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Local development weak areas
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During the last 20 years some keywords have been extensively used in international debate about local development policies: bottom-up approach, territoriality, policy integration, partnership, cooperation and negotiation among actors and interests. The use of these keywords hides a variety of cultural approaches, theories and practices; this means that we should study local development processes and policies analysing and deconstructing these theoretical approaches in specific situations and cases.

This empirical perspective and this closer sight can help us both to avoid the reproduction of traditional approaches and to discuss and criticize a recent approach that seems to evaluate local development policies as a dead-end experiment, and to identify in detail strengths and weaknesses of a territorial approach to development and cohesion problems. This article, moving from this point of view, analyses in a general perspective a specific experience: local development policies (and especially local development integrated programmes, Pisl) in Lombardia's Ob. 2 areas for the period of European structural funds programming 2000-2006.

Programming local development in Lombardia's Ob. 2 areas

The Lombardia region introduced the *Programmi integrati di sviluppo locale* (Integrated programmes of local development Lr no. 2/03) to implement the Docup 2000-06 (Single programming document) and to define the political framework for the next period of the Structural

funds (2007-13).

The Pisl experience should be read as the first real attempt to redefine regional policies for local development. The Pisl model allows local actors to spontaneously create territorial aggregations of municipalities and avoid any regional interference in the partnerships formation. It is inspired by some principles:

- negotiated programming instruments should be considered as a direct expression of a specific territory through a partnership composed by different actors and bodies;
- the integrated project that shape the programme should be designed as a unitary project whose components are explicitly coordinated and whose objectives are directly linked with the aims;
- the programme has to be 'context specific', according to peculiarities and needs of the territory. The partnership has the responsibility to interpret the territory's dynamics.

Ob. 2 and phasing out areas in Lombardia cover about 22,6% of the municipalities of the Region. This low rate could be explained by the fact that Lombardy is one of the richest regions in Italy and is considered one of the best performers in Europe, in terms of economic development and of increasing growth rates. So a limited part of its territory that has the characteristics requested to be considered as a lagging area. In Lombardia, Ob. 2 areas are marginal, often physically peripheral in respect to the regional territory and its central economic system. In Ob. 2 areas, 44% of the municipalities has less than 1000 inhabitants, often organised in intermunicipal communities, with weak institutional and technical structures, low budget and, often, limited competencies in territorial policies.

Territory and territoriality in local development

International debate emphasizes the central role of territorial dimension in local development processes. However, it seems to be more controversial to explicitly recognize the role played by the territory in policies and practices that often appear to be directed towards achieving objectives completely divorced from the territories in which and on which they act. Also in the Pisl experience the territory is often a hidden dimension: the projects simply evoke the territory as a central dimension of political activities, without going deeply into the complex, polysemic nature of the territory itself. This problem could be exemplified making reference to three aspects.

The first aspect regards the delimitation of the territory in which the local development process occurs. This aspect is usually made in two partially alternative ways. The first delimits a homogenous territory, according to a mix of traditional geographic interpretation based on the geomorphologic features and on common and traditional historic and socio-economic specificities, avoiding the fact that problems and dynamics could refer to different areas. This option could be defined as delimiting a 'territory without actors': actors are not considered as autonomous beings but seem prevalently determined by environmental, economical, historical and cultural structures or to power and profit. The second option refers to the delimitation of a perimeter that starts from the interests of involved actors, whether they are local or supra-local, respecting any need of institutional reference of the public actors and on competencies of the different government levels

involved, but paying little attention to problems and opportunities of the territories. This option can be defined as the delimitation of 'set of actors without territory': in this case, relations among actors happen in a sort of 'pneumatic void' that excludes any link with the territorial characteristics and peculiarities. The territory is then called to play only a supportive role for social interaction, recognizing, in some cases, the importance of proximity among actors as a factor that can increase the interaction. Whether the first or the second option is considered, the process of delimitation, and thus of recognition, of a territory is rarely discussed, while it is more often simply accepted de facto.

The second aspect is the lack of integration of the Pisl, in spite of the regional indications and the premises. This lack of integration concerns both territories, functions, policies and actors. The greater part of the Pisl tends to privilege answers to punctual problems rather than to construct a territorial strategy. The insufficient integration of the projects represents the mirror of the various conceptions through which the idea of the local development 'is put into practice'. Pisl experiences put in evidence the difficulties of integrated programmes to integrate, or at least to confront itself, with the territorial characters, dynamics and strategies of a wider area. The third aspect concerns the possibilities to reproduce local development process, seen as synonym of territorial development embedded in the local milieu. Nevertheless, the practices of local development are little specific. In particular, Pisl projects make to see a homogenization of the territorial specificities and strategies.

The problem can be reformulated referring to the institutionalization processes of local development whose effects, according to Pichierrri (2002), are ambivalent. Moreover, they can carry to the adoption of opportunistic behaviours, that is of only formal adaptation to the institutional demands. The problem sends back to the modalities of the institutionalization or, in other words, to the difficulties to find the 'balance' between institutional rigidity and territorial specificity.

Management and governance

Integrated local development programmes can be considered governance mechanisms aimed at different objectives: facing territorial cohesion problems in regions (such as Lombardy) where marginal and fragile areas coexist with highly competitive and attractive urban and rural areas; promoting environmental and landscape sustainability in areas interested by risky development processes potentially dangerous for environmental and social cohesion; promoting competitiveness in areas interested by development policies funded by EU, national Government or Region involving local and non-local actors and institutions. In front of this multiplicity of objectives, integrated projects should be able to activate different kind of actors, to build and manage local partnerships, to generate institutional learning, to evaluate problems and opportunities emerging in project's life cycle. This means, as theoretical and empirical literature have attested, that a good project management is very important. Local development is strictly linked to efficiency and efficacy of governance, management and evaluation

practices. In this perspective management is not only a technical problem.

A good management strategy is connected with patterns of local and non-local networks (and with density and complexity of governance networks); with usable knowledge owned and produced by actors (and especially by institutions); with rules (European structural funds rules and governance mechanisms) and their use by local institutions.

In Lombardy Ob. 2 areas (and especially in Pisl territories) management problems can be analysed moving from the fact that 'frailty' is not mainly economical, but first of all cultural and institutional. This means that main management problems in this context have been:

- institutional fragmentation (the number of municipalities in Lombardy is very high and the size, especially in Ob. 2 areas, very small). This fragmentation is also linked with the lack of municipalities' resources and human capital;
- lack of political leadership. In fragile areas the absence of a strong political leadership (by a major or by another local politician or by a local coalition) implies that integrated development projects are considered only a source of additional money, and not a good occasion for a new strategical approach to local development problems;
- absence of a strong implementation structure. Many projects in Ob. 2 areas are weak not only because they are not rooted in a strategical vision of their territory, but also because they are not able to implement the programme after the first design phase, to manage the relationship with Region and other actors, to promote and activate new actors;
- limited involvement by local and non-local private

interestes and actors. The absence of private resources, a general problem for local development policies, has been a specific characteristic of integrated projects in Italy and also in Lombardy;

- difficulties in respecting European rules, especially those about accountability and financial reports, that often are really difficult and time consuming for local bodies.

These management problems can be summarized in four main themes:

- vertical governance (i.e. good relationship between local actors and institutions and regional, national and UE authority, but also non local private interests) is very important in order to create useful links between local and non local policies;
- enactment of local actors (especially firms) and mobilisation of local society (often not locally represented by unions and entrepreneur associations) are main conditions for success of local development projects;
- integrated and multidimensional projects as Pisl need institutionalisation strategies, in order to strenghted local institutions after the formal conclusion of special programmes;
- the approach adopted in these projects should be also used in ordinary policies, in order to strenghten capacity building processes by local bodies and public administrations.

Conclusions

Ob. 2 experience in Lombardy can be considered a good example of local development projects' broader problems. As we said, in Lombardy Pisl experience and Ob. 2 programme were not strategic policies for Region, but in any case this policy is important if we want to analyse possibilities and problems of development actions in fragile areas. Which idea of local

development can lead useful policies in these contexts? First, local development in fragile areas should mix an attention to sustainability and social and territorial cohesion with actions aimed at economic growth (improving employment, Gdp, export and other economic variables). Second, a locality rooted approach improving social capital is very important, but development programmes should link local and non local policies, processes and dynamics. Third, differences in Ob. 2 areas should lead to a variety of approaches and instruments for different problems. From this perspective, complex integrated projects probably should not be used in each circumstance, while traditional and sectoral cohesion policies should better work in really fragile situations.

From this point of view a new approach to development policies in fragile areas should:

- hybridate and integrate local and non local, integrated and sectoral policies, programmes and projects;
- use different instruments and mechanisms in order to face different problems in a variety of territorial contexts;
- mobilise different resources, enacting local actors and strenghtening actors' capabilities through learning processes.