PRACTICAL PLANS:

REFUGEES, SPATIAL DESIGN, AND A WORKSHOP OF PLANNING

Marco Cremaschi[a]

Abstract

Migration generates both challenges and opportunities. The magnitude of flows and effects on local resources are rarely equally distributed, indeed, the demographic size and economic strength of arrival cities or regions consistently affect outcomes. The nature of these challenges and opportunities is, therefore, extremely varied. These elements have already structured a network of places, refugee-cities, integration hubs, and transit points that play different roles in the increasing process of human mobility. The paper discusses the role of planners in dealing with refugee crises starting from the experience of a university workshop. This allows for a plea in favour of a different approach to planning, one that insists on practice, spatial strategies, and implementation. The paper also illustrates a different teaching approach that takes into account the need to integrate different forms of knowledge and disciplinary perspectives.

Keywords

Practice, refugees, teaching, spatial strategies, planning

a   Ecole Urbaine Sciences Po, France. E-mail: marco.cremaschi@sciencespo.fr

1. Introduction

Urban planners, as well as most social scientists, have a direct interest - besides an intellectual duty - to study the places of crises and social emergencies. Unprecedented situations are, in fact, the only opportunity to observe phenomena still in formation; moreover, a statu-nascenti situation is the closest to a laboratory experiment in the hard sciences. The 2008 global crisis has multiplied the number of places in crisis, and a new cleavage is rising within a few European areas in recovery (Rosés and Wolf, 2018) as well as the many afflicted by the consequences of the economic transition.

The refugee crisis fits in between these processes, and poses difficult questions to both growing metropolises and decaying marginal areas. Starting from an educational experience, this paper critically examines the interplay between the related ambitions of combining a technical-scientific understanding of spatial issues with an ethical commitment to 'repair the world'. In addition, it reviews the conceptual implications of the commitment to sustain those localities most exposed to the worst effects of global crises.

This paper describes an educational experience that tried to address this double challenge entailing a sort of 'mission impossible' – engaging localities while addressing non-local issues – which approaches the planning tradition of dealing with wicked problems. The ambition of the paper is twofold: first, to discuss the organization of a learning experience on a border problem – planning for refugees in weak places – which raises profound ethical and theoretical concerns; secondly, to advance our specific understanding of planning as a policy-design activity aimed at suggesting provisional spatial arrangements, yet achievable and critically responsive to larger global changes.

In order to introduce the topic, the paper rapidly summarizes, in the next section, the main trends in migration flows and the condition of refugees in Europe today. It criticizes the notion of crisis and emergency, stressing instead the long-term features of the process of immigration. However, it also acknowledges the uncertainty of future trends, and the need to address, simultaneously, global concerns and local priorities.

The following section addresses the peculiar situation of the municipality of Lampedusa in both geographical and geo-political terms. The border condition and its geographic marginality impacts on the institutional capacity of the island to manage its own development.

The fourth section describes the teaching and conceptual criteria behind the preparation and organization of a specific learning environment, a one-week in-situ workshop in Lampedusa, organized in May 2016 by a team from Sciences Po[1], Paris, which had the aim of tackling the impacts of migratory flows while supporting the development of the village. This reasoned chronicle tries to summarize a few methodological points, addressing, in particular, the challenge raised by the time pressure placed on the exercise.

What can we learn from Lampedusa? The methodology adopted is discussed with reference in particular to the different ways of integrating different disciplinary views and concerns; and the need to combine different forms of knowledge. In particular, the fifth section discusses how planners can deal with the refugee crisis by delving into the growing networking of local actors.

On a more general level, the workshop also taught participants something about the practice of planning itself. The sixth section deals with the role of planning when facing the issues of refugees' transition. Again, the need to link development to non-local scales questions the capacity of planners to deal with change in general terms. Linking practice and planning, while turning away from the high-theory ambitions, paves the way to a potentially more successful way of addressing local issues.

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1   The Master's in Urban Planning and Design is offered at the School of Urban Planning of SciencesPo, a research university focused on the social sciences. The Urban School of Sciences Po aims at training specialists of the 'construction' of urban and regional policies in a multi-disciplinary professional culture. The team of the Cycle d'Urbanisme included Marco Cremaschi, director; Irène Mboumoua, academic coordinator; Jérôme Baratier, Marie Bassi, Alessandro Formisano, teachers; Marina Marino, Davide Cornago, Cesare Onorato, tutors; and Jérôme Michel et Coralie Meyer, assistants.

Finally, the seventh section illustrates some general implications for practice[2] of the teaching approach deployed during the workshop, again noting the need to integrate different forms of knowledge and disciplinary perspectives.

In conclusion, this allows for a plea in favour of an approach to planning that insists on a combination of practice, spatial strategies, and implementation.

2. Places vs. Politics

The arrival of refugees in Europe is not recent (Gabaccia, 2004). Over the past thirty years, Europe has received 11.6 million new arrivals. From an analytical point of view, it is worth considering the current arrival of refugees as the latest step in a long transition which can be traced back to at least the late 1940s (Panayi, 2009). According to recent Eurostat figures, foreigners account for about 7 percent of citizens within the EU (Vasileva, 2012). In 2016, member states took more than 1 million decisions on asylum claims. For refugees, figures relating to main actors, flows, routes and policies have evolved on rhythms dictated by, sometimes unpredictable, international events (Aiyar et al., 2016). In 2012 there were 336,000 registrations, yet of late, the annual figure has almost doubled from the 700,000 peak registered in 1992 after the fall of the Berlin Wall (European Commission Migration and Home Affairs, 2017).

It is clear that migratory flows are not a temporary event (Agier, 2010). In 2016, about 140,000 refugees were registered in transition centres in Italy, almost the same number as the previous year. A few islands, local authorities and communities, like Lampedusa and Ventimiglia in Italy, Lesvos in Greece, Grande-Synthe, and Calais in France (Babels, 2017) are on the forefront. For twenty years, Lampedusa has been committed to providing hospitality to thousands of refugees, while at the same time tackling a dispute over tourism development and environmental protection (Bassi, 2016a). Rather than an emergency (Guiraudon, 2018), it is a long story (Marrus, 2002).

Although the number of refugees in Europe is not negligible, it corresponds nevertheless to a very small fraction of the European population. As is well known, Europe receives a minor share of the number of people forcibly displaced all over the world. However, both the concen tration of refugees in some entry or transit points, like Calais in France (Collectif, 2016), and the policy of relocation in small com munities have resulted in strong but dissimilar reactions, sometimes racist and violent, sometimes the oppo site, namely, open-handed and inclusive (like the sanctuary city network: RFT, 2016).

Immigration ranks amongst the highest concerns in European public opinion. In 2016 Eurobarometer, immigration recorded 28 percent as an issue of concern, whereas unemployment received 33 percent. The media often discusses this topic as a 'refugee crisis', which did not occur at the continental or national level.[3] Most of the discourses on refugees and emergencies, crisis and urgent interventions, are framed by a strong ideological dimension.

The spatial impact on the territorial development of cities and regions is even more varied as a consequence of the changing European urban landscape. The 2008 economic crisis accelerated the ongoing spatial transformation, accentuating disparities, inequalities and vulnerabilities amongst cities and regions. The regions of Europe are heavily affected by the consequences of the crisis of 2008, either by the effort required to maintain development processes or through the consequences of spatial restructuring. One has to note that the presence of refugees weighs disproportionally on a few regions and localities that the economic crisis of 2008 had already impoverished.

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2   Baum (1997) specifies that practice has its own requirements, different from research or decision making models. Teaching has thus to accommodate to these requirements. While sharing his statement "Planning is a practice, a way of acting", I have to highlight Baum's reminder that most of the planning education is not about practice.

3   Insatisfaction with media coverage is a growing concern for international institutions, the Council of Europe and National aid agency. Hate speeches are multiplied while scant voice is given to refugees and actors of the 'crisis' (see for instance Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017; EJN 2015).

Besides figures, the geographical impact also shows some complex elements. The number of refugees is growing largely due to the Middle East and Afghanistan wars (Agier, 2002); however, regional crises in Africa have generated intense and continuous flows of migrants. In 2015, 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in Europe, half of them from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, there is not a single point of arrival. During the first months of 2016, for instance, refugees' trajectories changed. Large flows followed a few land routes, from Libya to Turkey towards Central Europe and Germany, Greece being one of the major transit points. Governments have established several provisional camps far from the landing islands, along the routes or at border crossing points (Agier, 2011) (Figure 1).
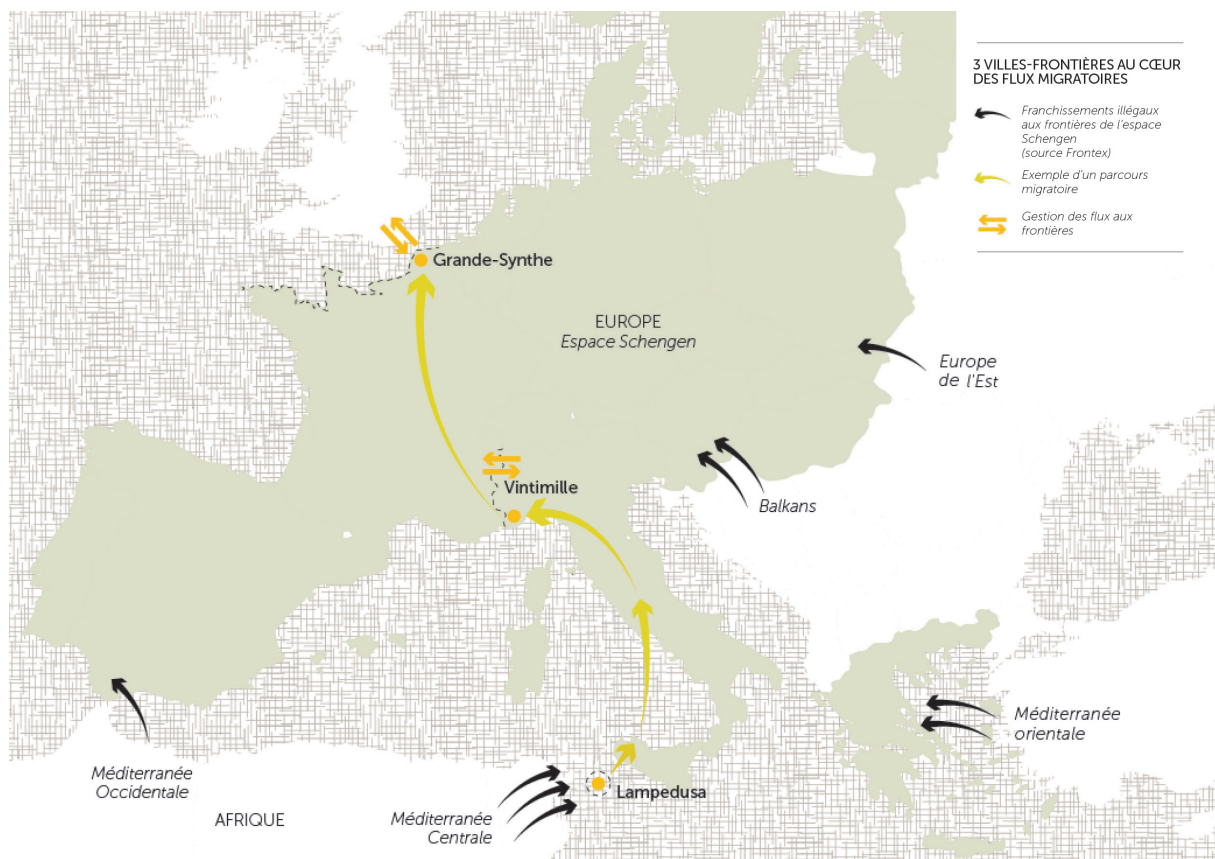

Figure 1 - Map of Border Cities (Source: Laetitia Pieri, Cycle 2016).

Place matters; this is the first element to be acknowledged when approaching these issues, and this raises a considerable challenge to both national integration policies and local spatial planning (Sanyal, 2012). Over the next few decades, whether "by chance or by design" (Altman, 2016), our cities and regions will definitely change, and their po rosity – to refugees as well as to other populations – will be a major variable of this change (Saunders, 2012).

Politics matters as well, in a second and even more difficult way. In fact, new migratory routes have recently exposed nation states and the European Union to new political dilemmas. These dilemmas concern both international policies and the domestic affairs of European countries. The rerouting of the global flows of refugees has also produced an unprecedented impact on the international positioning of the EU.

At a national level, refugees add to the difficult management of integrating the more permanent population of 'legal' migrants; a far higher number than refugees. In a few decades, sometimes in a few years, migrants and the children of migrants have become a permanent feature of all European countries. Most live in large cities, but an increasing number are now located in the countryside. Even the remotest village is today confronted

with the permanent presence of foreign-born inhabitants (Balbo, 2015). Member states face the consequences of a long history of imperfect arrangements in balancing different cultures, faiths, and languages.

Among the commentators (Altman, 2016; Guiraudon, 2018), some point to the fact that the present transition is highly uncertain. In the near future, the flows of migrants and refugees may increase or perhaps decrease, according to a combination of factors; political situations and geographical routes may vary; social profiles, subjective expectations and public controversies will likely evolve. In all scenarios, however, some localities will continue to function as either arrival points, exchange platforms, sanctuaries, or places of integration. Whichever solution is adopted, whichever model of Europe prevails, everyday life in some parts of the EU has already irrevocably changed.

3. Being a Hotspot

Lampedusa is a little island of 20 square kilometres and 5.5 thousand inhabitants, at the end of the European continental platform (Melot, 2009). In 2016, 88,000 refugees landed at Lampedusa, a few hundred less than the year before, while in Italy there were 138,000 refugees hosted in transitional centres. This island has received more than 400,000 immigrants since 1983,[4] more than 80 times its own population.

Although small, Lampedusa poses a considerable challenge to urban planning: the metabolism of the island has changed; water consumption as well as garbage production have rapidly increased. Space and landscape, as well as natural and economic resources are overloaded, and this is not a temporary situation. The resilience capacity of the island is no longer enough to adapt to the refugee crisis.

The presence of refugees in a small community changes the latter's relationship with resources, increases the stresses upon often-exhausted public services, and introduces new populations, cultures and ways of life. The arrival of the refugees has profound impacts, as while affecting all economic activities, some have suffered while others have prospered. Furthermore, the slim public service has suffered an enormous stress, activating new cleavages through the local community, and stirring up local conflicts.

Hence, the notion of crisis acquires other nuances (Guiraudon, 2008). What may be a political crisis at the national level is a material crisis at the local level. From the point of view of the communities on the forefront of the refugee crisis, this is not a temporary effect. Local communities do not have either the political or the financial resources to compensate for the new burdens that they face.

These phenomena are of different natures: insularity in itself, ecological marginality, migrant flows, difficult economic conditions, and global warming are five amongst many. Besides, the economy and institutions are weak, and constantly exposed to the risk of corrupted behaviour.

These "extreme conditions" (Donolo, 2001) increase the reciprocal weakness of the state and society. In addition, the refugee crisis has brought new actors, mostly non-local or even international, who made the local political scene more dynamic.

What does it mean for some localities to become hotspots, to be at the interface between the movement of refugees and the network of intergovernmental relations? What hotspots and camps teach us around Europe is that every city or village is an island: "a strong and fragile island at the same time. Strong in its people, in its knowledge, in its resources, but shaken by global phenomena that overcome it".[5]

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4   Almost 15 thousand, however, drowned at sea (la Repubblica, 18 feb. 2016). In October 2013, the shipwreck of a fishing vessel almost on the shore of Lampedusa caused almost 400 casualties. The catastrophe triggered a vast debate that brought eventually the Italian government to establish a Naval patrolling system named Mare Nostrum, later replaced by the European Frontex (Guiraudon 2018).

5   As Mimmo Zambito, its charismatic vicar, defined Lampedusa: see Cycle (2016, p.5). As a visitor, one is often silently reminded that what Lampedusa threw on the table is its 'body and soul': the geographical space it occupies, and the capacities of its inhabitants to adapt to a fast-evolving environment.

Lampedusa is organised in political forms like all regions. Many public institutions are present, not all are equivalent, and some have strong reputations. Interests associate and act in thick networks through consolidated ties.

Even more importantly, the refugee crisis has brought new actors, mostly non-local or even international to the area and this has contributed to the dynamism of the local political scene (Bassi, 2016b). In the last twenty years, Lampedusa has been striving to preserve its environment while engaging and developing its ability to manage the arrival of thousands of refugees.

Lampedusa had a robust planning approach during the administration of Nicolini. Mrs. Giusi Nicolini,[6] mayor between May 2012 and June 2017, first adopted a firm policy in support of nature and landscape protection, and tried later to put urban developments and sprawl under control. The mayor was also committed to hosting refugees (Lendaro, 2015) while preserving the environment.

In general terms, this exemplifies a condition of weak institutional as well as market organization that planners have rarely addressed. Lampedusa demonstrates critical conditions:[7] a weak economy, a lack of institutional presence (Donolo, 2001), and feeble social capital (Cremaschi, 2006); cumulatively these contribute to an insular and fragile environment. Perhaps unusual for a European observer, these conditions are not uncommon in a global context (Watson, 2003). What then, if plans are not drawn in due and proper form? Combining political economy with neo-institutionalism and paying attention to the empirical forms of collective action (Le Galès and Vitale, 2013), it becomes possible to enquire how places are (somehow) governed; and consequently, we can explore how local actions can be planned.

Though small in size, Lampedusa poses a dramatic challenge to urban planning, combining a situation of possessing a weak economy, geographical marginality and under development, with a tradition of feeble institutional presence and a perennial exposure to the risk of corruption. These conditions are extremes in the sense that they challenge the notion of the state providing societal guidance and acting as a coherent set of institutions and values. Lampedusa thus presents an interesting case study because it seems to require a different planning approach.

4. What a Workshop Does for Participants

The aim was threefold (Cycle, 2016): to find a spatial and strategic solution to the problem of migrants; to propose an articulation between those processes which affect the island at both the local and the global scale; and to inscribe the proposed actions with the more general problem of insularity, in keeping with the mayor's mandate.

The workshop was built upon a few specific characters of the master's programme:

- First, a strong interdisciplinary learning environment.[8] A third of the participants had a degree in architecture; a third in aménagement (urban and regional planning), geography, landscape design, engineering or environmental techniques; the others had a background in a wide range of social sciences (sociology, political science, law, economy, and so on).
- Secondly, the workshop dealt with social issues 'framed in space', and tried to suggest both policies and spatial strategies to address these. In fact, the Cycle d'Urbanisme adds to the various SciencesPo's curricula a unique understanding of physical space, and orientation to designing policies and regulatory systems.

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6   A few months before the workshop, Giusi Nicolini travelled to Sciences Po in Paris to portray her vision to the students of the Cycle. She asked the students to bring ideas and proposals to the island's new master plan.

7   In Italy, many areas of regional decline are neglected, in particular those that are located at the periphery of urban and metropolitan centres. Historically, southern regions have received additional funds; of late, a National policy has addressed marginal areas (aree interne), requiring, however, consistent funds and an ambitious development approach. For a review, see Cremaschi (2010, 2011).

8   For almost 50 years, the Master's degree has provided students with a combination of programs on public policy, social sciences and urban design. The Master's degree stands at the crossroads of planning, design, real estate and urban studies (Micheau, 2009).

- Finally, the participants benefitted from the practical experience and the teamwork previously completed during the internships, tutorships, and study trips that had occurred throughout the course of the master's programme and, in particular, the working group. Participants worked in groups of six or seven throughout the year, under the direction of a practitioner, according to a contractual agreement. A permanent tension between professional experience and academic reflection characterised these classes. A strong emphasis was placed on the 'learning by doing' approach, therefore half the time was devoted to research groups or team work.

The 39 participants had enrolled in 2016 in the Cycle d'Urbanisme[9] and came from a wide range of disciplines; almost all already held a Master's degree. The workshop was the second step of a two-part sequence.

In Paris, students were subdivided in provisional groups according to their topic of interest (initially: economic development, landscape, urban regeneration, public space and the refugee crisis). In 2016, the Mayor Giusi Nicolini and the planners of Lampedusa[10] went to Paris to meet the students and discuss the objectives of the workshop. She evoked the notion of frontier to assert a new role for the island, as an interface between a global stake and the local reality. She wanted to "reverse the logic of the border" and give a new breath to the island: "The drama of the refugee movement has taught us our unique status in the Mediterranean. The time has come to project Lampedusa as the gateway to the European continent".

A series of bibliographic searches through the press, scientific literature, and the reading of technical files made it possible to constitute a database prior to the trip. This more theoretical part reflected on the specific issue of combining different forms of planners' knowledge.

In Lampedusa, the workshop was structured around visits, interviews, and group work. Building on a few previous specificities and previous experiences,[11] the workshop provided full immersion in a context, without restraints.[12] (See Figure 2 that is described in footnote 12.) These visits complemented a vast array of personal explorations, informal meetings, and thematic research.

During the workshop, the participants were expected:

- to understand the situation and identify the conditions that might trigger a project to change;
- to identify the logic and components of a new process of development;
- to locate the actors, analyse their logic and identify the issues at the interface between context and actors.

In particular, the participants engaged in describing the social profile of different groups of populations, their spatial arrangements, the ways in which they organized their everyday lives, and the frictions that resulted from the overlapping of these areas and activities. The challenge was to extract from these spatial practices

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9   Participants: Iliès Acharhabi, Félix Arrivé, Léa Assouline, Éléonore Basset, Anne Bellée, Camille Bourguignon, Maud Chevet, Sarah Colombié, Yann-Kévin Creff, Jean Déal, Clément Derym, Robin Drosson, Emmanuelle Emmel, Boris Fillon, Jules Gallissian, Alix Gastineau, Jérémy Gay, Simon Henry, Helena Hiriart, Cécile Ivanovsky, Sophie Jacquemont, Béatrice Lacombe, Ludovic Lamaire-Maringer, Caroline Lefèvre, Alix Loisier Dufour, Faustine Masson, Cosette Méric, Mark Moulines, Laetitia Pieri, Mathilde Préault, Myriam Ruffa Leclère, Amaranda Sanchez, Xavier Seurre, Eva Terliska, Suzanne Thibault, Camille Thisse, Kieu Mai Truong, Louise Vachon, Florent Vidaling.

10   The site of Lampedusa is well known, the southern Italian island having been challenged by the arrival of refugees for decades; however, a contact with the local urban planners gave rise to the study visit to Lampedusa, as a good example of 'improvisation' (Laws and Forrester, 2015). The costs of the workshop was entirely supported by the School, even though the municipality contributed in kind (office space, time, information, maps), and the partner association ALDA helped in organising the final conference.

11   Thanks to Nicolini, Marino, Onorato and Cornago for having made available all the information and documentary resources that allowed the workshop and the exhibition to be realized.

12   During the visit, for instance, about 70 refugees marched past the church in the centre of the village, against the hotspot. The reception centre of Contrada Imbriacola was declared a hotspot in September 2015, the first of ten structures planned in Greece and Italy. Ten days later, a fire supposedly caused by a few Tunisians who were to be repatriated, damaged the centre. Other fires had taken place in 2009 and 2011. The protest addressed the node of identification, which implies denial of the prosecution of the trip to other countries. That same day, two Coast Guard ships disembarked 121 migrants found by MSF's Bourbon Argos from Libya. They were to be hosted at the hotspot that already had almost 550 migrants.

those elements, which could nourish a development strategy, the main concerns of which were tourism, refugees, and the rehabilitation of the built environment.

Figure 2 - Migrants' Protest in Lampedusa
Source: arch. Florent Vidaling, taken during the workshop in Lampedusa

Within the few available days, the chance of integrating factual knowledge with social interaction could, by no means, lead to sound analytical results. However, it allowed for a few robust propositions, including the following:

- The economic development of the island may organize around the land/sea interface, with the aim of reducing the tourist, energy and maritime dependence of its inhabitants.
- The need for an integrated approach to the migratory phenomena aimed at responding to emergency needs with an integrated vision of culture, education and health services.
- The need for a spatial development plan that proposes to enhance the interface between the settlement and the environment.

In general, the aim was to provide an external perspective on local problems in a forward-looking but realistic approach. Consequently, it was expected that local actors might eventually appropriate the program suggested by the report and adjust the proposed actions to the local context.[13]

Regarding the teaching methodology, the class had a deliberate concern with timing, pressure, and organisation. The participants worked together to identify the appropriate arrangements and organisational solutions, while dealing with emergent issues in a weak economic context, under the pressure of external forces and the extreme conditions of institutional and environmental fragility. The workshop required them to locate the actors and to analyse their logic, in order to identify the issues that existed at the interface between context and actors. In particular, the participants had to provide a social profile of the different groups of

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13   The report was translated in Italian and sent to be diffused to the population. However, a change occurred in the administration in 2017, undermining the dissemination process.

populations and, in so doing, interrogate their spatial arrangements and resulting friction, either through observation or survey.

Additionally, the time limit did not allow for an extensive participatory process, although the inhabitants' practices were taken into account, and the investigation of actors' position was central. Nevertheless, the real process of integrating inhabitants into the workshop was out of reach and, therefore, intentionally left aside.

Finally, the sequence of operations exploited the time constraints, the tension to produce, the need to exchange information and collectively contribute to the different steps of a unitary process. The rhythm of the workshop was extremely intense: every three hours, or at least twice per day, a general session was called. The participants had a slot of one hour to synthesise their work and to put in common ideas and doubts. Every group had five minutes for a rapid presentation. Half of the session was free for participants to mingle in front of the working tables (as in a poster session), asking questions and presenting comments. Late night sessions offered a time for exchanging ideas about the work done and organizing the following day.

This workshop model provided the opportunity for young professionals to work together outside academic obligations, in an advanced, interdisciplinary, and project-oriented atmosphere. The occasion bypassed rigid cognitive patterns by immersing the participants in a 'strangely familiar' context that aroused the inevitable (but not unpleasant) element of surprise while exposing them to an apparent lack of systematic knowledge.[14]

The incumbent deadline and the operating mode implied the need to prioritise all information according to utility and reliability. The workshop exploited the absence of a career-specific or cognitive concern for future professional developments.

During the workshop in Lampedusa the participants learned some of the skills needed for creating urban plans and social research in conditions of urgency and to work as a professional team, integrating competence in a comparatively large group through semi formal procedures of discussion (Figure 3).

They wrote, produced, and printed a report for the Mayor in less than a week (consisting of five production days and 1,600 hours of work). An international conference concluded the workshop, which was organised with the support of the Centre d'Etudes Européenes of SciencesPo and Alda, and aimed to enable the exchange of experiences and best practices between municipalities and policy makers at the forefront of the current migrants' crisis.[15] Finally, in July 2016, an exhibition was organised at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal in Paris by a group of participants, which was later exhibited to the Biennale dello Spazio Pubblico of Rome, in May 2017.

5. Knowledge and Action

While teaching studios have become a growing concern for the education of planners (Long, 2012), workshops are educational events, based upon practices, which aim to deal with a situated context and real situations. Workshops promisingly assemble social concerns with a design oriented tool (Neuman, 2016); they often, but do not necessarily, shoulder the mode of design competitions in order to nurture creativity, and the compact time frame that is typical of design charrettes.

The Lampedusa workshop was intended to encourage participants to develop their critical thinking, reframe their previously acquired professional habits, and enlarge their views and understanding of urban/spatial issues.

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14 The appreciation was very consistent. A final assessment, once returned to Paris, granted very positive returns, both from students and instructors on most of the topics (destination: 100%; instructors 87%; organisation 75%; preparation, however, stuck at 60%).

15 The conference took place in the presence of the MEP Ms. Kyenge, rapporteur for the European Parliament on migrations in the EU. The Mayor of Barcelona Ms. Ada Colau and the Mayor of Palermo M. Leoluca Orlando sent a videomessage. Three mayors, Damien Carême of Grande-Synthe in France, Enrico Loculano of Ventimiglia in Italy and Nicolini exchanged experiences and suggestions for initiatives that might also affect other and larger municipalities.

At the core of the model lay a double concern with practice; the construction of a set of realistic propositions; and a cooperative (not competitive) model of learning and exchanging views around the design process.

Figure 3 - The Strategic Project of "The Green Valley" (Cycle 2016)

Baum (1997) underlined the idea that the gap widens between theory and practice because educators tend to replicate research attitudes. Elaborating on this, the workshop combined a sociological approach with a design approach. This translated into a few main methodological keywords: investigation, immersion, interaction and imagination. While the first pair derive from the quantitative and qualitative tradition of sociological analysis, the second is clearly indebted to a policy-design approach.

The first step of investigation is influenced by a pragmatic approach (Servillo and Schreurs, 2013). The participants prepared some preliminary notes on thematic groups before the trip to Lampedusa, mixing expert data (from statistics and maps) and ordinary information (from newspaper and novels). All sources, however, were derived from an accurate selection of literature and technical documents. This exercise had previously been the object of a few analytical and methodological courses in the first semester (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - The Structure of the Built Environment (Cycle, 2016)

Direct observation of a sensory landscape has a long and varied tradition, which is well inscribed in urban studies (Debord, 1956; Lefebvre, 1974; Lynch, 1960). The participants investigated, in groups, different parts of the island, and thence registered and reciprocally confronted senses of amazement and phenomenological findings; an approach which increasingly complements traditional geographical analysis (Muis, 2016). This exercise had previously been the object of a transversal course developed at the Urban School across all master programmes. Direct observation suggested that three 'spatial ecologies' organise the island: urban space, the natural environment, and the line of fracture induced by areas for migrants. Note that neither population nor ecology claim here any theoretical status; they tentatively distinguish between social groups and environments in order to make progress in analysing the manifold ways in which actors relate to places.

Interactive knowledge developed through dialogue and interviews with the main actors, as pointed out by Lindblom and Cohen (1979). A list of interviews was preselected during the first preparatory phase and enriched in situ. Moreover, in this case, this was part of the methodological and analytical tools provided in class earlier in the year (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007). Engaging in a conversation with actors enables a better understanding and allows for the interpretation of context in a less superficial way. For instance, it rapidly became clear that the field of action lay at the interface between four "populations": the inhabitants, the tourists, the migrants and the growing body of non-local professionals induced by the presence of the latter.

By imagination, we mean the specific form of knowledge retrofitted into the process by a projection into a future state designed by projects and policy interventions. The matching between populations and ecologies was considered to be the initial frame of all possible developments. The intersection between populations and ecologies frames the possible evolution. Within this, it becomes possible to study which interfaces evolve, and which opportunities develop.

This latter step eventually delves into the strengths of what even Wildavsky (1973) appreciated of planning, though in an ironic and critical way: planning is not a rational enterprise, on the contrary it has an inherent 'theological' side (that is, normative and visionary). Friedmann (1995) too emphasized the "normative mode of theorizing" at the core of planning. Responding to how the actors normatively define their expectations (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003), planners interpret the situation in actors' own terms, which enables them to draw significant proposals even if the outcome is necessarily uncertain and provisional.

6. Refugees, networks and planners

Aside from the material outcomes, the workshop brought both participants and instructors to a better conceptual awareness of the place of planning and design.

A first conclusion hints at the limitations of the traditional forms of urban statutory planning. Since the late 1980s, the French notion of Urbanisme has been reshaped around a strong interventionist attitude that relies heavily on the notion of the collective management of urban redevelopment.

Urbanisme addresses the spatial transformation of cities and countryside, and contributes to their social, economic, and political adaptation and development. Stemming from a variety of disciplines concerned with human settlements, it is a rich and comprehensive field, requiring specialised technical knowledge, which often leads to specific urban design proposals.

However innovative from a design perspective, Urbanisme focuses mainly upon the built environment, and implies a growing economy. In contrast, the approach adopted in the workshop focused on spatial design and the development of local societies under the new conditions of global flows and emergent crises.

Thus, a second conclusion was that planners have to get involved in broader actions beyond the aims of regulatory planning and/or the design of built environments. The aim of the class was to experiment with planning in real world conditions, and to answer explicit needs through an integrated multidimensional and multi-scalar approach, which combined a strong physical orientation with the highest possible awareness of political and policy dimensions. In this sense, the notion of 'practical plans' looks beyond the technical and political models of regulatory planning to see how collective actions can address exceptional problems such as the refugee crisis in a context where both institutions and the market are weak. These places have become global thresholds and have somehow connected in a network that links the landing territories to the integration cities. The network draws on the trajectories of the immigrants as well as increasingly on the institutional connections of organizations, policy communities, and NGOs. To manage these problems, it is necessary to connect actors who operate at different geographical scales. Such a network would allow cities where refugees settle to exchange knowledge and improve their approaches. The policy is also modelled on archipelagos or long networks like the trajectories of migrants.

Consequently, the design of places cannot be severed from an appreciation of networks even at the scale on an island like Lampedusa. "Far from being deprived of resources Lampedusa suffers from a lack of connection and development of these potential assets" (Cycle, 2016, p.5).

Lampedusa has, in fact, been able to connect to a larger network of centres dealing with the integration of migrants. Indeed, a network of the border mayors has been set up in Lampedusa and signed by several cities including Pozzallo, Riace, Ventimiglia, Calais, Lesbos, and Barcelona. According to this approach, all these places are not islands, but knots of an emerging network.[16]

There is no doubt that a friction exists, as several NGOs pointed out. The small community of Grand-Synthe represents a good example, having succeeded in forcing the government to take up the responsibility to shelter the refugees (Cherblanc, 2016; D'Haenens, 2017).

However, the debate on the arrival of refugees has already had dramatic consequences for the political balance, sometimes unexpectedly. It will take time to resolve these disputes, and it is unclear whether this emerging network may affect the EU and its international position. In all scenarios, some localities will function as a

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16   In May 2006, these shelter towns met in Barcelona and later in Lampedusa. Notably, the mayor of Barcelona Ada Colau declared in September 2015 that "we will do everything we can to participate in a network of shelter towns". The prominent philosopher Jacques Derrida added that "We expect from shelter cities what we give up asking the state." In 2016, Nicolini declared to the newspaper *la Repubblica* that Barcelona sent help and experts to Lampedusa and Lesbos.

crossing platform. Perhaps these can also teach us how to manage the change that will affect the geography of Europe as well as its 'political ecology'. Such a situation forces planners to act, as national states do not have clear strategies, and market forces are absent or do not have the interest or capacity to intervene.

The limited scope of traditional planning, the constraint of integrating various sets of development actions, and the need to address networks and places at the same time, though by no means original conclusions, have the consequence of imposing an intimidating list of challenges, well beyond the scope of the workshop. These are general concerns that planning has however the need to address; all might find some support in existent academic debate.

7. Plans and Practice

A large part of the planners' debates over the last 30 years has concentrated on discussing the virtues and plights of either state-led actions or market-oriented partnerships. Not surprisingly, most of the justifications for planning rely onto two main pillars: either that planning produces an efficient functional setting that maximizes capital accumulation, taking into account for instance transportation and utilities' networks; or that planning allows for addressing market failures, such as poverty, pollution, or land reclamation.

As is well known, these two major justifications have been often questioned. Foucauldian critiques have clarified the role of planning amongst other governmental techniques (Scott, 1998; Yiftachel, 1998). From this perspective, concerns arise with regard to the large-scale changes that often do not produce the sort of positive trickle-down effects that were expected. Many great expectations have been eroded, as is well known in development economics (Hirschman, 1967), by unintended and unforeseen consequences.

Recently, self-organisation and microdesign (such as acupuncture: Lerner, 2014) have been rehabilitated by many approaches. They would eventually trickle-up the positive effects of self-organising systems that are supposed to produce, in turn, a progressive improvement of urban social conditions – "a thousand tiny empowerments", as Leonie Sandercock (1997, p.129) expectantly put it. However important, micro-events cannot open the boundaries of closed communities; additionally, they cannot introduce innovative elements such as new capacities or new actors. Many of the leading models of planning, such as communicative or insurgent planning, overstate the force and capacity of civil societies to stand against the state (Watson, 2002), leaving us unfit to react to the proliferation of disorder (Donolo, 2001). Moreover, they ritually appear to celebrate harmless social practices (Bianchetti, 2016). Essentially, both justifications ignore the condition of weak governments and weak markets that characterize a vast number of peripheral European regions. Extreme situations are dense with intractable problems (Schon and Rein, 1995) that require planners to deal with ongoing controversies. At the core of most socio-technical controversies that deal with these problems, new assemblages of actors go beyond the commonplace opposition between technical and local knowledge, and allow for the rediscovering of the technical expertise of users and the combination of formal and informal forms of knowledge (Tironi, 2015).

Furthermore, another model of social change is discussed within scholarly literature, which depends on the social connectivity that exists among actors across geographical scales. Connectivity spurs a potential for collaborating and exchanging information and knowledge. In this case, planning selects critical actions and empowers agents, enabling them to cross impeding spatial boundaries or global scales. Thus, it is possible to check back on the possibilities of political and collective actions (Le Galès and Vitale, 2013). Governing is somehow possible, and is often the result of networks tying together actors across usual cleavages: institutions and NGOs, public and private, technicians and politicians (a recent example can be found in Sotomayor and Daniere, 2017).

Planning and space are thus embedded in specific forms of social change that new interventions might activate. Change occurs at different scales and in different ways. The plan is defined as the interface, the 'translation agency', which is built among a number of actors, some of them institutions, involved in a situation. This interface is contingent upon a spatial and geographical situation. All societies are in fact established in space,

although all spatial features are social constructions (boundaries, distance, concentration, symbolism and so on). Setting up such a conversation within the context implies the recognition of the historical interaction between things and objects that has been continuously mediated in a reflexive way.

Eventually, the plan results from a conversation between materials, objects, and actors, which is embedded in time, space, bodies, and relations. However, a concern for things is recent in planning. We need to tackle at the same time the hybrid objects we work with (Beauregard, 2012), and the historical, political and economic assemblages of our age (Giardini, 2015). As for this, it is possible to rediscover the virtue of a project approach, as a form of limited action and local rationality, with the paradoxical yet modest strength of an uncompleted 'low theory' (Verma, 2011).

8. Conclusions and Betrayals

In the definition provided by Hamdi, "practice (is) that skilful art of making things happen" (2013: XIX). One has to acknowledge that this quality has not been among the most acclaimed virtues of planning thus far. Rather, the visionary function of planning has mostly served high-modern, over ambitious, rhetorical schemes (Scott, 1998). However, a relationship with practice is not the problem of planning alone. If one agrees that politics is not just an arena, a profession, or a system, politics also shares the same troubled relationship.

It is an uncomfortable position, as Ben Jelloun (Markhal, 1987) once clearly formulated, a seemingly double bind: if you are committed to planning and practice, you are probably betraying both of them.[17] The frame of high modernism makes planning and practice clash though their apparent ties.

We can, however, think of urban planning in a different way, as a part of an institutional sedimentation, though probably not an emergent one, nor the most important (recently). This paper makes an effort, to demonstrate that urban planning can help us focus upon the boundaries and spatial limits that organize and sometimes constrain public and private actions.

As for the concept of 'Practical Plans', the antonymic friction between the two terms projects planning beyond the divide between technical and political issues. In non-ordinary situations, another approach is required. Exceptional conditions include those where both state and market institutions are weak and clear-cut roles fade away. Since the 2008 crisis, means of development are lacking in a large part of Europe, and a concern with the spatial restructuring of the continent is rising everywhere.

Part of this concern is due to the magnitude of refugee flows, which raises challenges for cities and localities. The experience of a workshop such as this one can open a reflection on different approaches to planning. In tackling spatial strategies, planning has focused upon implementation issues at the expense of other considerations.

Therefore, this example offers a model for a teaching approach that addresses some crucial loopholes in the practice of planning. Overall, a practical approach to planning teaches the need to integrate different forms of knowledge into the construction of a proposal for collective actions. This raises, in turn, vast theoretical concerns; from the point of view of spatial design, the incomplete process of theorisation offers a paradoxical opportunity to bridge the gap between lay and expert knowledge.

In particular, four adjectives animated the workshop as well as the preparatory debate conducted during the previous year. The proposal for Lampedusa was conceived as a collective effort, based upon the reading of the context created by actors that are imbedded in material issues, and cannot be understood outside the discourse that framed it.

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17   Once Tabar Ben Jelloun explained the troubled position of a dual language novelist: "My wife is Arabic and my mistress is French, and I maintain a relationship of betrayal with both of them" (Markham 1987, quoted in Sanyal 2012).

The educational experience helped prospective planners to disentangle the collective, contextual, material and discursive dimensions that frame all kinds of strategy. It also helped them to spatialize this strategy through an accurate, almost ethnographic reading of local practices. Eventually, it led to the elaboration of actions designed upon networked resources, thus locating the plan at the intersection of spatial scales.

Planning has often been associated with major, radical changes, under the metaphor and policy instruments of the 'blueprint'. This is no longer the case: the period of big plans being over, radical solutions are no longer part of the discussion.

Spatial planning thus contributes in a very limited way, whilst a reflection on the scales and bounds of the possible actions helps to "engage the future of spaces" (Cycle, 2016) and avoid patent betrayals.

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