

Italian urban planners do much more than people think. This book reveals such grounded urban planning practices that extend far beyond any reduction of "real urban planning" to plan-making or urban design. The narrower vision of planners as plan-makers has had a dominant influence on Italian planning curricula by severely limiting the scope of what to teach. In contrast, the place-makers' urban practices detailed here open up a wide spectrum of possibilities of planning action, suggesting many ways to update the forms, themes, and teaching methods of Italian planning education. This book shows the functions played by diverse planners and their senses of strategy and action, both shaped by their education and training. By evoking and exploring these practitioners' extended accounts, the editors sought to erase epistemological and political tensions between pragmatism and critical theory by articulating a "critical pragmatism". This book should provoke critical and grounded discussions, both practically, pedagogically and theoretically, in the national and international scholarly and scientific community.

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Paul Klee, *Chosen Site*, 1940. Courtesy Wikiart

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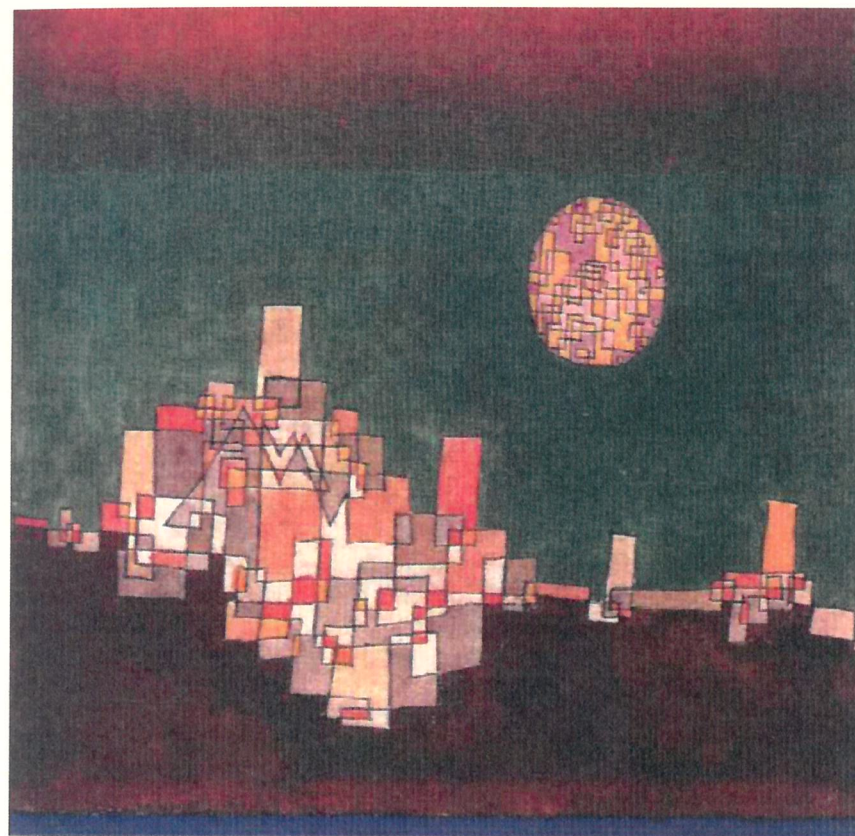
Reimagining Planning

INU Edizioni

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How Italian Urban Planners Are Changing Planning Practices

Edited by Daniela De Leo and John Forester



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Paul Klee, Chosen Site, 1940. Courtesy Wikiart

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It was terrible, so what was important in that case – that meant that we were very lucky – was that the architect who followed us during the process didn't change; she loved the plan and she helped us to present the plan to the new chairs.

Because it's a long process, you also need to love what you do, to have enthusiasm. The Ministry architect, in the end, loved our plan as we did; in some sense she thought that it was her plan too, and this was very important, apart from the hierarchy of the government. So she felt that it was hers, something that she really had been part of. She had been there for 30 years – even as the chiefs changed – and that was very important.

I don't know what importance my being a woman has been, but I can tell you that a colleague of mine who has had a long political experience, and who was a councilor in the communist party in the region for fifteen years, joked with me and said, "Angela applies the pedagogic way to the political activity, trying to help people understand, not getting tired of explaining and explaining and justifying and finding new arguments and so on". And she joked with me about that, but I don't know if this is typical of women.

Extraordinary Results Through Everyday Work

Patrizia Gabellini

*Meeting in Rome, on November 12nd, 2015,
while she was still Deputy Mayor in Bologna.*

I have been Deputy Mayor of Urban Planning, Environment and the Historical City, of Bologna, since 2011. So I am finishing my mandate because the next election will be in the spring of 2016. The experience I will speak about was launched in 2012: it is about a strategic program to renew and to give a new habitability, a new condition, to the center of Bologna. It will help me to discuss different aspects of this special experience as Deputy Mayor.

It has different aspects because this is the first program that involved about one half of the team of ten Deputy Mayors – so, not only me, but also four other colleagues of the governing group of the Municipality.

So the first feature of this work is its trans-sectoral or "intersectoral" character. I was involved in this, I can say, as a "theoretical" leader in planning, because of my prominent role of instigator and proponent, even more than as an expert in urban planning. Although I am Deputy Mayor in three main fields (Urban Planning, Environment and Historical City) my experience is very different in each of them, and it offers different stories. So I decided to speak with you about a story referring to my engagement in

the historical city because the main features of this experience cut across sectors and highlight an unexpected side of a planner's competence. It was new in its approach and it was difficult for the large team and for the involvement of our administration, and so we had to be inventive all along the way with many things – and we are carrying it out, and we are changing too. It is a process – a program, a strategic program – with different actions and with a progressive development.

I will begin not with procedure. I want to start with the connection with the program of the Mayor during the election, because this is most relevant. The Mayor decided to transform the core of Bologna into a pedestrian zone, and the first act was to transform a parking area inside the building where we worked – an historical building in the main plaza of Bologna, which was a parking lot – into a square for children, and we did that in a very short time.

We changed the parking lot into a square with minimal transformation – minimal because we had little public money, but we had private money from a foundation, and because it is an historical building listed by the Minister of Cultural Heritage. So we managed to do it with a platform of wood placed on the concrete. This minimal solution was realized in few months, and we decided to stop the discussion and to have no more cars.

This decision was the beginning of a pedestrian solution in the center of Bologna – an old question. After years of discussing the increasing presence of cars in the center, the Mayor decided – and we were with him – to begin without hesitation and to begin with this parking area in the courtyard of the Municipality building. So we transformed it into a square. This was the decision, and the solution was made in two months. Many were unsatisfied, but now we can say that it's a very successful solution. This was at the beginning, and it was a signal – it was a demonstration of our intentions.

Everybody can say, today, that it's normal everywhere to transform some streets and squares into pedestrian zones but, in Bologna, this choice involves the structure of the city and the organization of public transport (more than of private transport). In fact, in Bologna there is Via Emilia, which is an ancient Roman road, that cuts through the Padana plane and cuts through the center of Bologna. Via Emilia is the "decumano", and another im-

portant street, which reaches the station, which is orthogonal, cuts the center into quarters through this intersection.

The center of Bologna has a medieval urban structure, because it has been preserved for a long time. These two streets are the main transformation of the nineteenth century, and they have been enlarged, thereby destroying the historical tissue.

Moreover, the main lines of the public transport system pass through this intersection. Just to give you an idea, one thousand and eight hundred buses a day go through that intersection without stops. So to work in this part of the center means to touch this crucial point of the organization of the city's public transportation. Also we have a concentration of important places in the center of Bologna: the University of Bologna with about forty thousand students living in the city (one student for every ten inhabitants), the court, about one hundred museums and libraries, forty schools, and two thousand and eight hundred local businesses. Basically it is a city, a city within the city.

So to decide to transform this kind of center into a pedestrian zone meant finding a specific solution, because it was not possible to decide to stop all traffic – we had no chance of that. So we invented the so-called "T-days" which meant creating a temporary pedestrian zone in the intersection (decumano and its orthogonal) only on the weekends when the rhythm, dynamics, and the way of living in the core of the historical center changes in a distinct way.

Then we had to decide how to gain new pedestrian zones in this old fashioned urban tissue, which is so thin, with many very small streets, and with forty kilometers of arcades between the streets and the buildings. So, it was necessary to consider the physical structure.

The idea developed because in the past, other administrations tried to close this area to cars, and that created so much conflict that they decided not to go on. It was a huge struggle: they had organized these two roads with certain street furniture, and they were compelled to destroy and re-build it as it was before. But another element, which maybe led to this idea of a temporary pedestrian zone, came from some particular events in the city which created an opportunity to close down auto traffic. So we had some idea of the dynamic of the center and how it changes during the week.

During the week there are different days, with different dynamics, different practices, and a different presence. For example, in the first days of the week there are movements not only of workers but also of families because of the presence of residents and the schools for children. On Friday begins another dynamic which is the shopping and the movement of tourists and occasional visitors. In that life begins "movida", the dynamic presence in restaurants and into the night. So another organization of public transport is possible and creates another city; it changes the population too, because the reasons to go there are different from the other ones.

When the T-days were adopted, it was challenging, because it had been necessary to change the routes and paths of buses. There were conflicts too, because all the buses, which pass through the center during the week have to go around on another road. So the inhabitants of the center began to appreciate the lack of pollution and the lack of noise, but the inhabitants of the other parts began to say, "They're benefitting, but we're not!": the inhabitants of the center are favored but we on the outside have to pay a penalty.

This was a difficult transformation for the organization of the network.

I found it very interesting because the main effect was the silence: no more noise in the center. On these two days, for the first time in the center of Bologna it was possible to hear the noise of footsteps and the voices of children as another noise system; while on the other days there are only the noises of the buses and cars and the vibrations of the buildings. It was very hard. I agreed with many people that this was an important revolution in the way of living in the city.

Before that time the proprietors of the shops organized a very strong resistance. So it was necessary to have, many, many meetings with them and to explain the opportunities of this. In fact what is happening now, afterwards, is that many of them like and want this solution because of an increase of business due to the increase of pedestrian traffic.

The T-days had been a success for attracting tourists for the first time in an important way in Bologna.

I was not alone in this story, as I said, because when we made decisions, when we had meetings, we were two or three Deputy

Mayors. The leader in this phase was the Deputy Mayor for mobility, not me. I have the mandate for urban planning, but not for mobility. When we had meetings to discuss the solution, to modify something, to organize things and, over all, to make a new arrangement of the new pedestrian spaces, I was one of the voices. Still, the inhabitants and also some commercial people who had a long-term vision – and who considered the pedestrian solution good for business – supported this. So there were some members of the commercial group who considered this a good opportunity, but another part said, "No!"

But in two years the opinions became the same: today they like this solution. The other members, the inhabitants – because the center of Bologna is not a business district, but a city with many inhabitants – appreciated the silence, but they didn't like stopping the buses because the T-Days interrupt the main lines of public transportation and the long lines, not only of the city center but of the surrounding territory. To create this temporary pedestrian zone it has been necessary to reroute the buses, and some inhabitants have had to stop far away from their own houses – so that's the reason that the residents were upset.

Also one or two major lines have been cut, while, previously, the line was continuous. So then it was necessary to get off of one bus and to go by foot for about one kilometer to get on another bus. So, that created much discomfort, especially if we consider that a high percentage of the center's population are old people. So one part of the main political party began to fight against this solution.

So the conflict became a conflict within the main political party. I didn't explain that the local government is made up of members of the Democratic party and of the Radical left. So this is an internal conflict, and it is not solved yet. I was and I'm still in the middle of this conflict with a role of mediation, because of my recognized competence and my character; and I accept this role as I think it can be useful and interesting at this time.

I am an old professor, and in fact in the governing group, I am the older one. I have a lot of experience; I am a planner. So I have a specific competence and I am not a member of the party; I am independent. I am surely not radical. I am pragmatic, but at the same time I always have doubts. I reflect and usually listen to the reasons of others – and that is not so common.

I must explain what I mean when I say I am pragmatic and not radical. I discuss with myself after listening to others' reasons, and so people say I am able to listen to them. People who work with me, and also those in the municipal council – in the opposition – say that it is useful to speak with me because I discuss things; I have my ideas and I try to explain things according to their way of considering the problem. I try to put myself on the other side of the table; I try to understand the arguments of the others, and I try to change my way of presenting the things I want to do and the things we are doing. As I am finishing up my experience I can say that I have been appreciated for that pragmatic way of working – meaning that I have wanted to get results. I want to do things, and I try, not to win in a struggle of different positions, but to find solutions which can be understood by others.

My main aim is to create the conviction that if somebody has a different idea from mine, I respect it. And this takes a lot of work, but it is my style. I try to change the words I use – my language – to communicate, and I can say that after about five years, now I am simpler in explaining what I want.

I can say that it is possible to express difficult concepts in an easy way, and this takes effort. People don't want academic talk and they are sensible to my attitude, to the way of being in a situation. I mean that they say – the opposition too, and the members of the main political party too – "You don't seem like a professor". That means that I don't put myself on a pedestal. I show my weaknesses. When I am having trouble, I say, "I am having difficulty here". I call this "transparency".

This is something that politicians don't want, and I have had some problems with that. Some of the colleagues are afraid of my transparency and I have had some problems with newspapers. Some declarations of mine in the news became a problem for the Mayor.

I had a conflict with the Mayor three times: the first one was at the beginning of my experience when in the municipal council – which is the typical public space – I said that "Bologna is a dirty city". And the Mayor said, "How dare you?" when the newspapers wrote "Gabellini tells the truth". I also received a reproach message from one of my colleagues, the same one that recently wrote in the newspaper that the Administration is working to clean up the city, and recognizing "It is a problem". But it's hap-

pening now, after some years.

My impression is that people appreciate that I don't use my competence to win, because competence can become a weapon in a verbal competition. I don't use this, by my choice, because I think that it could destroy the discourse. If you use this weapon, in my opinion, you have no more consideration from others.

There are different ways to put your knowledge or your position on the table. And when you are an old woman, an old professor (being old is important in this case) – when you are well known and so on – because people go on the internet, and they read your CV, and you don't need always to exhibit your competence. So, when you are in a discussion, when you are in a difficult position with some arguments, you could stop the conversation by saying, "I know!". You could say, "I know", and your claim could be enough to stop discussion. But I try to avoid that.

I am careful not to use my competence as a weapon in a discussion when I speak about choices, where there are different points of view, and where there is a conflict about the future. When we speak of something very important to the other participants, I don't use this as a weapon. I try, if I succeed, to enlarge the range of arguments. I try to stress my competence to add elements to make better solutions – but also to create a certain climate in the conversation, because sometimes you succeed in finding the solution because of a certain climate.

I can say that this is a choice, and a training, but slowly I am thinking that it is a way of life. This is an experience in which there is a great opportunity to be useful or to create disasters, because an administrator has a lot of responsibility in front of others, in front of the city.

Anyway, this is what is happening to me. I reflect on how to manage relationships with others, using my competence, and so I can say that I met some philosophical questions, in this self-reflection about what I am doing now. And so I am thinking about a way to be – how to live in a condition where the conflicts are strong between different interests, different cultures, and different positions. It is necessary to decide how you can stay in this condition: what is your attitude, what is your way of living in this situation – which is difficult and in which you can consider some use of power, because of course there are some rules in managing power.

Listening to my young colleagues – who I find very interesting – I note that they use the expression “to win”, considering the main part of the situation as a match, that it is important to win.

I can’t accept this way of living in situations where I am in front of other people deciding what to do. So I have another idea. If I put myself in the perspective of winning no matter what, of winning in a short time to end a competition (I could call every debate a competition), I must interrupt to go fast. I must cut off the arguments. I must cut off the voices which seem not so important at the table, and I must decide, “Yes, I will listen to him but not to the other, because he is not so important”. This is a very, very common way to be in the situation. For instance, many of my colleagues often don’t come to the municipal council meetings, because they think, “There’s nothing interesting; what’s important is to have consensus, the votes”. They select the time to be there, or if they come, they don’t listen to the debate. Again, because the work of the council is organized into thematic commissions, I always go, and I always engage myself in these discussions.

In this way, in the end, I get some results. But sometimes it’s possible, sometimes it’s not. But I consider it is useful to discuss because we learn in the discussion. I can give you a very recent example of what I consider a success.

I went first to the “Environmental commission” and then to the municipal council to approve the environmental budget, the eco-budget. And for the first time the politicians of the majority asked me to present it to the municipal council, not only to the commission. They asked me to present this act, because of its importance. Usually in the city council the request for presenting acts come from the opposition, because they want to have arguments to fight against.

The eco-budget, or the environmental budget, is a sort of sum of and assessment of environmental policies, but environmental policies (which is another part of my responsibilities) are not so important in the political agenda of my majority.

I worked for about four years alone with the technicians on these topics with great freedom. Little by little, using the interests of an opposition party – the “Movimento Cinque Stelle” (the Five Stars movement of Beppe Grillo) – I used a dialogue with the opposition to get the interest in my majority because it was very important that this big question enter into the governing majority’s

agenda. This was a lot of work, requiring a great deal of patience, and this was a great success for me because the councilors of the majority asked that I present it, and they did three speeches to support this. They studied the act, and in the end, I had no vote against it: the opposition expressed an abstention vote.

I give this example because if I had used another approach, assuming as it seemed, “This is not important for them, I’ll do my things, and I’ll go on”, and without an effort to repeat, to argue, to involve, maybe this would have had no consequences at all. It could have remained a technical product of the bureaucracy, while I wanted a political success.

I have the opinion that a planner is very useful in the administration. For the most part, in the activities of the government of the territory and of the city, they need his or her contribution. In fact, I realize that there are always debates about choices where I am called to participate. My point of view as a planner (and as an architect) is considered important.

How so? Because of several things: because as a planner I have a certain capacity to understand the importance of communication, this struggle between different points of views, and I have an idea of the political system. This is because sociology and political science are part of the literature we use in planning. So I think for our study, our education, we are able to understand the context in which we work – and that is an important form of intelligence today, it is smart.

That means having an idea of the people you are speaking with: their role, their functions, their interests, their culture; to understand the goal of the meeting in which you are participating, the reason why you are there, and where you are going. That means having an idea of what is happening around you – a sort of framework of the situation, of the context where you are (i.e. in a small city with a poor condition, rich condition and so on) – so you have some idea of the opportunities you have, or not. To put together and to have an understanding of the different elements which influence the situation is important, and this, I think, is related to the education of a planner; and this is also the reason why they need the contribution I can make.

Someone told me, “I trust you because you are an architect, but don’t say that to anyone”. I had to interpret this declaration. Just as a planner has some features, so an architect has other features.

The feature in this case is that you have a focus as a designer, and the focus – very important in a decision – is that as an architect you have something unique to offer: the idea of the physical support of the choices, a familiarity with the physical space, the organization of the physical form, and the physical image. What is concrete is very important because it can be adapted, while usually many choices are abstract from that. The habitat where you live – your natural or built environment – is very important for your perception, and this knowledge sometimes is necessary to avoid mistakes.

The program for the pedestrian zone in the historical center is a proof of that, because we had many opportunities to communicate and to meet inhabitants of some squares or streets which had to become pedestrian. And when you speak with the inhabitants you must have an idea of their places, because in fact, even if they are not conscious of it, their needs and their ways of living in a public space are strictly related to the forms of this public space, and not only to its functions. Their perceptions are always a mixture of the physical elements – the dimensions, the colors, the texture of the space – and you must have an idea of that. My colleague who is responsible for mobility is a lawyer, and sometimes when the situation becomes a bit contentious, a bit 'heated', I support him using some arguments about people's homes, because this affects the public space they live in and perceive.

This is their home, and it is necessary to have an idea of what "home" means. You can't only use functional arguments because they say, "That's abstract, it is not about this place, it's not useful here!" Often people use these arguments: "It is true, maybe true, but not here!" "Not here" is an obsession in many, many debates: "Not here, this is a specific place". The specificity is, of course, a mixture of several elements, but the physical one is very, very important in giving character, and you must understand and engage this dimension.

It's important to say that I was the general consultant for the master plan of Bologna. So I had experience with many technicians who today are my collaborators. Many of them are smart, competent, skillful, and with a certain culture – general culture – and I appreciate them. They already knew me, and so at the beginning of my becoming Deputy Mayor it was necessary to reorganize our relationship because they knew me as a technician, as a consultant. It has taken a long time, not difficult, but long.

I had to learn about my way and my space – the political space which was new for me – and I had to recognize their space and their competence. Even if it has been important to say, "You are the technician, you have your responsibility. I am the politician with my responsibility", it is not so easy to be conscious of this difference, because it is easy to go into the field of the other and to leave your own field, not to practice your own field.

So I had to repeat to myself, "You are a politician now". And when I succeeded in being a politician they began to be much more relaxed. When I succeeded in adopting my new role they began to have better interactions with me. I can try to give an example by using the words of one of the technicians.

I try to work not only with the top officials, but also with the technicians who are working at whatever level. This is not so typical, but it is very important for them; it gives them responsibility, and they work with much more energy when having a direct relationship with the Deputy Mayor. It's very important because they feel like they have a role, which does not happen if I speak only with the head of their department or sector.

Some weeks ago I was with one of them who had been suspicious of me (this was my impression). We had worked together on difficult legal questions. Specifically there had been a television transmission about an important case, and we had to work together because of an important public matter; and then our relationship began to become much smoother. He began to give me information without asking, while previously I had had to ask. But now he began, in a spontaneous way, to share information.

Another time he said to me, "You know, Patrizia, at the beginning some of us thought that you were such a meddler, because you wanted to know what we were doing, to get involved in the technical questions, to read every document, and you asked for notes, and we wondered, 'What does she want?'".

Usually I call them to work together or to meet some businessmen or citizens, and I begin by saying, "I know what the issue/problem is, but please, explain it to me and to them". In doing that, I force them to give a representation of the problem, and this is an effort for them. They were not used to it. Referring to this way of working he said, "But now we can understand the importance of representing our work, this is very useful for us". And this was important for me to hear from him.

I do it because technicians know much more than I do, especially when it comes to details, stories, laws and procedures, and I recognize their competence; then I need their effort to give me the possibility of understanding the problem. So this is not a way to favor participation, but really because I think that they have knowledge that I don't, and I can't gain. So this is a way to understand my role as politician: I must gain the knowledge, represent the problem, and I need their help because I have to make a decision. This is a way not only to give them the opportunity to be actors – to be proactive in the process – but it is important for me to decide, "Well, we'll go in this direction".

This is one aspect and the other one is that they need to see themselves in the mirror, in order to understand what they are doing. So this is a typical condition of learning from each other because we are exchanging our point of views. Presenting and discussing is not a way of working in this setting, but it is typical in the academy – in the workshop with our students. This is my way of teaching – to force them to say and say again what they want, what they are doing with me in that moment. This same method, when you are in politics, is not typical, but it can be useful.

In this work what I enjoy most is the variety. I will say that this period as Deputy Mayor was the most intense and stressful period of my whole life, because it was rich with everything, because there was no end to it. I often dreamt of my work – it was a total involvement. Each day I began by looking at my calendar and seeing the mix of events from morning to evening, and every day was different. Sometimes at the end of the day I hardly remembered what I did in the morning.

I enjoy working with different kinds of people. I like to answer the letters from citizens because they write, and I always answer, even if they are, sometimes, very difficult.

I must add that I am an optimist due to the deep idea that it is necessary to organize our habitat, and you can't avoid this. It seems to me nearly elementary: just as you eat and you sleep, you must plan. For me it is necessary; it is essential. And it is necessary to accept that you are not the head, you are not the boss, or always the main important figure.

I consider emotions as part of life, and I don't oppose myself to them. It is one essential dimension of this work to be in the condition to be trespassing: you can call it passion. I think that life

is made by emotions, even if you must control them, of course. But to control and to be reflective in front of yourself is not to say: "Emotion is bad". This is another component of what I called transparency.

Maybe I will be a consultant again – I hope so – maybe in another city. I don't think I will work in a different way from the past. But perhaps I would be much more sure of my behavior, because of my experience of the mechanism, seen from inside. What I knew through literature is now enriched by lived examples: the complexity of the range of actors, the conflicts, the variety of questions, the relevance of some practices, and the weight of communication.

Experience can have many different effects. I think, for instance, that this kind of experience is very different for a young person and for an older person with many years of work like I have had. Anyhow many experiences give oneself a certain flexibility. You become flexible because you have seen many different situations and worked with many different groups of people, in different cities, with different kinds of responsibilities. This experience comes for me after many others. And I think this is the reason that if I will be again consultant, I will be a quieter, calmer consultant than before.

Usually when I begin an experience I have no particular expectations. I don't start with a defined idea about what I want to do. I go in, and I live the new experience. This is my approach and I think it is another aspect related to the nature of a person. I will try to explain better what I mean.

I think that there are different levels of influence on one's nature. In the past I used a very strong expression; in a debate related to the "Feminist movement", I said that, "When I am a planner, I am not a woman; I am a planner". I meant that there are some levels which are not so linked with gender. There was a strong reaction to my affirmation and I reflected on this. Today I would say that experiences are differently related to the nature, gender, culture, and the economic and social position of a person. So when I say, "This is Patrizia", I mean that I feel it deeply related with my nature.

Some of these questions, in my opinion, can only have answers of a personal nature, and perhaps they cannot have answers of general meaning and value.