Distinctive and Innovative Regions: Urban Resilient Communities and Regional Policies. The Sardinia Case Study.

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1. Introduction

The contemporary research for alternative and sustainable models of development is based on collaborating networks of urban polarities aiming to create an added value for the global territorial system. In these models, the economic, environmental and social issues are framed following territory identity and according to local resources, above all cultural heritage and landscape. In particular, the recovery of some community practices and their application in land use planning allows the creation of cooperative distinctive networks which are able to develop knowledge-based tools aimed to respond in a "creative" way to a pre-assembled urbanism model. In this discourse, it is possible to fit the strategies inspired by endogenous growth that some urban and rural communities have fielded rediscovering and reinterpreting the rules of the historical landscape construction, the behaviours and practices related to it. They become central in the contemporary debate on common goods and civic uses. Some regions aspire to develop innovative tools starting from these practices to stand out as places of excellence. One of the privileged asset is the redesign of economic policies together with the regional image to create induced economies in tourism and attract investment, planning landscape and territory with the inhabitants. The traditional instruments of regional planning must therefore be questioned. They have been revisited according to multidimensional and cooperative approaches in the attempt to involve the final stakeholders of plans and projects, spacing from the regional scale to a neighbourhood level, from urban planning to the cultural policies. New perspectives are opened today by the spread of the landscape approach which inextricably links territorial planning and cultural heritage enhancement to needs and aspirations of local communities. The study try to shed light on the contributions given by cultural heritage-based development models in the construction of resilient, competitive and "distinctive" regions according to territorial vocations, making local communities less vulnerable to economic and environmental impacts of global competition. Through a critical analysis of the literature and the Sardinia Region experience we attempt to provide some guidelines for the draft of regional planning tools inspired to landscape approach and the related community engagement.

2 Cities as engines of regional development

In last decade the economic theories on creativity and innovation have re-focused the attention on cities as a promising habitat for spillover processes and cross-fertilisation, mainly because of the urbanization advantages: density of personal contacts, information exchange, the availability of complementary goods and advanced services, coordination between economic actors, continuous reconfiguration of networks (Casoni, 2011; Cooke and Lazzeretti, 2008). Polycentric metropolis composed by large agglomerations and networks of medium-small cities represent an opportunity but also a challenge in terms of environmental and social sustainability, presenting the same problems of historical cities but in a broader and more complex way[1] (Camagni, 2012; Fiorentin, 2013; Hall and Pain, 2006; Thornley and Newman 2011).

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[1] Consider, for example, the rebalance of heart-periphery relationship, the containment of soil consumption, the control on real estate market, the safety measures for the territory.

Despite urban policies are not yet included among the founding pillars of the Community action, experiences like URBAN or the European Capitals of Culture have led to a rethinking about the role of cities in Europe. Starting from the document "The territorial state and perspective of the European Union" (2005), through the Leipzig Charter (2007) and the Declaration of Toledo (2010), it has come to the European Parliament Resolution of 23 June 2011 concerning the adoption of a European Urban Agenda and its inclusion in the cohesion policy framework in compliance with the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy (Camagni, 2012). The theme 'city' in the EU regional development policies has opened the door to creative spatial strategies supported by cities networks and clusters focused on territorial marketing, urban regeneration by attracting the 'creative class', economic incentives for local and foreign companies, competitive bidding - pushing local planning authorities to compete in resource allocation (Sager, 2011). Among the initiatives managed by the EU DG Regio and realized with ERDF funds, we refer particularly to the project *Creative Cluster in low density urban areas* within the URBACT program and the project *Creative Cities* within the Central Europe Program, which have involved the Italian cities of Prato, Catanzaro, Reggio Emilia, Viareggio and Genoa (Kern and Montaldo, 2013; INTELI, 2011).

In Italy Europe 2020 has been implemented through the strategic option "City" of the document "Methods and objectives for effective use of EU funds 2014-20" presented by the Minister for Territorial Cohesion 27th December 2012. According to it, the achievement of the fixed goals[2] must be accompanied by a modernization of urban and regional governance through the reform of Provinces and Metropolitan Areas and their planning tools.

3 Development models for the contemporary polycentric metropolis

In the contemporary debate on urban region spatial organization the attention is mainly focused on the nature of the functional relationships between cities. In a certain way we are witnessing a transformation in spatial structure that is leading territorial policies models from hierarchy to networks (Camagni, 1993; Capello, 2000). Polycentricity and the task of complementarity are, at this time, very often treated together, especially in many policy documents setting regional networks of cities worldwide. Basically, the idea is that, in a polycentric network, each city plays a distinct role and provides specific services extended to inhabitants and businesses of other cities in the network. The goal is primarily about the creation of synergies from local assets through cooperation between cities and city-regions. The concept of polycentricity relates to other political ideas such as balanced regional development (cohesion), taking local assets and endowments as the point of departure for regional development and economic growth (competitiveness) and widening the ownership of political decisions (governance). It is generally seen as the opposite to monocentricity, dispersion and urban sprawl.

The core of this policies is based on the reorganization of administrative structures that polycentricity would require, which could support equitable sharing and redistribution of diverse regional resources. Particularly, these structures would create optimal strategies to balance healthy competition and cooperation between cities belonging to a polycentric urban network. One typical feature of this development model is the relative disconnection between size and function of a city. This means that the demographic dimension is no longer determinant for the settlement of activities and settlements because the functional perspective is now upgraded to the whole urban and regional area (Meijers, 2003).This kind of networks are the basis for the traditional development gap overcoming between urban and rural areas by aiming to harmonious development of the whole extended region.

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[2] The fixed goals are: (1) to redesign and modernize urban services for residents and city users; (2) to develop and spread social inclusion practices among the most vulnerable population and disadvantaged neighborhoods; (3) to support cities in placing local certified productions into global supply chains. See Law n.56/2014 and also: "*Il CIPU e le nuove politiche per le città*, text of the speech held by the Minister for Territorial Cooperation, Rome September 25, 2013 [Online]. Available at: http://www.coesioneterritoriale.gov.it/

This kind of territorial policy was first mentioned at the European level in the Leipzig principles that formed the basis for the European spatial development perspective and clearly distinguish some features of polycentricity as strategy. Actually polycentricity and rural-urban relationships are among the key ideas introduced in 1999 by the European Spatial Development Perspective and several programs have been devoted to this (ESPON, 2006). Here the determinant factor is the development of social, economic and institutional capacities in order to make local actors able take advantage of existing opportunities. First of all, settlement structures like the distribution of population, buildings, and infrastructure over a territory. Functional socio-economic specialization, because the attractiveness of a place is largely influenced by its specialization and this aspect can be influenced through public policies, in particular with regard to the aim of structural change. Then there's a clear need of transportation and connections between nodes in the polycentric pattern but also as gateway to other regions and other networks, and finally Cooperation and Interaction, which are the real concept core of territorial networks, and despite the common and generalized mistrust, public policies have huge potentials for developing this aspect (Hall and Pain, 2006).

4 The role of landscape approach in the construction of collaborative urban networks: engagement of local communities

Since the 1990s the active community participation in planning processes have become central issues in the global political agenda, as witnessed by the approval of the Aahrus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters" (De Marchi, 2009). However, the more significant steps have been taken following the European Landscape Convention (ELC). It has introduced a new planning approach based on a dynamic analysis of the interactions between man and nature, fundamental for residents as a factor of well-being and quality of life and, potentially, useful for attracting the creative class and / or activate new models of citizenship at local scale.

The introduction of landscape planning tools in Europe, like the English *maps of landscapes* and *landscape character assessments* or the Italian *Regional Landscape Plans*, has represented a challenge for local authorities. They have learnt to deal with local communities through participatory models set on different degrees of involvement then extended to regional policies for local development, cultural and natural heritage (territorial and cultural planning) (Healey, 2010; Mikusiński et al, 2013, Priore, 2005).

Many tools and permanent institutions aiming at building public involvement in regional planning have popped up all over Europe. The Green Knowledge Portal, for example, is an initiative of the Twente region in Netherlands aimed to create a place where entrepreneurs, governments, educational and research institutes can jointly work on innovative regional issues in order to define the best and widerly agreed development strategy. Another example is the Provincial Quality Chamber (PQC) of East Flanders which brings together local actors and experts from various disciplines in order to strengthen the aspect of spatial quality in projects for urban fringe and rural areas. We remember also the inter-municipal neighborhoods forum in Hamburg, a governance tool to engage several levels of regional and local public administration, comprising the surrounding municipalities, in a regular information exchange on development plans before the formal planning processes are started. Considering a case-studies literature so wide, only few studies question deeply the regional planning inspired by the ELC investigating how cities are involved in design choices and, vice versa, how cities contribute in the draft and implementation of regional tools: have cities proved to be mere passive receptors of higher-level policies or have they strengthened their skills and relationships becoming real collaborative urban networks? Has this made local communities less vulnerable to economic and environmental impacts of global competition?

Our research try to answers these questions through a critical analysis of the Sardinia Region experience. We focused on the island case study because of its territory that hosts several networks of medium and small town and villages, more and more often in competition for ERDF funds as

part of a region falling under the Convergence objective (and so under the DG Regio initiatives). In the following paragraphs we analyze the main regional tools for economic and cultural planning adopted after the Regional Landscape Plan (2006) trying to point out the role of cities in them. In the final part of the work we provide some guidelines for the draft of regional planning tools inspired to landscape approach and the related community engagement.

5 The urban dimension in Sardinia regional planning

5.1 Cities in territorial planning

Since 2006, Sardinia got a Regional Landscape Plan (RLP) which goes further its normative role becoming a fundamental cognitive tool. It has deeply investigated all aspects of the environment and settlement of the region by classifying and placing them at the heart of territorial planning.

The Regional Landscape Plan of Sardinia has been designed and built as a modern regulatory framework that guides and coordinates territorial planning, defends the environment (starting from the coastlines), interpreting the landscape as a result of the complex interaction between nature and human intervention. The plan hinges on three basic elements: cities, the countryside and coastal areas, the latter being the main tourist attraction.

Except the major urban polarities, it takes in account the "low density" of the regional landscape, with its model of habitat, made of compact villages, trying to prevent any leakage susceptible to configure occupation spread in the rural area. This approach would seem to overshadow the role of cities and villages in Sardinia, but human settlements are recognized and protected as basic elements of the landscape deeply rooted in it, especially in case of historical founding town (italian: *centri matrice*).

This "settlement pattern", which minimizes the use of land, strengthening the urban dimension and solidarity, encourage the creation of networks of municipalities for a conscious use of resources and sharing of objectives. This cooperation between cities and inland centres emerges as one of the necessary preconditions for the construction of a strong and sustainable regional spatial model: urban and rural areas should be compatible parts of the same system, in which cooperation between main cities and smaller urban polarities points to a regional organization based on the integration, complementarity and specialization, rather than on a continuous and generalized competition (Meloni, 2008; Mura, 1999).

For this reason the landscape plan takes in great account the results of the so called "season of the strategic planning" runned immediately before the release of landscape plan itself. Thanks to the experience gained with the 2000-2006 programming period, large and small cities are equipped with some integrated tools of urban planning known as "Strategic Plans", besides the ordinary planning instruments. The aim of these plans was to guide the evolution and transformation of the territory, defining and analyzing the strategic development opportunities throughout the reading of the context, by providing the possible scenarios and promoting development dynamics consistent with the economic and social vocation of the territory and the community settled in (Perulli, 2004). These tools have so allowed to identify development opportunities, objectives and scenarios for Sardinia's territories, offering long-term strategies shared by all the stakeholders operating on it.

5.2 Cities in cultural planning

In Italy, the reform of the Constitution of 2001 has redefined the competence of the state and the regions at each step of the culture heritage chain. This has further complicated the regulatory framework of cultural planning, especially in the heritage's valorization and related services, a matter already subject to existing laws on public procurement and antitrust. Fortunately, since 2004, they have been introduced new forms of valorization for cultural and landscape assets which have

gradually led to a renewal of cultural planning and its governance[3]. In Sardinia, for example, in 2005 the Region commissioned a feasibility study for the development of cultural districts that should be defined not following the provincial border but the geographical concentration of networks of institutions and / or properties, identified by:

• a wide territorial net or a urban agglomeration (alone or in the presence of smaller networks);
• one or more medium-sized networks.

Depending on the proximity-distance among the networks, the districts' boundaries have been draft with an indicative reference to Sardinia's conventional geographical sub-regions. With the exception of the metropolitan area of Cagliari which exercises a centripetal attraction with respect to neighboring municipalities, the rest of the island is characterized by an urban polycentric model similar to other European cases presented in the study (Galicia, Scotland, Ireland, Finland), with the consequent opportunities for decentralization in the distribution of investment and development opportunities, as advocated by the European Union in establishing the criteria for EU's spatial planning (RAS, 2005). In 2006, the Sardinia Region has therefore launched the "Regional Plan for cultural heritage, institutions and places of Culture 2008-2010"[4] with an important work of cataloging the assets and structures recorded at the regional cultural system in order to establish minimum quality standards and select the structures truly able to respect and keep them (RAS, 2008). The cataloging and the construction of quality standards have ended while it is still ongoing the accreditation of the selected structures to the regional cultural system.

Going down to a detail scale, there are interesting initiatives undertaken by the municipalities, like *Fondazione Barumini Sistema Cultura* a foundation created and financed by the Municipality to enhance the UNESCO site of *Su Nuraxi* (thanks to the Foundation many people work in the site) or the Memorandum of Understanding for the valorization of the Citadel of Museums in Cagliari, an agreement between managers of different sites and museums to guarantee the uniformity of cultural services at municipal level. We remember also the project *BC² Beni Culturali Beni Comuni* focused on a participative conservation project for the Giants of Monte Prama (ancient stone sculptures created by the Nuragic civilization of Sardinia). Finally, the project *Cagliari 2019* for the candidacy of the regional capital as European Capital of Culture which provides workshops and spaces to inform, involve and make all citizens an active part of the process of regeneration and re-writing of the territories (Bocci and Ferrari, 2013, Ferroni and Patrignani, 2013).

All these experiences shoes how the polycentric model in regional cultural policies is present but only from a theoretical or ethical point of view given that cultural districts of the feasibility study have never started and the only existing districts are the Local Tourism Systems, established by law and coincident with the Province[5]. Even the construction of thematic routes and networks as part of the Regional Operational Program 2000-2006, like the Tour of royal cities[6], has generated enhancement agreements between the administrations involved without providing specific forms of

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[3] From the legislative point of view, see: L.77/2006 concerning the introduction of the Management Plans for the italian UNESCO sites; L. 296/2006 establishing the right to long-term use of cultural assets for regional and local authorities (up to fifty years old), the granting for the management of real estate by private investors, Unitary Development Program that unifies cultural valorization projects involving the same area; L. 214/2011 which introduced the Unitary Territorial Valorization Program for reuse and regeneration of public buildings. All these instruments were included in the Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape (Legislative Decree n.42/2004) through the Legislative Decrees n.156/2006, n. 62/2008 and n. 85/2010 which amended Articles 112, 115, and 116 on management and promotion of cultural heritage. In this process, local authorities have played a central role respect to Ministries in creating new spaces for debate and decision but we have to acknowledge the initiatives lead by the central government such as the National Plan for Cities (italian: *Piano Città)* and the transfer of state properties to local authorities under the recent devolution process(italian: *federalismo demaniale culturale*).
[4] Italian: *Piano regionale per i beni culturali, gli istituti e i luoghi della cultura 2008-2010*
[5] In implementing the reform of the national tourism legislation approved by Law 135/2001, the Autonomous Region of Sardinia by resolution of the Regional Council No. 23/19 of 30/05/2006, recognizes the following Local Tourist Systems: Gallura Emerald Coast, Southwest Sardinia, Karalis - Middle Campidano, Sulcis Iglesias, Eleonora D'Arborea, Ogliastra, Nuorese. See Masala (2006).
[6] Italian: *Tour delle Città Regie*

participation in their construction. Instead, at municipal level seems to exist a fertile and dynamic reality in which partnerships between local authorities generate planning tools open to participation, even if that happens mainly in the definition of valorization activities rather than in the related services, where traditional contracts still manage to regulate the relationship between the parties.

6 Conclusion

The affirmation of ELC approach at international level through UNESCO and the European Union, have had its impact on Sardinia given that, since 2004, the region has developed planning tools based on a polycentric settlement model consisting of the main cities and networks of small-medium villages and scattered settlements. These tools, however, have produced different results in territorial planning and cultural planning in terms of activation and the construction of collaborative urban networks.

In the Regional Landscape Plan settlements historical and contemporary, are considered the engine of the future landscape project, and thanks to strategic planning, the region has learned to involve municipalities in each phase of the plan (drafting, implementation, revision). Emblematic is, for example, the participative process Sardinia New Ideas for RLP's revision as the activity of the Regional Landscape Commission in adapting Urban Plans to RLP or in ordinary building files. The RLP has made the Sardinian landscape and local governments more resilient respect to economic and environmental impacts of real estate market, building transformations and changes in land uses.

In the cultural field, instead, the analysis seems to suggest a lack of interest in the region in the construction of collaborative urban networks, considering cities as passive receptors of regional programs while these latter are already working to build alliances and partnerships for the valorization of their cultural heritage and landscape. Maybe this explains why regional initiatives appear weak, if not small, from the point of view of implementation, while inter-municipal or metropolitan initiatives appear less vulnerable to economic and environmental impacts of external and internal competition.

Detractors argue that such policies are effective only in densely populated areas, but, actually, Sardinian territory, with a wide spread heritage on a relatively large extension and a small population settled in, is exactly the right place where establish a managing model based on networks.

Small villages and subregions risk to get frustrated by extremely local policies, their opportunities would be wasted in the internal competition. It is really appropriate, instead, to bring together energies and efforts toward a common shared and planned goal for the adequate use of the land and its resources, of environmental and cultural kind; fostering a collaborative community making a critical mass capable of resiliency. Even if, up to date, the implementation degree between all the different initiatives results largely unsatisfying, impacts generated by the whole regional programming, with a deeper coordination, are potentially very significant.

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