



Report of the third workshop of the:

Research Network on Sub-national collaboration for regional development: the role of networking among regions

On Wednesday the 27th of May the third and last Workshop of the *RSA Research Network*, took place in Brussels. It was organised in cooperation with the Brussels office of the Emilia Romagna Region (also host of the event) and IRPET - Tuscany's Regional Institute for Economic Planning. The title of the workshop was:

European Networks of Sub-National Governments: A Changing European Geography?

This was the third and concluding workshop of the series organized within the RSA research network on "Sub-national collaboration for regional development: the role of networking among regions". The network has been managed by Nicola Bellini (Sant'Anna School in Pisa and now IRPET in Florence) and Ulrich Hilpert (Jena University). It was a different workshop from the previous ones: rather than realizing a discussion within the network, its aim was to bring the academic experts in contact with the people working on the field in Brussels (officials from the EU commission, representatives of regional government, managers of networks) and to promote an exchange of ideas between scholars and practitioners.

The choice of Brussels was of course linked to the importance of the role of the European Commission in promoting networks of Regions and other sub-national governments as a cornerstone of future European policies, either actively or

indirectly. A whole range of networks have emerged, some of which defined by territorial proximity, while others are based on common themes, interests and projects. From the Lisbon Strategy to the Climate Change Agenda, from Interreg to the “objective 3” of Structural Funds, from Research to Innovation, from Social Affairs to Immigration, regional networks have been growing exponentially. They have different nature: some of them are defined by territorial proximity, while others are based on common themes, interests and projects; some are political, others are issue-based. Those networks outline a possible new European geography and a new kind of “Europe of Regions”. The following questions were proposed for discussion:

- Which are the patterns and implications of this process?
- Which impact can we expect on the way future EU policies, including cohesion policies, will be designed?
- In which policy areas will the potential of inter-regional networking be better exploited?
- How is regional policy-making changing in this scenario? Are new polities also emerging? How will the role of national / regional governments be redefined?

After the introduction by Lorenza Badiello (director of the Brussels Office of the Emilia Romagna Region) and the keynote speeches by Nicola Bellini and Ulrich Hilpert, the discussion was started by the remarks of Mikel Landabaso (DG Regio) and Andrea Forti (Committee of Regions). After the coffee break researchers presented some of the main findings of the RSA research network and some distinguished practitioners commented and proposed new suggestion for further research. These included Annalisa Boni (Représentation de la Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), Maria Dina Tozzi (chief of the International Relations Office, Regione Toscana), Richard Tuffs (West Midlands EU office), Thomas Wobben (Sachsen-Anhalt EU office).

The programme was from 9.00 to 13.30. After the lunch break the members of the Research Network came together to discuss the state of advancement of their papers, and the coordination of the future publications as outcome of the Research Network.

Numbers:

The participation to the Brussels Workshop consisted mainly of two audiences: 37 people working in the Brussels community of “regional practice” and 16 members of the Research Network attended. RSA carried out some active membership recruitment, thanks to the presence of Aureliane Beauclair.

Bursaries:

3 young researchers requested an RSA Bursary to support their travel expenses. Only two attended however (Magdalena Schoenweitz from Germany and Marius Suciuc from Italy), due to flight cancellation for the third one. The two attendees received bursaries for 384,78 €.

Coffee break, lunch and dinner:

The Belgium-style coffee break was offered by the Regional Studies Association. The lunch, which was only for members of the Research Network who continued working during the afternoon, was hosted by IRPET (Istituto Regionale di Programmazione Economica Toscana).



Outcomes:

The discussion in Brussels was very fruitful. The relevance of those issues was confirmed, not only because of the empirical evidence of the growing number of networks established, but also because of their increasing importance within the EU policy process. It was also clarified that this is a phenomenon with a momentum of its own, i.e. which although many networks are established thanks to the EU commission and its support, other networks are now increasingly established independently of the EU programs.

Furthermore the need for researching the topic has been affirmed: as one speaker put it, this is at the same time the “most politically supported and least evaluated” policy in Europe. Original, interdisciplinary approaches are required, due to the complexity of the issues and to the need to analyze the evolution of the emerging policy networks.

Based also on the results of the Brussels workshop, network participants agreed on the proposal to proceed to the publication of a first book on cross-border networks, based on territorial proximity. A sufficient number of papers, at an advanced stage of refinement, are already available and a final draft may be ready

by the end of 2009. On “virtual” networks, i.e. those not based on territorial proximity, a significant amount of ideas and information has been collected. Yet further research and theory-building is needed, possibly also thanks to the enlargement of the group of scholars attending the Research Network workshops.

Future meetings of the Research Network:

With three Workshops in Pisa, Jena and Brussels the meetings of the RSA Research Network on “Sub-national collaboration for regional development: the role of networking among regions”, has been officially concluded.

A proposal for a renewed Research Network will be presented to RSA within the next few months.

Pisa, 19 June 2009

Annex 1: Programme of the Brussels Workshop

Annex 2: List of participants to the Brussels Workshop

Annex 3: Payments with receipts