of time, with an overarching objective to build a theory and community of practice. Perhaps then schools of planning ought to establish community planning centres or research programmes where students will be presented with an opportunity to test normative theoretical knowledge alongside technical skills in contexts necessitating public debate about inequalities, disenfranchisement, and overlapping power relations – formal and informal – amid urgent pressures for change, as portrayed in Simeto Valley.

Where schools can involve students in real projects, it is critical to merge learning and expertise. This means that experts and practitioners add more value to participatory processes designed to produce implementable projects. Students may be limited in advancing projects beyond research and learning, but they also learn more practical skills if they work jointly with practitioners. Moreover, all key stakeholders should be engaged, including stakeholders considered as hostile to the project. Surprisingly, there are cases where stakeholders initially considered hostile

turn out to be vital assets for the project. Their turnaround has significant impact on motivating other stakeholders.

Caution should, however, be taken to ensure that there is no elite capture of participatory processes. This happens especially in contexts where more powerful stakeholders with vested interests assume leadership roles in the project. So it is important to consult other stakeholders informally about their views on particular events, outside normal activities like meetings. An example of this was presented by Pappalardo who indicated that after certain "heated meetings", informal consultations with various participants helped improve the engagement strategy. Hence the need to diversify modes of participation, including those that allow anonymous contributions.

This story definitely provokes planners to recognise informality, perhaps as a crucial strand of knowledge and expertise in planning. Participatory skills are imperative: knowing who to engage, how to deal with contexts like this where engagement could mean engaging with illegal structures (e.g. powerful Mafia or similar powers such as community gangs). But we must also appreciate the importance of authorities even in places where their power or influence is deemed absent, as this helps leverage public support and perhaps enables disenfranchised communities to find value in participation, as a process to initiate change where all key stakeholders are involved. However, there is a risk of exposing the disenfranchised and vulnerable communities to more dissatisfaction and heightened levels of unhappiness, especially where after opening up their comprehension of the depth of the issues at hand, no transformative projects get implemented.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, while the case presented by Pappalardo is not necessarily unique, it raises critical issues for planning education and practice. The case demonstrates the potential of community mapping and participatory action research to recast social power arrangements and open avenues for more collaboration and joint solution development to complex urban planning decisions. These kinds of projects may involve navigating diversity, adversities, conflicts and conflicting rationalities, but first-hand experience of issues can help strengthen planning methodologies so espoused in theory but so rare in practice. Evidently, then, this case study calls for our rethinking of planning education and practice.

### **Notes on contributor**

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## Mapping as the intersection of artistry and governance

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What could seem like an overly detailed self-analysis of her difficulties in fitting into the Simeto planning process actually makes a lot of sense in an experience that belongs to a new field in planning, one which is overturning the traditional relationship between institutions and communities. This new field is characterized by highly innovative margins of experimentation with tools for collective learning and action research practices.

The planning tools utilized in this experience – community maps, inspired by the eco-museums' experiences<sup>2</sup> (Boylan, 1992), and various river agreements (the Italian 'river agreements' national network has celebrated in 2015 its 10th year of existence) – have both been at the center of many high quality experiences of civic mobilization (Bastiani, 2011), as part of a broader movement of critical reflection about themes of the conflict between centralized decision-making and local community self-determination in a globalized world.

The way Giusy tells her personal story of being a student, then a graduate student, and finally a planner generates empathy in the reader while transmitting – very softly but also in a highly effective way – a series of methodological lessons related to the design and management of interactive social processes. She faces the process with a doubtful attitude toward the role of the practitioner in action, but her doubts and frustrations do not come just from her lack of experience; they are mostly related to the intrinsic difficulties of such processes, such as: the passage from a specific discomfort ("no" to the incinerator) and sectorial goals toward a holistic approach to the river territory, the lack of institutional stability, the challenge of building collective memory and awareness, alternating between active phases and back flows, and so on.

In between all these doubts, the uncertainty of Giusy about her role becomes a stimulus for an expert reader like myself (someone who has worked on several community maps and various river agreements) to transform those personal uncertainties in a way that allows both for insightful reconsideration of earlier projects and then for innovating processes and planning tools. The stimulus is also for the reader-student who can use the whole path of self-analysis for driving away, ahead of time, some fears of the uncertainties of the planning profession.

All the doubts about the planner's role in the various phases of the participatory planning process can become messages to be used to reshape the planning curriculum. Taking into account the fact that the expert is internal to the process, his/her competences require:

- (1) Relying on multidisciplinary competences (individual, or preferably team-based); this is the only way to answer research and planning questions that come from local actors who possess very subtle and dense knowledge and who therefore can make the researcher seem "ignorant" (e.g. in Neviano, a small town in the Salento region, while making a community map, I identified only three landscape units while the local residents had identified about thirty!),
- (2) Knowing how to activate and manage enhanced communicative tools,
- (3) Merging the capacity of being a planner with that of territorial designer. The planner is an expert manager of processes ("being a bridge for the different ideas and produce synthesis... keeping all the different pieces together... organizing the chaos" are some of the specificities that are discovered by Giusy), but the planner has also to be able to design and propose visions,



scenarios, while dialoguing with sectorial projects (through the multidisciplinary team). The scenario has to cover issues related to hydrology, environment, ecology, planning, urban design, agriculture, landscape architecture, local economy, for example. I have watched many expert facilitators of participatory processes collecting on post-it notes ideas related to issues they knew nothing about, so "I had to understand what they were talking about" are the right words of Giusy referring to farmers, fishermen, ecologists, tourist operators, for example. The best option is to be soft facilitators of participatory processes while having clear visions on how to shape a unitary strategic frame by building on the small pieces of sectorial knowledge that emerge from the participatory process.

Many narratives describing participatory planning experiences tend to emphasize the facilitation and management techniques, which are mostly already codified, and which are certainly important. However, it is more important to stress, understand, and support the collective learning process, promoting the collective place-consciousness. This is the way to move away from the individual solution to a problem in order to reach forms of collective management of the territorial heritage as common good ("commoning"). In the Simeto story, the passage from the community map to the River Agreement ("to reach something concrete") represents such a passage (not to be taken for granted) from the growth of residents' awareness of territorial values to the challenge of collective self-government (the network of 10 municipalities), which comes with the awareness that reaching "concreteness" requires new forms of cooperation with local public bodies.

In contemporary societies the level of expropriation of contextual knowledge and the individualization of the inhabitants, transformed into customers and consumers, is very high. Therefore, as this case shows, the reconstruction of active citizenship and collective forms of care of heritage assets depend very importantly upon citizens reflecting seriously in new ways upon the meaning and value of the places in which they live and work, coming to terms with their identifying characteristics and their potential values.

As we have also seen in this case, the community mapping served as the primary instrument of this path for shaping new collective assessments in later stages (as Giusy says, "before starting the project I could not imagine how powerful a map could be").

A satisfactory explanation of an experience of community mapping requires not only that we go, in general, into the details of the process of social interaction and its development, but also specifically into the mapping process. From this point of view, Giusy's text gives us the image of groups that discuss and some who take notes and mark on the map. At the end, the satisfaction for the map emerges (as a set of signs and drawings, not only words, which highlight "that on one place there are different ideas or in another place the same ideas can be").

From these references it seems that the map is mainly a way to write down the ideas ("the real problem was to make the synthesis - to try to make sense of what we had collected").

In this regard, I think that the map should include broader meanings: for example, it should allow the process of reconstruction of intergenerational memory of places ("when people were bathing in the river", or the ancient crafts); it should re-create affection, to create a desire to return to the river; here again it should be seen as a potential generator of territoriality.

But above all, in the construction of the map I think critically important is the mobilization of local artistic knowledge (painters, poets, writers, artisans, historians, teachers and students, for example): the art of making the map is an expression and a work of folk art, but it is also the first constitutive and statutory act of incorporation of the new community that self-recognizes itself in the creative and collective act. In this sense, I think that a very important indicator in the assessment of a participatory



process should be the artistic quality of the collectively produced map, which reveals the depth, richness and creative effort of exploring and studying the identities of places and the emerging re-identification with them.

For this reason, we have long studied the West Sussex parish maps (known from the testimony of Kim Leslie, 2006) that inspired us with their innovative artistic techniques, for example, in the collective construction of our Apulian eco-museum maps.

### Notes

1. The concept of eco-museums originated in France and was developed by Georges Henri Rivière and Hugues de Varine, who coined the term “*écomusée*” in 1971. The term “*éco*” is a shortened form for “*écologie*”, but it refers especially to a new idea of holistic interpretation of cultural heritage, in opposition to the focus on specific items and objects performed by traditional museums.
2. The 2000 World Water Forum defined the “River Agreement” as a form of agreement which permitted the “implementation of a system of rules in which the criteria of public utilities, economic profitability, social value and environmental awareness are equally involved in the research for effective solutions” for every river basin. The basin is identified as a unit of reference for the policies supporting biodiversity as a “territory whose limits are not political boundaries, but geographical and social boundaries of the ecosystems and settled human communities.” The River Agreement implements the European Union principles of democratic participation in decisions that are the backbone of the recent Lisbon Treaty: the community is called upon to develop a shared vision for the development of the basin, promoting dialogue among parties with different own interests.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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