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Participation and negotiation process for water basins management
Michele Zazzi

Among the principles contained in the *European Declaration for a New Water Culture*, great importance is attached to the need of promoting innovative governance processes in water resources and water ecosystems management. According to the Declaration, the crisis of water management in institutional models has exercised great influence on the effectiveness, running and legitimation of traditional decision-making processes. Recurring lack of consensus on principles and basic values as well as difficulties in involving effectively local communities, confirm insufficient social participation in the implementation of water management policy and development process. Water management different approaches can be the spur for innovative policies that direct traditional public directives towards widespread social matters. General interest for water issues becomes thus incitement to outline new 'advertising' policies, as expression of social trend, that regulate a coalition of interests at stake. In other words, an attitude to governance and social interaction prevail in comparison to the exertion of discretionary authoritative principles. Correlation between water use and soil use, different allocation of resource exploitation rights, capital mobilization for the establishment of necessary infrastructures, a broadening meaning of the expression 'water ecosystem protection', as well as water cycle integrated management, are difficult issues that decision-makers have to face and deal with. Furthermore

conflicts arising from different uses and values, always clashing, though relating to each other, and the importance of general interest given to decisions taken are also though issues to deal with. It is also important to recognize the evident fragmentation feature of those decision-making systems concerning catchment basins and water resources. The subject of governance applied to water basins, seen as preferential space units according to which water resource territorial policies can be worked out, can justify the importance given to the planners' point of view among the multidisciplinary knowledge used in drawing up the Declaration. What is important to highlight are a few hypothesis supporting and fostering innovative processes for water basin management. Such processes witness the current transition from traditional government policies regarding environmental resources to the introduction of concertation actions and negotiation processes in policy and plans building.

Participation and concertation action in water basin policies

An adequate and high social participation in water basin policy outline is an essential condition to implement territorial policies, marked by interaction and shared information between participants. The public sector has the task to start the participative process, yet giving proportional power shares to both stakeholders and institutional set-up involved in the social interaction, be it cooperative or conflictual, of such participative process. A first analysis of current participative process shows that most arguments support stakes and processes' democratic

nature instead of participative forms featuring territorial concertation models.

How can we put together, in a territorial concertation, a complicated tangle of water basin policies such as regulative actions, infrastructural policies, financial programs, actions taken consequent upon environmental damage and long-term preventive strategies? The first concertation model regards the interinstitutional feature of different stakeholders involved in territorial policy implementation. Elimination of conflicts between different administrations, spotting appropriate scales to outline water basin management according to subsidiarity criteria, finding stable forms of cooperation and coordination are the goals of such interaction and the hallmark of basin authorities policy.

The second concertation model regards assessing limits to soil exploitation rights. In this regard forms of equal distribution, exchange and negotiation gain importance in comparison to water protection policies, that are useful in incentive negotiations for transfer or redistributive taxation system aiming at rebalancing water protection responsibility among the different territorial communities involved. The third concertation model regards the possibility of implementing agreed policies for an environmental compatible use of water resources and a clever exploitation of water ecosystems, included in local development programs. The main application fields for territory exploitation and development include: strategies for the upgrading of basins in critical condition, property assessments of goods and activities at risk (for insurance), integration of

basin policies in territorial planning processes. Hence basin planning strategies, in order to be effective in local development concertation, need to be completely changed. Requests of basin planning protection may need to be revised, trying though to keep the balance between regulative functions, which are characteristic of every public administration, and private investments.

Negotiation processes for water basin management

The possibility to start negotiation processes by implementing and putting into effect water basin policies is witnessed by experiences that take shape of contractual approaches in water management issues. The best examples are river contracts. They are considered as procedural tools whose criteria of public utility, economic yield, social value and environmental sustainability are given equal space in the research for effective solutions for the upgrading of a river basin. In Italy river contracts appeared for the first time as planned negotiated tools promoted by the Region of Lombardy. They are oriented to concertation and integration of basin and subbasin policies, that are supported by public and private individuals, in order to protect and improve environment and water resources and prevent them from hydraulic risks. Such procedure leads to a Framework Agreement for territorial development, aiming at water quality improvement, flood prevention and control, river banks maintenance, improving and exploiting river environment, spreading of water culture. In this regard river contracts represent, in basin planning, an alternative option to overcome issues deriving from current political and institutional set-up. They aim at fostering consensual

concertation action in the optimization of organizational and financial resources as well as at fulfilling requests of decision-making autonomy by medium government entities and social stakeholders.

Implementation of water basin territorial governance may well be fostered and facilitated through negotiation processes such as river contracts. In fact they define issues and strategies, which can be tailored to every local community's specific need. Solutions shall try to implement shared common social activities and to join regulative needs, strategies and intervention policies in decision-making processes. On the other hand participative process interaction enables us to outline a common territorial outlook on water basin management. Great importance is attached to basin upgrading functions, seen as valuable strategies, integration and assessment factors, integrated policies. A central role is played by management aspects of projects and related strategies. In fact one of the problems regarding strategic approaches is building good relations between a potentially effective instrument, which could be able to meet agreement, and a sectorial instrument, which is institutionally very strong, but often considered as an obligation imposed without previous agreement.