

New Geographies of Self-Organisation

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1 ABSTRACT

Moving from both contradictions in EU policies between territorial cohesion and competitiveness, and the comparison between different conceptualisations of territory, and in the light of the ongoing territorial and political rescaling processes, notions such as “autonomy”, “self-organisation”, “active territoriality” and “territorial heritage” as a common good are introduced, in order to propose a general rethinking of the concept of “marginality”, and to suggest a possible way in which non-paternalistic but really shared sustainability can effectively be achieved at the local level.

2 RESCALING AS A PROCESS OF RE-TERRITORIALISATION

2.1 Actually existing neo-liberalism, and the (assumption of) “local trap”

Although (officially) guided by a political process rather than by market forces, the EU construction is part of the broader phenomenon of globalisation. In this sense, EU territorial policies can be interpreted as a local compensation for global neo-liberalism (Allmendinger, 2000), i.e.: the redistributive tool used in advanced capitalist societies. An example is given by EU agricultural policies – a clear example of protectionist (non-liberalist) policy – that can be seen as a form of mitigation of unbalances due to neo-liberal strategies, whose principles, however, remain undiscussed, as shown by decisions on communications, airlines or energy (Marshall, 2012), which highlight a trend towards an increasing polarisation. As EU policies focus on cities as nodes and high-speed railways as inter-connections, such trend towards polarisation clearly mirrors the dominant representation given by the network metaphor (Castells, 1996) that has emerged from the deep structural changes occurred in Western economies/societies since the end of the 70s as „a powerful and pervasive image within which framing every interpretation of contemporary complexity/territory“ (Scoppetta, 2009), so that networking, together with governance and rescaling (often interrelated), has been one the main path explored in various and converging research fields (Scoppetta, 2012).

A tendency in summarising the three interrelated issues – networking, governance and rescaling – by using the generic term “globalisation” exists, and this does not offer a fruitful insight into the ongoing re-articulation of politics at different spatial level as described by Brenner (1999; 2000) since it inevitably ends to fail focusing on territory (on its social/historical/political/economic complexity), without which the phenomenon of rescaling (Swyngedouw, 1997; Brenner, 2000; 2001; 2004; Brenner & Theodore, 2002b; Gualini, 2006) cannot be understood at all. In other words, Badie’s „death of territory“ (1995), due to de-territorialised flows of globalisation, seems to be nothing but a fashionable narrative which, in the reality, has no substantive truth (Elden, 2005). Even governance, if detached from territorial specificity and „path-dependence“ (Brenner et al., 2010b), ends to be the Offe’s (2008) „empty signifier“, as it does not allow to understand the distinctive ways in which the „actually existing neo-liberalism“ (Brenner & Theodore, 2002a) is translated at the local level, i.e.: the real local changes it produces in terms of public policies and discourses, emerging spatial configurations, social impacts and economic outcomes, democratic processes, and power coalitions (see: Brenner et al., 2010a; 2010b; Peck et al., 2009; Brenner & Theodore, 2002a; on certain aspects of the Italian specificity, see: Tocci, 2009; Cremaschi, 2007). Therefore, if detached from territory (i.e.: from the local), neo-liberalism itself – „a keyword for the “prevailing pattern of market-oriented, market-disciplinary regulatory restructuring”“, (Peck et al., 2009 in: Brenner, 2010b) – remains nothing but a „rascal“ concept (Brenner et al., 2010a; 2010b) leading to a temptation to assess localised territorial policy developments as conforming to international trends through the assumption of power asymmetries in terms of weakness of local governments (or local social actors) in the face of „external and more powerful actors“ (Robinson, 2011), such as corporations, NGOs and other transnational organisations.

Such a homogenising idea of an uniform „smooth space [not territory] of Empire „ – which, differently from the „striated space of modernity“, can be intended as an „ou-topia, or really a non place“, where there is „no place of power“ as „it is both everywhere and nowhere“ (Hardt & Negri, 2000; 2004) – tends to hide the varieties of local forms, hybrids and peculiarities of neo-liberalism at different sites and scales as well as the particular and contextualised ways in which scale itself consists of the product of political struggles (i.e.:

exactly the reason for which the issue of territorial rescaling needs a deeper critical inquiry to be necessarily focused on territorial differences). It is not a coincidence, however, that one of the hallmarks of neo-liberal politics themselves is the appeal to supposed external constraints of the global economy, which are generally represented as being objective, abstract, and quasi-natural forces that are autonomous from political decisions and independent from human control.

2.2 Territorial differences, and different approaches to territory

In this sense, what Brown and Purcell (2005) advocates as the „local trap“, contrasting the idea of a more sustainable environment as an outcome of more localised policies, mirrors the Agnew’s urging (1994) in transcending the „territorial trap“ as a problematic and intellectually constraining assumption. As well-known, such viewpoint is strictly connected to the Anglo-Saxon political-economy and economic-geography tradition, according to which the territory is interpreted as the spatial expression of the modern national state. But, as scholars such as Cox (1991) and Agnew and Corbridge (1995; more recently, also: Brenner, 2004) observed, such equivalence of territory and state is highly questionable, and reasons to believe that the mainstream political and legal conception of territory as the passive spatial recipient of the state is the fruit of a modernist discourse can be easily found in the fact that the state can never fully reach total exclusion of others spatial functions and practices.

Furthermore, differences and specificities can be found in the construction and in the meaning itself of the European modern national states, especially in countries, such as Italy, with a long foreign domination in which power was legitimised from outside. In particular, in certain regions (such as Sicily or, more generally, the South of Italy), power was historically intended as constantly negotiated between the central (often perceived as an enemy) and the local level, the latter constituted by a small elite of landowners whose key-role was given by a feudal pyramidal model of power relation based on submission and violence that paved the way to the emerging of criminal organisation, such as the Sicilian mafia, as (violent) intermediary between a strong local power based on land ownership and an inevitably weak national state. In the Italian case, the latter, in fact, could not promote a land reform until 1950 (Lupo, 1993). Thus, the Sicilian example challenges the mainstream view of territory as the hard fact which merely provides the visible support for invisible social ties as it clearly shows how territory rather is precisely the effect of a specific pattern of social and power relations. Territory, therefore, can be thought not simply as a bounded space, but as the political form of the type of conceptualisation of space that makes boundaries possible. Then, the Westphalian state – which is very different, for example, from the Italian unitary state emerging from struggles for Independence – is only a variant within an existing spatial-political configuration, rather than the ontological shape that is often presumed to be. In these sense, the demise of one specific historical territorial configuration does not mean the end of territory as such, but rather an evolution.

Different approaches, sources and traditions in studies on territory exist, such as the French or Italian human geography. Raffestin (1980), for example, has developed his conception of territory as space mediated through power, in which “space” is a pre-existing reality that becomes “territory” through various political mechanisms, strategies, interventions and representations, and the state itself – as also Lefebvre (1980) notes – is only one actor among the others, since territory is social relation produced and transformed through continual struggle, a site of contested processes. As argued by Soja (1989), each concrete spatiality is an arena of struggle.

Sereni’s studies on the Italian landscape (1961) constitute an example of a broad Braudelian approach coming from a Marxist tradition, which considers territory as the result of „the inter-relation between history and nature“ becoming „also aesthetically perceivable“ through landscape (Calzolari, 1999). Introducing nature in discourses on territory means underlining the ways in which nature itself is worked and collectively transformed into a social construct. The Italian (federalist) patriot and philosopher Carlo Cattaneo (1925) in 1840 describes the Val Padana (the wide Po Plain) as a „by-product“ of human activities, practices, strategy and „projects“ (Corboz, 1983) – an archive of inhabitants’ daily life – rather than a gift from nature: „since human fate has been to live by working hard, each civilised region can be distinguished from wild ones by the fact it becomes an immense repository of human labour. It is for the reason that nine-tenths of our country is not derived from nature, but from our own hands: ours is an artificial homeland“. According to such non-Anglo-Saxon approaches, the territory is something different from the static, fixed and ossified object of the Anglo Saxon literature. On the contrary, it implies a different idea of territory as a highly

complex product of a co-evolution of both people and places, the result of a long standing process of civilisation (Magnaghi, 2000, 2001; see also: Dematteis, 1985), a collective product/construct that can be rather expressed through the Deleuze's and Guattari's (1980) cyclic movements of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation defining the relationship between the territoire and the milieu (or Umwelt) it territorialises.

Thus, if framed within an idea of „active territoriality“ (Dematteis, 2001; Dematteis & Governa, 2005; Governa, 2007) territory – as space constantly crossed by de-territorialising and re-territorialising tendencies – may be intended as aimed at a (self)sustainable and durable local development, where identity consists of sharing a common project and landscape is „a manner of seeing“ (Farinelli, 1992), the Humboldtian “haze” describing not „what exists“, but making possible „what could be“ (id.), what „could allow for the unexpected, that could promote change, even revolution“ (id.).

3 EU TERRITORIAL POLICIES BETWEEN COHESION AND COMPETITIVENESS

3.1 Territorialising the European social model

A further result of introducing nature in discourses on territory consists of the possibility of better separate the latter from the rigid idea of modern national state since environmental features are congenitally uncomfortable with boundaries. Furthermore, environmental issues seem to be usefully able to both summarise the three main elements – networking, governance, and rescaling – of the (apparently) de-territorialising metaphor and re-connect them to the territory. A river, for example, undoubtedly constitutes a network that can be intended as both physical and immaterial, given the social, economic, cultural relationships between opposite banks. Controlling its floods or building dams or bridges implies a certain degree of governance, at least in the form of coordination. Considering a river basin instead of different national states implies a territorial rescaling. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the environment is one of the major pillars of EU policies, as the entire EU project has always been defined, although indirectly (Scoppetta, 2012), by space and territory because its primary intent is to override boundaries, be they legal or physical impediments to the free movement of good, people, services, and capital.

Such territorial dimension of EU policies is expressed by the concept of “territorial cohesion” as well as by the development of a non-binding programme – the ESDP, European Spatial Development Perspective – that mirrors the EU understanding of spatial planning. The subtitle of the ESDP, „Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of Europe“ (CSD, 1999), clearly illustrates the importance attached the pursuit of balance – i.e: alleviating spatial differentiation among EU territory – in order to ensure that „the three fundamental goals of European policy“, identified as economic and social cohesion, conservation and management of natural resources and cultural heritage and more balanced competitiveness, „are achieved equally in all the Regions of the EU“ (id.). In fact, „people should not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the Union“ (CEC, 2004). Such approach is aimed to give „a territorial dimension of the European social model“ (CEC, 2009), by expressing the latter into spatial form and incorporating concerns about spatial protection by calling for „a just distribution of opportunities in space“ (Faludi, 2007; see also: Davoudi, 2005). In political terms, such European social model – based „beyond the diversity of the Member States‘ social systems, on a common core of values“ (Council of the EU, 2000b) – can be referred to the Delors’s European vision, expressed in both the 1994 White Paper on Social Policy (CEC, 1994) and the Lisbon Presidency conclusions (Council of the EU, 2000a) before being more fully articulated in an annex to the Presidency Conclusions in Nice in 2000 as „characterised in particular by systems that offer a high level of social protection, by the importance of social dialogue and by services of general interest covering activities vital for social cohesion“ (Council of the EU, 2000a).

Therefore, the concept of territorial cohesion implies an integrated and holistic approach that clearly demonstrates key cultural concerns. On the one hand, a key contribution of the German Government to the ESDP (Faludi, 2001) consists of the concept of “quality of life” that can be translated into “equivalent living conditions” to be achieved through spatial planning as a regional act. On the other hand, the focus on access to services of general interest reflects the French “aménagement du territoire”, i.e.: the interest in pursuing redistributive policies within a regional context. Anyway, „Europeans“, Faludi argues (2006), „are rooted in the soil [...]. In their desire to live where they have for generations they deserve public support“. Furthermore, territorial cohesion should also include a visionary element, since spatial visions „must

conceive of town and cities and regions, indeed of the territory of the EU as a whole, as more than places of production“. Territories, in fact, „need to be conceptualised as cohesive [...]. People should want to attach themselves to territories. Indeed, where the process is conducted in transparent fashion, the very act of visioning territories and their future can contribute to this feeling of attachment“ (Faludi, 2007).

Thus, although undoubtedly European planning traditions are diverse (CEC, 1997; Nadin & Stead, 2008) and proponents have offered no explanations of how the social model itself is affected by concrete practices in spatial planning (Gualini, 2008), territorial cohesion permeates EU spatial policies at least as a normative claim that the European social model should encompass a core of shared values, which, when spatialised, would promote spatial justice. An example is given by the European Landscape Convention – whose surprising emphasised spreading within the Italian academic context appears as particularly suspicious, since landscape is a particularly neglected issues within the Italian territorial context... – focusing on a strong place-based approach in order to enlarge participation and governance, to re-built social relationships, sense of community and local identity, and to strenghten legitimacy, democratisation, and social justice.

3.2 Cohesion vs. competitiveness?

But, in the light of the current dominant network metaphor, the major aim of the Lisbon Agenda – developed in 2005 after the 2000 Lisbon Strategy was perceived to have run out of steam – consists of competitiveness and growth of the economic and productive system through the enforcement of strategic and innovative sectors by focusing on the so-called “territorial excellences”. This means that cohesion funds are currently the financial incentives of the “jobs and growth” Lisbon Agenda that focuses on inter-urban competitiveness as a primary virtue in the context of neo-liberal development, and on a growth-first perspective based on the naturalisation of market logics that implies a “locking-in” in terms of an austere public sector, and funding provision on the basis of economic potential rather than social needs (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

This re-packaging takes place within the broader context of sustainable development (CEC, 2005) characterising the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (CEC, 2001; Council of the EU, 2006) as a long-term complement to Lisbon’s medium-term goals. This means that cohesion and sustainability are indicated as tools for the achievement of growth-oriented objectives, so that the decrease of regional differences, that constitutes the main indicators of imbalances, become crucial in the achievement of cohesion. The latter, in turn, is seen as a tool for competitiveness. Therefore, the idea of “balanced development” – proposed in documents such as the ESPD or the Amsterdam Treaty – still remains, but such vision is interpreted as functional for global competitiveness: in other words, without levelling richness and accessibility (to infrastructures, to knowledge) it is impossible to compete on the global market. Despite the focus on economic development and growth, this broader framework enables territorial cohesion to maintain ist grasp on balance, co-ordination and sustainability, even while economic development seems to be in explicit ascendancy.

Both the spatial planning and the cohesion strand continue to be reflected in policy documents, and the contested definition reflects the political and cultural investments of different actors in the debate. The 2009 Sixth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion, for example, summarised the Commission’s interpretation as „the goal of territorial cohesion is to encourage the harmonious and sustainable development of all territories by building on their territorial characteristics and resources“ (CEC, 2009). This satisfies both strands: it refers to „harmonious and sustainable development“, which can be understood to entail balance and coordination – and, consequently, the ESDP – while the reference to „building on territorial characteristics and resources“ refers to the liberal economic paradigm’s use of territorial endogenous advantages to promote economic development (CEC, 2008). By relying on the idea of territory to try to resolve the dissonance between competitiveness and redistribution, the Commission echoes OECD policy by emphasising the role of place-based policy approaches in capitalising on territorial assets and locational advantages such as knowledge, skills, specialisation, and proximity between economic agents.

Thus, a contraddiction is to be highlighted here, and the crucial question concerns the ways in which such divergence between competitiveness and cohesion is tackled. Undoubtedly, a strategy focusing on territorial excellences risks to weaken and further marginalise those territories that are already considered as spatially or economically peripheral. Territorial development, indeed, is not a neutral process, as it involves interests and strategies that can also be conflicting, and the implementation of development policies can paradoxically generate further and different imbalances.

4 RETHINKING PERIPHERAL TERRITORIES

4.1 Marginality

“Marginality” has been a key-term for the conceptualisation of the Italian territory. Both the partition between mountains and non-mountains regions, given by the physical geography (see: Becchi et al., 1989), and the North/South dichotomy – given by historical reasons and originated by a vast literature on the so-called “questione meridionale” (“Southern question”), which comprised seminal works by Giustino Fortunato, Saverio Nitti, and Antonio Gramsci – have constituted the typical representation of the Italian territory (see: Lanzani, 1996) and the main approach to regional development in the decades from the formation of the national state (1861) until the Fifties. Backwardness and regional unbalances became dominant in public and scientific discourse and, especially in the case of the Southern Italy, the latter was fully mirrored in (mainly top-down) public policies that, in turn, paradoxically ended reproducing precisely those problems they were aimed to contrast, as once the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno – the first development agency introduced in Italy following the political and social debate on the agrarian reform – had been established, the territorial disparity came to be seen as a matter of the fact. In fact, its ambitious top-down regional development plan was explicitly devoted to the South of Italy as an entire homogeneous “backward region”. As marginality was intended in terms of lack of both capital stock and spatial accessibility, the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno systematically addressed the question of both infrastructure provision and redistribution of resources without any reference to the economic effects of allocation choice and to possible endogenous entrepreneurial actors and activities. Furthermore, as within the rigid North/South dichotomy the development model was given by big firms (e.g.: FIAT) of the industrial North, a number of “poles of industrialisation” were established in order to stop the massive internal and external emigration.

In a certain sense, the quantitative and economic criteria used for the allocation of EU structural funds – population, density, age structure, GDP, employment, education, spatial accessibility, and so on – mirror the rigid and static concept of marginality that was at the basis of the Italian development policies of the Fifties. What results is a too simplified image, which is inadequate to effectively represent the real articulation of contemporary European local contexts, as it cannot capture the profound transformations occurred in the relationships and inter-dependences between urban and rural areas as well as the new territorial hierarchies given by the broader rescaling due to the phenomenon of globalisation. Thus, a more complex and dynamic approach to peripheral territories and to development issues seems to be needed.

In this sense, interesting suggestions are given by the Italian case. In the late Seventies the innovative and more articulated territorial representation of the so-called “Third Italy” (Bagnasco, 1977), comprising the regions of Central and North-Eastern Italy and mirroring an emerging economic landscape, was introduced by social scientists. This stimulated a profound theoretical change that led to the subsequent shift to the category of “local systems” as the manifestation of original local trajectories of industrialisation, and, therefore, as units for analysing territorial performance. This, in turn, led to formulate the concept of “industrial district” (Becattini, 1979; 1987; 1989; 1990; 1991; 2000) as spatially bounded relational density arising at the local level both directly (through deliberate exchange of matter and information) and indirectly (through external economies, spillovers and spin-offs) thanks to local cultural features and learning mechanisms given by a cognitive proximity.

Such advancements clearly showed the inadequacy of the previous representations of marginality, based on terms such as “depressed areas”, “rural areas”, “inner areas”, “forgotten areas”, “inactivity”, “inability to adapt”, “resistance against changing” (see: Becchi et al., 1989). These terms, in the reality, describe the features of a large part of the Italian territory, as it is largely made by mountain areas and by small municipalities with a population of 5.000 or less (70,4 % of the total Italian municipalities) that are currently experiencing a progressive out-migration leading the total resident population to decrease (from 10.590.728 in 2001 to 10.349.962 in 2011 according to ANCI, 2011). And these are precisely the features that, in the long-run, have allowed the permanence of what Magnaghi (2000) calls „territorial heritage“, and that may now not only find an economic use (Calafati, 2004; 2006) but also constitute the basis for conceptualising an interesting alternative “slower” development pattern.

4.2 Autonomy, and slowness

Despite marginal local systems – even though their contribution to the GDP may be negligible – perform a fundamental role in the social and ecological stabilisation of the territory, their distinctive features are little studied, and the need of a broad rethinking of marginality still remains neglected and undervalued. The proposed reformulation of the issue – through the identification of new and more effective interpretative categories – would allow the abandonment of a restrictive concept of “unbalance”, unidirectionally centred on the idea of economic growth, and would favour the construction of more complex, dynamic and pluralistic geographies of development, within which marginal territories may actively participate (and not merely survive) by usefully suggesting a possible alternative perspective.

The proposed rethinking of the role of marginality within development processes is to be framed within the recent trend towards the so-called „decroissance“ (Grinevald, 1979; Latouche, 2005, 2008), also due to the ongoing global economic crisis, which includes the search for innovative parameters for measuring development such as the Hicksian income (maximum sustainable consumption), MEW (Measure of Economic Welfare), HDI (Human Development Index), GNH (Gross National Happiness) (see: Brooks, 2008), GPI (Genuine Progress Indicator) (Daly & Cobb, 1994), ISEW (Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare) (ibid.). Beyond the „natural capital“, the latter considers unequal distribution of income, unpaid houseworks, costs for education, health, commuting, car accidents, pollution, loss of rural areas or wetlands, long-term environmental damages, destruction of non-renewable resources, and so on. Further transversal indicators refer to the relationships between human settlements and environment (e.g.: the carbon or entropy estimation), or to a shift of lifestyles, such as in the case of the justice estimation (in which the way of consuming is referred to justice for future generations). Participation, genre, and inter-generational estimations are to be added. All these parameters highlight the inadequacy of traditional categories, but they still remain linked to an economic approach to well-being, while further indicators focusing on territory seem to be more effective: from carrying capacity to ecological footprint; from „environmental space“ (or „ecospace“ or „environmental utilisation space“) to concepts such as „resilience“, „emergy“, „exergy“ (see: Pareglio, 2010). Finally, we also have an indicator for measuring „happiness per hectare“ (Kucharek, 2006): in fact, as several recent innovative studies underline (e.g.: Sampson, 2003; Haybron, 2011; Layard, 1980; 2006, etc.), an innovative parameter for measuring the quality of life can be found in happiness, whereas the latter is referred to the social and environmental context (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004) rather than to individuals, and differs from a product-based well-being (it is rather closer to an access-based concept).

Anyway, such approaches move from the idea that sustainability can be really achievable if referred to the local dimension, in which a greater accessibility to informations implies an effective control on both production and exclusion processes. In fact, the autonomy of the economic system from the social and political sphere clearly leads to the question of the concrete possibilities of democratic control, as the latter tends to decrease with the growth of the financial, technical and bureaucratic apparatus (and with a larger and low-cost supply of goods).

Thus, the transition from the concept of inter-dependence, which is at the basis of the network metaphor, to the idea of autonomy is connected to the need of enlarging participation in decision-making (especially as regards the management of resources), and of awarenessly rescaling down. In fact, the myth that the market would define, through self-regulating dynamics, the optimal scale for developing economic and productive processes is quite misleading, as it only happens in the short term in response to price changes, while in the long-run it rather tends to support its self-expansion, with the predominance of trends towards aggregation. On the contrary, shifting the centre of gravity of economic processes closer to the level of political participation could mean an increased responsibility on how and what can be produced in a certain territory, e.g.: with the possible establishment of environmentally and socially sustainable agricultural or self-managed energy systems (Scoppetta, 2009).

Interesting suggestions come from the interpretation of certain Italian marginal territories as „slow territories“ (Lancerini, 2005; Lanzani, 2007), whereas slowness is not synonymous with backwardness, but indicates a different and slower trajectory towards sustainable development, which requires time in order to allow collective learning processes. In this sense, autonomy and slowness mean assigning centrality to marginality, as the latter can be intended as a sort of “litmus test” for sustainable development policies, and it can effectively play a specific role in the construction/reformulation of European territorial scenarios.

4.3 Measuring the re-territorialising potential of slow territories

An interesting research field is highlighted here, and it concerns the search for new analytical and interpretative categories that could offer useful insights into such innovative concept of marginality. Moving from a definition of “territory” as the result of long-standing evolutionary processes between human settlements as local milieus and the environment, such more complex and dynamic parameters to be defined have to refer to the concept of social capital, even if it is not an unambiguous notion, as it include a „dark side“ (Cremaschi, 2007), i.e.: when it is not intended as pure public good, whose individual consumption does not reduce the use by the others, but rather, being the result of utilitarian strategies, is „capitalised for rent seeking by particularistic social networks „ (id.), so that complexity (of social relations, but also institutional) ends becoming a factor of „disorder“ (Donolo, 2001).

In this sense, Putnam (1993) distinguishes between „horizontal“ and „vertical social capital“: the latter concerning „inequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence“, while the former is able to generate trust and cooperation, strengthening reciprocity rules, and facilitating the flow of informations about the credibility of the involved actors. A further distinction concerns „bridging“ and „bonding“ social capital (Putnam, 2000): the latter characterised by a tendency to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups and based on „strong ties“ (Granowetter, 1983) – in the case of marginality and marginalisation, a tactical response to hostile conditions, as „strong networks seem to be linked to both economic insecurity and lack of social services“ (id.) – by both contributing to the fragmentation of communities, and perpetuating the condition of marginality itself. Therefore, one could talk about social capital as „social support“ and not as „social leverage“ (De Souza Briggs, 1998), being the former intended as an aid in addressing the needs of everyday life (which are particularly acute under economic deprivation), while the latter is aimed at supporting subjects in the broadest sense, by facilitating access and changes of opportunity structures. Finally, the distinction between social capital as „embeddedness“ or „autonomy“ (Woolcock, 1998) stresses the importance of building links with the outside, and seems to be particularly interesting as it does not refer to an idea of “assimilation” of marginal territories to hegemonic visions and values, but rather to the construction of a critical relationship between “slow” (with their specificities) and “speed” territories, i.e.: to the construction of an innovative more pluralistic way of thinking the concept of “development”.

Therefore, the search for innovative categories for measuring the re-territorialising potential of the proposed slow territories can only move from a concept of social capital which, unlike other forms of capital, is understood as a constantly used public good, i.e.: whose possible decay does not depend on its excessive use, but rather on its non-use, as its iteration, and the progressive expansion of social relations, constitute the key-factor for its accumulation. Such iteration is ensured and facilitated by trust, as the latter „lubricates cooperation“ (Putnam, 1993).

The capacity of a territory in terms of planning, cooperation, and networking can then be identified as a parameter in order to measure its re-territorialising potential as well as the ability in self-constructing from below alternative ideas of development. A further parameter may be the way in which power is given to weak actors, and how this is used to support a shared place-based spatial strategy. In this sense, a relevant reference is the transposition of the concept of „capacitation“, introduced by Sen (1999), from the individual to the collective dimension of territories, whereas they are conceived as being able to acquire an autonomous capacity to express different development models, in which not only economic but also social, environmental, historical and institutional factors are included. Anyway, autonomy seems to be a key-category, and it does not simply means decentralised power, but rather self-regulation of territories, i.e.: the ability in developing individual and collective preferences towards sustainability through non-paternalistic strategies (i.e.: making sustainable development concretely desirable).

Activism of marginal territories – i.e.: the greater or lesser recurrence with which they construct (or participate to) spatial strategies – constitutes a further element, and such criterion can be also used in negative, in order to evaluate the level of weakness in planning. But it is worth noting that planning cannot be a criterion in itself: in fact, it cannot be seen as the only parameter of self-sustainable local development, but rather as a necessary condition. What is more important is the way in which marginal territories are able to (re)define their own identity around a project through the construction of a shared territorial imaginary that allows the persistence of ties and the establishment of interiorised values and methods beyond the project itself. In this sense, the evaluation of results and outcomes of such projects is to be intended in

immaterial terms of process, rather than of material achievements (an infrastructure, a building, etc.). In this sense, slowness alludes to an evolutionary process, where a longer time – although short-term indirect and unexpected outcomes, however, are not to be excluded – is required by the cognitive dimension of the collective cultural construction aimed at the co-evolution of people and places. Thus, the spatial strategy may be understood as a construct rather than as a product, and it consists of the re-production of common goods, which constitute the basis and the most qualitative element of development, by giving a stronger sense to the concept of “social cohesion”, and allowing a non-contradictory approach to the notion of “development”.

4.4 Networking slowness

On the background of territorial and political rescaling occurring in the European space, a relevant issue for slow territories concerns their ability in constructing larger networks. In this sense, what becomes crucial is the inter-municipal dimension, which may not correspond to any existing administrative entity, as it can be conceived as a result of sharing actions over time. Such spontaneous forms of inter-municipality define an intermediate level at which projects, strategies and agreements towards local sustainable development can be effectively and fruitfully established and implemented.

In this sense, an example is given by the French experiences of the so-called “Pays” (Santangelo, 2003): in fact, the Law LOADDT (1999) enable the inhabitants of a cluster of municipalities to form a legally recognised “Pays”, based on mutual consent and defined in terms of territorial identity. For historical reasons, Italy appears as one of the countries which has more largely exploited the potential of inter-municipal cooperation, and public spending “cuts”, and proposals for reorganising local government (both due to the current economic crisis) are currently highlighting the emerging phenomenon of the “Unioni di Comuni” (“Union of Municipalities”) due to legislative changes initiated from the Law n.142/1990. Such territorial clusters have become a relevant reality (313 Unions), which includes 1.500 municipalities and a total population of about 6 million people, i.e.: 9,5 % of national population, which corresponds to that of all the metropolitan cities with the exception of Rome (ANCI, 2011). A wide range of clustering and cooperative instruments is used, and their variety is likely to have few equals in the European context. (Hulst & Van Montfort 2007). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the phenomenon cannot simply be pushed in the conceptual framework concerning very small municipalities, which are forced to join for purely financial reasons. Although there is a strong trend towards clustering by “dust municipalities”, the “small only” is not the unique pattern, as we also have a “satellite” (a number of little municipalities around one or two larger centres), a “big only” (two or three larger centres), and a “couple” model (and, obviously, mixed forms). And, even if such new aggregations often move from the need of answering the growing demand for public services, once cooperation has been established in certain policy areas, there may be a positive spill-over effect towards further sectors.

Therefore, the proposed innovative categories can be fruitfully used for measuring the potentials of such territorial re-organisation that emerge from below, by drawing alternative geographies of development.

5 REFERENCES

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