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Local development in fragile areas

Critical remarks on the initiatives underway in the mountains of Lombardy

Francesca Governa

- 1 Over the last twenty years, the following key words have been consolidated in the international debate on local development: the bottom-up approach, the centrality of the local level and of territorial features, the multidimensional, integrated and inter-sectorial policy approach, the partnership between public, quasi-public and private actors. These key words are summed up in the expression local development, which is a far-reaching expression as it refers to an extreme variety of cultural, scientific and political outlooks; an often contradictory diversity of theoretical and methodological references; a variety of practices and experiences (Becattini et al., 2001). If we look at the multitude of practices and experiences that are classified as “local development”, it would seem that this expression conceals the most diverse activities for promoting development alongside entirely traditional methods adopted by the main political, economic and social actors, so as to make local development functional to, or at least highly compatible with, current neo-liberal views (Hadjimichalis, 2006). So, all in all, local development is an expression, which rather than helping us to understand the process of development, leads to confusion: a classical example of a fuzzy concept (Markusen, 1999).
- 2 To deal with this confusion it is perhaps helpful to critically discuss the limits and possibilities of the processes under way. This paper intends to do just this by entering into the pro-cesses, specifically those involving “fragile” areas like those of the mountains in Lombardy¹.
- 3 For this reason, reference will be made mainly to the results of a research-action activity, co-ordinated by the IRER (Institute of Regional Research of the Regione Lombardia), on the integrated local development programmes (PISL) for the Objective 2 areas of the region².
- 4 The paper is organised as follow. Firstly, it will present the distinctive features of the integrated local development programmes and the areas in which they are implemented. Subsequently, it will discuss the more problematic aspects of these programmes, with the hypothesis that only by revealing the “dark side” of practices, which are often left in the

shade by a rather rhetorical emphasis on the virtues and benefits of promoting development through local actions, is it possible to learn and move forward. On the other hand, I am convinced that the problems mentioned do not pertain solely to Lombard PISLs, but refer more in general to the difficulty of local development in following up principle and theoretical reasoning with consistent methods of survey and potential strategies of action. Therefore, the conclusions will recall the reasoning followed, debating whether and how far the limits discussed referring to the PISLs are purely “practical”, and therefore deriving from the difficulty of implementing models and theories, or whether if the limits are theoretical and therefore dependent on the theoretical and methodological inadequacy of studies on local development.

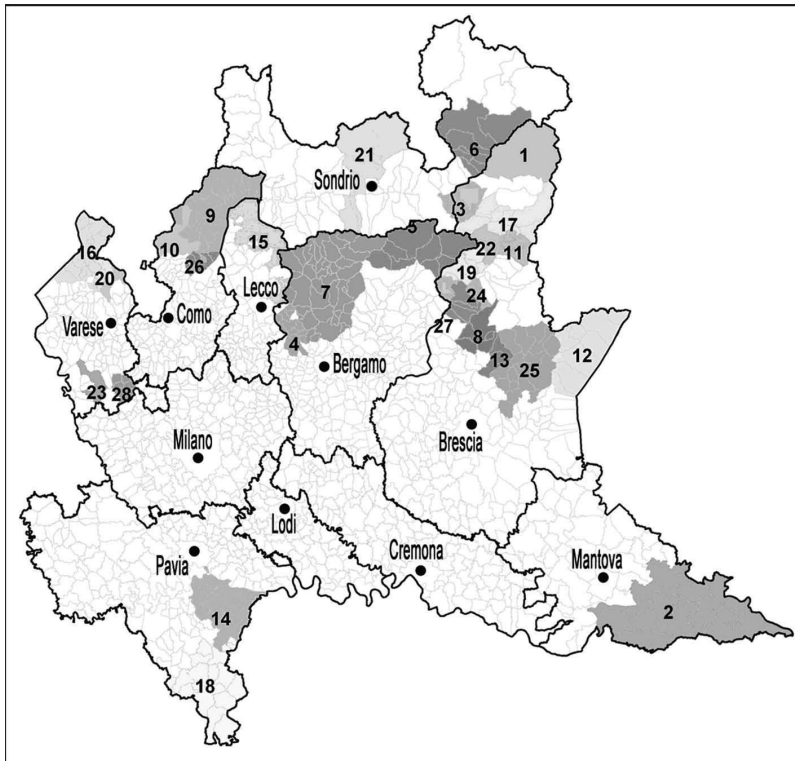
The Integrated Local Development Programmes of Regione Lombardia

- 5 During the 2000-2006 period of European structural funds programming, Regione Lombardia set up a local development programming method called PISL (Programma Integrato di Sviluppo Locale, or Integrated Local Development Programme), through which the Single Programming Document (DocUP – Documento Unico di Programmazione) could be implemented in the Objective 2 and phasing out areas of the regional territory (Regione Lombardia, 2004)³. The PISLs were later regulated by Regional Law 2/2003, recognised as an ordinary procedure for enforcing development policies throughout the regional territory and for the next Structural Funds programming period (2007-2013).
- 6 The Lombardy PISLs, for which the available financial resources amount to 421,037,469 euros, set out an ambitious objective for the Region’s policy: promoting development aimed at guaranteeing both competitiveness and territorial cohesion, using the EU policy keywords, while respecting the principles of environmental sustainability (Regione Lombardia, 2004).
- 7 The regional documents define the integrated local development programmes as the expressing of the intentions of local public and private actors who must organise their resources in order to define and enact a shared development strategy for the territory in which they operate. This strategy is subdivided into projects that operate at various levels and have different and specific objectives, but which must be interlinked in a consistent manner. The concept and setting up of a PISL is therefore the result of negotiation among the main territorial actors: local authorities (Municipalities, Mountain Communities, Unions of Municipalities), enterprises, social partners, and the so-called “functional entities” (Chambers of Commerce, Development Agencies, etc)⁴. The regional tender establishes the contents of the proposals which must indicate, under pain of being excluded from the possibility of receiving funds: the area involved in the project; the public and private actors involved and the procedures of the partnership; the socio-economic and environmental situation of the area, also through a SWOT analysis (strong points, weaknesses, opportunities, threats); the major theme, the strategy, general and specific objectives of the programme; the expected results; the sketch and the total costs of each project; the assessment of the environmental sustainability of the initiatives. The Region will then verify the conformity of the PISL proposals with the tender

specifications and with regional policies, evaluate eligibility for financing, and “accompany” the local territories towards achieving the development strategies defined.

- 8 So the PISL is a complex and ambitious programme, which requires, at least in the intention, great local commitment, conceived as privileged regulatory framework depending on the assumed or real capability of the local level to elaborate projects and strategies. The regional level is also called to carry out a new role: in fact, it should act as what the scholars of territorial governance (for example, Pierre, 2000) define as a network manager, i.e. an actor that stimulates the construction of non-hierarchical relations among the actors, enhances the self-organisation capacity of local systems, animates and guides the different forms of action that emerge in the social interaction. The contents (in particular the emphasis on local development and the highlighting of specific territorial characteristics), the regional tender specifications (in particular the activation of a partnership network and the widespread participation of the local actors) and the procedures for obtaining funds (a “softer” form of competitive bidding) make the PISLs very similar to other programmes introduced in Italy over the last 15 years, also in relation to the European stimulus for the integration and territorialisation of policies and actions (Governa and Salone, 2004)⁵.
- 9 32 PISLs have been presented. They involve 324 of the 1546 Lombard municipalities (about 21% of the total) and 865,897 inhabitants (approx. 9.1% of the total population) (fig. 1). Almost 93% of the municipalities falling under Objective2 or the phasing out areas is included in a PISL. Most of the PISLs are promoted by Municipalities (14) or by Mountain Communities (12); the size of the areas involved by PISL are extremely variable, both in terms of the number of municipalities (most PISLs include between 5 and 9 municipalities), and in terms of the quantity of population concerned (most PISLs involve less than 20,000 inhabitants and there is a decidedly high number of PISLs that involve less than 10,000 inhabitants).

Figure 1. PISL in Lombardy



Source : <http://sviluppolocale.foromez.it/centronord/lombardia.html>

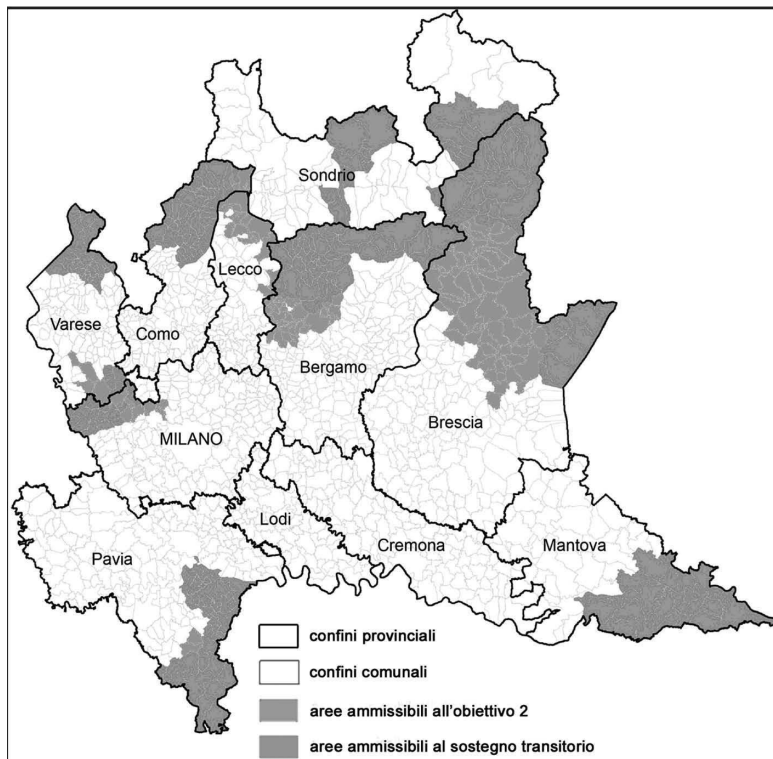
- 10 Conversely, there is very little differentiation between the prefigured development strategies. Deciphering the generic nature of the programmes submitted to the Regione is not easy. However, the core objective of many development strategies for the Lombard PISLs is, without any doubts, tourism, principally declined in terms of sustainable tourism, also in view of the decided preference of regional indications to encourage experimentation of path of development that break away from the industrial and productive tradition of the Lombardy's economy⁶.

Objective 2 in Lombardy: the “fragile” areas of a “strong” region

- 11 Lombardy has an area of 2,386.00 Km², a resident population of 9,393,062 inhabitants, 1546 municipalities 542 of which are classified by the ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics) as mountain municipalities covering an area of 1,032,322 Km² and a total of 1,246,326 inhabitants (ISTAT, 2005). The presence of the mountain in Lombardy (in terms of territorial area, number of municipalities, resident population) is significant compared with, for example, the situation in Piedmont where the area and number of municipalities classified as mountain communities are similar to those in Lombardy (1,316,592 Km² out of a total area of 2,540,246 Km² and 530 mountain municipalities out of 1206), but the overall population is lower (673,631 inhabitants out of a regional population of 4,270,215 inhabitants) (ISTAT, 2005).

- 12 In Lombardy, the Objective 2 and phasing out municipalities are 349 (22.6% of the Lombard municipalities): 243 in Objective 2 areas (approximately 15% of the total) and 106 in temporary support areas, amounting to a total of approximately 1 million inhabitants (11.4% of the region's population) and approximately 20% of the area of the regional territory (Region of Lombardy, 2004). These are low percentages (consider that in Piedmont the share of regional population of the area eligible for Objective 2 and phasing out funding is 59%), which are reflected in the image of Lombardy as a rich and competitive region, both nationally and within Europe. The Objective 2 areas in Lombardy thus define a geography of "fragile" areas, or rather relatively fragile, in a "strong" region.
- 13 The municipalities eligible for funding in connection with the Lombardy PISLs, namely the Objective 2 and phasing out municipalities, fall within old industrialisation territories affected by intensive de-industrialisation and outsourcing processes, and in declining rural and mountain areas. Apart from a group of municipalities between the river Ticino and the Olona located in central areas from an economic and physical point of view, but affected by a strong decline in traditional industrial activity, the Objective 2 areas of Lombardy are physically situated in peripheral areas of the region: Oltrepo Pavese in the Province of Pavia, the Mantua lowlands, some coastal parts of Lakes Maggiore, Como and Garda, and the relative hillside or pre-Alpine hinterlands, some parts of pre-Alpine low valleys and some Alpine valleys (fig. 2).

Figure 2. Objective 2 areas of Lombardy (2000-2006)



Source : <http://www.obiettivo2.regione.lombardia.it>

- 14 On the whole, these are small and very small municipalities (44% have less than 1,000 inhabitants), located in "fragile" territories marked by ageing population and by depopulation, especially in the mountain areas. The demographic problem can be

exemplified considering the trend of the resident population between 1941-2001 in the municipalities that form two typical mountain PISLs, the PISL of the “Alta Val Camonica” and the PISL of the “Valli Seriana Superiore e di Scalve”. The decrease in population of these Alpine valley municipalities (- 22.6% in the municipalities of the Alta Val Camonica and - 16.7% in the municipalities of the valli Seriana Superiore and Scalve) is all the more clearer when we compare it with the decided increase in the population of Lombardy in the same period (+ 54.7%). In addition, the depopulation phenomenon is more intense in the less accessible municipalities or those excluded from the tourist development processes: for example, Vione in Camonica Valley, records a 47.7% decrease in population; Azzone in the Scalve Valley, a 39.4% decrease. Depopulation is aggravated by the ageing of the population. In 2001 the population ageing rate of the municipalities of the Camonica Valley and of the Scalve Valley was decidedly higher than that of the regional population (138.07), with a maximum of 289.71 in Vione, i.e. the municipality that registered the highest decrease in population. Furthermore, in the alpine valleys, the Objective 2 municipalities are only partially comprised in the Lombardy tourist areas of excellence, while most of them are situated in economically weak areas. Essentially the economic markers in these areas do not show acute conditions of hardship or poverty, but rather a stalled situation. The employment and unemployment rates of the municipalities of the Val Camonica and of the Valli Seriana superiore and di Scalve indeed reveal similar economic figures, if not better, to the regional figures. For example, against a regional unemployment rate of 11.58, the municipalities of the Camonica Valley show a variable value between 2.97 in Monno and 11.36 in Incudine⁷.

- 15 The Lombard Objective 2 municipalities can therefore be considered “dormant” territories, where the population decline is accompanied by the presence of an ageing population that is stagnant and shows no real desire for change. The weak planning capacity of private actors is added to the difficulty of networking of public actors and the low inclination for cooperation between institutions. Also in an institutionally fragmented territory like Lombardy, where many mountain municipalities come up against the “weaknesses” of their small dimension (weak organisational, institutional and technical facilities, limited financial resources and skills), the municipal administrations seem for the most part to pursue individual strategies. The scarce propensity to build collective relations among municipalities persists even when they are united in Mountain Communities, which, though they play a significant part in the fragmented institutional context of the Lombard mountainous area, also pay for a general “under-endowment” (of personnel, financial resources, etc.) and a tendency to immobility also in view of the uncertainty of their institutional future. The vertical relations among municipalities and Provincial councils and among municipalities and the Regional Council appear no less problematic: the higher authorities are in fact perceived as institutions distant from the problems of “fragile” areas, focusing their attention on supporting the competitive “heart” of the region in the Varese or Brianza plain or in the “centre” of the metropolis of Milan. So, the fragility of the Lombard mountain communities appears multi-faceted, in terms of its characteristic dimensions (physical marginality, economic immobility, aphasia of society, weakness of the institutions, etc.), which do not always coincide in the same areas, and in terms of the spatial context in which it is defined. This fragility is expressed by the marginality especially from local perception, while it assumes a different connotation on a regional or macro-regional scale, where it is mainly associated with difficulty to communicate.

- 16 So, the Lombard PISLs represent a real gamble: that of promoting local development in the fragile areas of a strong region, valorising the endogenous resources of the mountains, building partnership among tired and poorly motivated actors and activating the planning capability of a society that tends to be aphasic. A very ambitious goal to achieve. The elaboration and management process of a PISL puts a heavy “strain” on local levels, but is a useful lesson from the point of view of the governance of territorial development processes. This strain, and the difficulties involved in the strategic programming of development (in terms of resources, skill, know how, etc.) can in fact be an extraordinary opportunity to learn how to do new things or, even, to learn new ways of doing traditional things.

Local development in “fragile areas” of the Lombardy mountains

The territory as a strategic dimension of local development

- 17 The extensive international debate on local development, on the so-called “regional renaissance”, on the role of non-economic factors (such as knowledge, social capital, trust and reciprocity) in development processes and on their territoriality, highlights the importance of the territory in aiding or hindering local actions in the framework of the local development process⁸. The centrality of the territory is therefore an acquired fact, at least from a theoretical point of view, while the situation of the policies and practices is very different. Often policies to promote local development appear to be directed at reaching objectives that are completely uprooted from the territory in which they operate. The situation is no better for the practices: the territory in reality does not exist or, if it does, is conceived in an extremely reductive manner. Simple “support”, a neutral screen on which to project schemes and interventions, a container of resources to exploit, without monitoring the outcome (territorial, environmental, etc.) of this exploitation or, again, a set of inalienable values which the “expert” can recognise before and beyond every social interaction processes (for example: the cultural heritage to be protected). There are two more frequently recurring concepts in local practices (Rullani, 2005): that of the territory as a container of resources, from a reductively economic viewpoint, and that of a path-dependent territory, which sees the territory as static, embalmed and stationary from a reductively historicist viewpoint that in reality lends itself to different manipulations of the collective memory as witnessed by many current territorial marketing practices.

Demarcation: the problem of boundaries

- 18 The identification and limits of the territories on which the programmes are implemented is, in itself, a problem that has no unique and clear solution (Vanier, 2002). In fact, many possible, different demarcations exist, each with positive aspects (the valorisation of old customs of cooperation, for example) and negative aspects (the failure to acknowledge the continuity imposed by the presence of ecological networks, for example). In the PISLs, as in other local development programmes, this problem is normally solved by finding the fine equilibrium between two different, and tendentiously alternative, options.

- 19 The first option is to demarcate the territory on which the local programme will be elaborated on the basis of the idea of an intermediate “homogeneous” area. This option interprets the territory in a traditional way, which takes into account geomorphologic characters, historical tradition and socio-economic specificity, even when the problems, the potential to transform and the actors involved belong to different areas. This idea of territorial homogeneousness is debatable in theoretical terms, since it delimits a territory with no actors whose premise is to integrate man with his environment within a setting that has its own natural coherence (Berdoulay and Souberayn, 1991). From this conception, deriving, according to Lévy (1999), from Vidalian geography, the strictly social and political rationale of territorial dynamics are excluded: social actors are not seen as partners acting with their own intentionality and rationality, but rather seem to act from a logic that is determined by environmental, economic and historical and cultural structures or, at the very least, to obey to abstract criteria of the optimisation of power or profit (Berdoulay and Entrikin, 1998). In addition to being problematic in theoretical terms, this idea is also lacking in operational effectiveness, since it is not clear which homogeneousness (economic, physical-natural, cultural, etc.) that it is referring to. A homogeneousness that takes into account all these aspects leads to a kind of “mythical determinism” whereby each territorial aspect is connected to the others in a natural and organic way.
- 20 The second option is to proceed to determine the area of the project, beginning with the interests of the actors involved, be they local or supra-local, mainly respecting the institutional demands of public actors and thus analysing more deeply the competencies of the tiers of government than the problems and opportunities of the territories. This leads to valorising the long-term cooperation attitudes (e.g., the presence of associations between municipalities for the joint management of public utility), the customs of cooperation, the presence of second-level local authorities, such as the Mountain Communities in Italy. This second option is also debatable in theoretical terms, since, similarly to the first option, it determines a set of actors with no territory in which the territory is called solely to play a support role in the interactions, recognising, in the best case, the role of the physical proximity among actors. However, this is also difficult to apply in practice, given the constant modification of actors, alliances and agreements, as well as the intentionality and opportunities of individuals.

The territory and actors: weak and limited partnerships

- 21 The 32 Lombardy PISLs clearly differ in their characteristics, ambitions and objectives. Similarly different are the actors that play the leading role in each programme as well as the more or less “exclusive” procedures used to manage relations between the actors. On the whole, however, the PISLs share the substantial weakness of the partnership networks. These appear to be formed mainly of public entities heavily focused on a few actors (the programme leaders), with evident difficulties in opening up to other actors, particularly private ones. The central, almost exclusive role played by local authorities in the partnership networks forms in some cases an entirely minimal programming logic: the PISL is banally seen as a neutral programming tool used to distribute funds. On the other hand, also private actors often consider taking part in the programmes as an irritating, but compulsory way of obtaining public funding.

- 22 The heavy “concentration” of local networks on a few actors presents clear limits. If certain actors, in particular local administrations that act as the pivot of networks, change their role, the local process can stall or actually move backwards even in the most consolidated practices. A similar “backward” trend can also occur in the presence of strong leaderships, which, although they play a fundamental role in keeping the attention high around the process and in stimulating, driving and promoting local action, they can also, quite paradoxically, turn into obstacles. A strong leadership in fact tends to be exclusive. It builds strong and cohesive networks but restricts the possibility of activating those “weak links” capable of bridging basically separate relational worlds, thus, broadening partnerships and making them more solid and firmer in the event of change (Granovetter, 1998). This risk is particularly evident when the leadership is of a political nature and directly subordinate to changes associated with electoral cycles, local and super-local political changes, resentment and power games.

Territories without image, projects without strategy

- 23 Despite the statements of principle and the premises, the projects implemented in the Lombard PISLs do not seem very integrated, both in territorial terms, and in terms of actors involved: lists of works, list of things to be done, no overall vision of what the territory could and would like to become. Therefore, most of the actions comprised in the PISLs tend to be sectorial, they tend to answer to specific problems (both in functional and in localisation terms) rather than building an overall strategy. The outcome is a series of projects with no strategy.
- 24 Within the framework of the Lombard PISLs, the strategic shortcomings derive mainly from the intrinsic weaknesses of the single programmes. The first problematic element concerns the difficulties of the PISLs to integrate, or at least make comparisons and dialogue, with the other development strategies present in the area. This incapability, besides a schizophrenic multiplication of the initiatives, strategies and programmes for the same territory or pieces of practically coinciding territory, also limits the possibility of generating a collective effect helpful in maintaining the development process once the funding of single programming phases comes to an end. The second problematic element concerns the comparison of the territory involved by the PISL, and the development strategies prefigured in the programme, with broader or simply closer initiatives. This comparison is, of course, fundamental in order to ensure a stable consistency and perspective to local development strategies. The importance of this aspect is however subordinated to clear limits, as often the territories in which and on which the PISLs operate are read, analysed and valorised in a wholly self-referential manner, without any communication with other initiatives that move outside the territory itself.

Specificity and institutionalisation: when territorial does not mean specific

- 25 As the territory is by definition differentiated, even the development processes implemented to valorise the territorial features of places will also by definition be diverse. Local development becomes synonymous with territorial development, not only because it is localised (that is, it takes place in certain places, Storper, 1997b), but also and above all because it is specific to a certain place, it is embedded within it (Hess, 2004), the

development processes that we can imagine for a certain place cannot simply be transferred elsewhere precisely because they are specific, and hence differentiated at local level, in terms of territorial features that could be enhanced in development processes and of the local actors operating in these processes.

- 26 As the territory is by definition diverse, even the development processes that are implemented to valorise the potential of places will by definition be diverse. However, if we look at what happens in practice, we see processes that are not very specific. What emerges is a tendency for the standardisation of specificity: territories that are not diverse, but stereotyped and featureless; projects that are all the same; development pattern that tend to be similar. The banalisation of specific characteristics also seems to be reinforced by a sort of procedural mechanism, which leads to the production of “rituals” and watchwords, and by the uncritical transposition of conditions (endogenous and exogenous) to guarantee implementation of local development because they exist in “successful cases”.
- 27 So, what is the problem? In general terms it can be reformulated considering the possibilities of reproducing a virtuous development process that has worked elsewhere in all those areas which, for one reason or another, have not experienced a development deemed satisfactory or have encountered a critical phase. The possibility of “transposition” of a virtuous development process from one place to another, at the origin of the best practices “mechanism”, is based on the institutionalisation processes: the definition of standards and institutionalised regulations and standard procedures intends to provide the means for producing and reproducing processes, conditions and development processes that can be adopted anywhere.
- 28 However, as highlighted by Pichierri (2002), besides their undeniable merits, institutionalisation processes have limits and risks. On the one hand they provide a framework for the programme, stimulating and directing local strategies, also only using funding as a bait. On the other hand though, they tend to sort of suffocate the wealth of local planning, proposing and conveying somewhat predefined territory images and development strategies. In addition, the institutionalisation of local development processes tends to favour the adoption of opportunistic conduct, i.e. only formal or, even corrupt or collusive compliance with institutional requirements (in particular with regard to building partnerships and implementing participation practices).

Conclusions

- 29 After having pointed out all these problems, it would seem natural to ask whether local development is possible in fragile areas like those of Lombard Objective 2. This question should not sound rhetorical, or even less as an invitation to return to hetero-direct and centralistic policies, or, as reference to interpretations that demonstrate the inevitability of marginality and fragility, often acknowledging their role in the process of capitalistic accumulation. Quite the contrary. The question refers to the need to re-examine the reasoning behind local development from the beginning, asking oneself what differences does a development process of this kind present, what possibilities and limits does it offer, how “to play” among the many dimensions of a development that is by definition multidimensional (economic development, certainly, but also social, cultural, symbolic, distinctive, etc.), also in relation to the differences among the territories where local development process is to be implemented and among the many problems to be faced.

- 30 In the “fragile” Lombard mountain areas it is necessary to start from processes of attention and re-appropriation of the territory as well as the reconstruction of social and territorial ties. However, while all this is important, it is not sufficient. If it is true that local development is not only economic development, it is however also economic development: the social, environmental, political or cultural dimensions of local development alone are insufficient. To focus attention exclusively, or almost, on these can lead to elitism, which do not satisfy the demand for economic growth expressed locally and that lend themselves to criticism, even instrumental, underlining the inefficiency of local development processes when tested against facts (for example, on the number of jobs created).
- 31 The process of re-appropriation of the territory, the recognition and sharing of local values, the construction of networks and partnerships provide fundamental resources. In fact, they allow the production and reproduction of those relational assets (trust, knowledge, and reciprocity) that organise and valorise non relational assets, in such a way that the territory behaves and acts in a collective manner. So, in “fragile” areas, the territory plays a fundamental role in the definition of the cultural and social dimensions of local development, while it is perhaps not the most effective “mediator” for economic development. Local and territorial action must be combined with other relational architectures, linking and associating other and various mediators to the territory in order to promote development as suggested, for example, by Rullani (2005) or Le Galès and Voelzkow (2001).
- 32 If we adopt this perspective, promoting development in fragile areas calls, first of all, for the construction of efficient relations between local actors and supra-local processes, the opening up of local systems to external dynamics, hybridisation among local development programmes and policies and territorial development programmes at regional, national and European level. These vertical governance mechanisms give access to those resources, first of all cognitive, through which to consolidate the capability of the administrations to reproduce the social capital and activate the planning capability of local society, which it is unable to express alone. Thus forming social and territorial ties, but also and above all promoting co-operation among enterprises, social actors and public administrations.
- 33 However to achieve good results, local action needs time and continuity to take root. However time can also pass in vain: nothing may be learned; we can learn how to use words, but not to make any substantial changes or, even, let the resources of knowledge and of strategic capability that had been built up within the single projects, often very laboriously, go to waste.
- 34 The learning process that can take place in local development strategic processes also requires the sharing of responsibilities and the contribution of different types and levels of actors. In the sphere of territorial development, the local level is overburdened with expectations, tasks and responsibilities, also in implementation of the (controversial) principle of subsidiarity (Faure, 1997). On the contrary, this burden is accompanied by a sort of shirking of responsibilities of the higher institutional and territorial levels. But local development is not only a problem of the local level; it is an opportunity whose target is not just the development of the territory on which it operates. In reality, it is only by starting at a local level that development is also created at higher levels. Without this awareness, which calls for the implementation of real mechanisms of territorial governance and with the assumption of responsibilities and new roles by all the actors

(local and sovra-local), local development policies, especially in the fragile and fragmented context of the mountain communities, appears bound to fall completely within the dominant narrations, without being able to pursue that strategic alternative to the destinies that see these areas as merely “playgrounds” for city dwellers or as quality “residential areas”, if they are sufficiently near to urban centres as to offer useful spaces for the peri-urbanisation process.

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NOTES

1. In this paper I am going to use the term “fragile areas” rather generically to indicate the condition of certain areas, typically of the mountains in Lombardy, where physical marginality goes hand-in-hand with the local perception of being emarginated, the weakness of the institutions and of local society, the difficulty of internal and external relationships. The objective of this paper is not to give a complete definition of these characters, even though this would be a necessary requisite, recalling and discussing persisting conditions and changes that characterise the present geographical fragilities (cf. Farinelli, 1983).

2. Information on the activities, working papers and research reports are available on the site www.irer.it/pisl/pisl.

3. In the 2000-2006 period, Objective 2 of the structural funds concerned areas with structural difficulties, belonging to regions with a level of development similar to the European community average, but characterised by intensive transformations of the economic and social nature, linked in particular to de-industrialisation processes, phenomena of “urban crisis” and the decline of traditional activities in rural areas. On the whole, Objective 2 concerned 18% of the European population; in Italy, 7.4 million of the inhabitants, amounting to approximately 13% of the total population. The “temporary support” concerned some areas eligible to receive financing of the structural Funds under Objectives 2 and 5b in the 1994-1999 period, but not entitled to the funds in the subsequent programming period (2000-2006). The clear objective of temporary support is to avoid a brusque suspension of financial help in areas that are recovering but still in need of help, thus gradually reducing the amount of funds while enhancing the positive effects achieved during the previous programming period.

4. The Mountain Communities were established by law 1102/71; Legislative decree 267/2000 strengthened their duties and roles. They are groups of small and medium-sized mountain municipalities established to valorise mountain-related activities and to overcome the difficulties of institutional fragmentation. The Decree issued in 2000 also defined the character of the Unions of Municipalities, formed of two or more municipalities to jointly exercise many administrative municipal functions. The specific regulation of the Mountain Communities and Unions of Municipalities is enforced at regional level.

5. Starting from the Nineties, Italy, like many other European countries, has experimented important innovations, within a more general redesigning of the relationships amongst institutional levels and amongst the institutions and society (Cassese and Wright, 1996; Bobbio, 2002). These changes have had a considerable impact on urban and territorial policies, in particular with regard to the new centrality assumed by local authorities in many policies, the consolidation of certain regulatory institutions intended to simplify and streamline cooperation between public actors at different levels and encourage negotiation in interactions between public and private actors (Governa and Salone, 2004).
 6. Information about the PISLs is available on the web sites of Formez (<http://sviluppolocale.formez.it/centronord/lombardia>) and of the Regione Lombardia (<http://www.obiectivo2.regione.lombardia.it>).
 7. The data referred to is available on the web site www.ring.lombardia.it
 8. There is a huge amount of bibliography, but is not the objectives of this paper a critical review of the positions of the various authors (Dematteis and Governa, 2005; Governa, 2007).
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ABSTRACTS

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 experiences. Within this framework, the article critically discuss local development policies involving “fragile” areas like those of the mountains in Lombardy. Reference will be made mainly to the results of a research-action activity on the integrated local development programmes (PISL) for the Objective 2 areas of the Region financed during the period of European structural funds programming 2000-2006.

Durant les vingt dernières années, quelques mots-clés ont été intensivement employés dans le débat international sur les politiques de développement local: bottom-up approach, territorialité, intégration politique, association, coopération et négociation entre les acteurs et les intérêts. L'utilisation de ce vocabulaire cache une série d'approches, théories et pratiques culturelles. Pour ne pas seulement se contenter de mots, il est nécessaire d'étudier les processus de développement et les politiques locales en analysant et déconstruisant les différentes approches théoriques à la lumière de situations et d'expériences spécifiques. Pour ce faire, cet article présente les politiques de développement local dans des zones fragiles telles que les montagnes de Lombardie. On fera principalement référence aux résultats d'une recherche-action sur les programmes de développement locaux intégrés (PISL) pour les territoires de l'Objectif 2 de cette région, programmes financés au cours de la période 2000-2006 par des fonds structurels européens.

INDEX

Keywords: local development, fragile areas, Lombardy, mountains, territorial approach

Mots-clés: développement local, zones fragiles, Lombardie, montagne, approche territoriale

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