

## GEOGRAPHICAL AND ECONOMIC FEATURES OF TOURIST NETWORKS

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### *Abstract*

The present globalization tends to assume in a lot of areas of our world – in particular in Mediterranean countries - some common geographical, social and cultural features. While it assists in this homologation, there is a rediscovery of the different local value through the enforcement of the “subsidiarity principle” for determining a stronger cohesion in the local community. Mass tourism, in a lot of traditional destinations, comes up against the limits that reduce the wellness of costumers, that lead to require new types of tourist services and aim to discover local resources and value. In this direction, the tourists become a vehicle or tool of multicultural dialogue with residents and both communities absorb the cultural feature. On account of this, new forms of personal relationships between tourist and resident are being established with economic, environmental and social consequences of utmost importance for the support of tourist development. This behavior of tourists tends to follow the innovative structures “horizontal networks”, which, in this paper, are analyzed by original instruments characterized by a high level of multidisciplinary.

### **1. Introduction**

The present tourism growth derives not only from economic growth at a global scale, but also by local *empowerment* (Pollice 2005). In fact, some geography scholars prefer to strike the term *glocal* (Swyngedouw, 2000) to point out the double influence. Some decades ago (the 70’s and 80’s of last century), in particular, geographic literature described tourism growth as revolving on two interpretative models: dependence theory and a product life span, since the role of the local government wasn’t yet recognized in the organization and in the increasing phenomenon (Minle, Atelejevic 2001, p. 372). Therefore, the two models turned out to be, and are still, very valid to explain the centrality of some tourism destinations compared to others – especially in city tourism or in tourism in art cities (Faccioli, 2009), and to identify the common problems in territories with old tourism facilities – the high level of pollution and overcoming load capacity.

Hence, the two above mentioned models do not explain the growth in the last decades, of the different forms of tourism, characterized by human relations and feasibility. In fact, the growth of this type of tourism derives from knowing that the competitive benefit depends on the different resources present in the territory, the irreproducible and the particular ones, thanks to which the tourism product of destination can be associated. The realization of this kind of tourism offer should involve the local community which, because of the space proximity, trust, and mutual interest, can easily create networks within the internal components of the

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territorial system, using not only natural, environmental, and cultural resources, but also human resources and the most appropriate territory technologies. Therefore, we could state that the *community-based* theory for this type of tourism is better explicative than previous theories (Minle e Atelejevic , 2001).

The article arises from these theoretical assumption and is intended to analyze the positive and negative spatial dynamics of new forms of tourism where the motivation addresses human relations. Moreover, geographic literature recognized in voluntary tourism and travellers in sleeping bags, the same reasons as to why people decide to take a trip: sharing, getting to know others and the hosting culture, and intercultural dialogue (Ooi e Laing, 2010). The first part of this paper intends to define integrated relational network tourism and its effects from the territorial, spatial and socio-economic standpoint.

The particular aspect of this form of tourism is the total disintermediation, since all the particulars of the trip are shared on the network. For this reason the offer is flexible, differentiated, and is transversally integrated with all the social and economic promoters operating in the territory and with network tourists. Consequently, tourism demand is composed no longer of crowds, but of people who, by sharing interests, share with locals the use of resources, discovering in intercultural dialogue the main element to develop relationships. In fact, the meeting of demand and supply and offer is not just an economic event, but it becomes a social and cultural factor since it's based on mutual respect and trust. For this reason, some scholars (Liepitz, 1987) introduced the regulation theory based on the direct accumulation system between production and consumption. The stability of the system, in constant evolution, is determined by shared rules and social procedures (Teague, 1990). A deeper study of this same trend gave rise to the concept of integrated relational tourism, i.e., a tourism where human relationships are preferential and are at the centre of the trip: a person travels to get to know.

In the second part, the article studies through a cost-benefits analysis, the territorial changes produced by new tourism flows, while the third and fourth parts clarify, through a case study, spatial dynamics and economical - geographic impacts of car tourism in the province of Modena.

## **2. Integrated Relational Tourism**

Tourism reflects more and more the opulence society where behaviour of both groups and individuals indicates the social status. As it is often said “you are what you buy”, so in a similar way, the individual reflects its social status by showing others “where he goes”. Inevitably relations of this kind generate a segmentation of tourism demand.

The diversification of tourism activities, if on one hand has multiplied possibilities of resource fruition, on the other hand started a new way of use. In short, it has produced an upstanding cycle since from a compound demand arose an innovation on the supply of tourism services, aiming more and more to the personalization of service (*tailor-made*).

Among the forms of tourism spread out today with these characteristics, integrated relational tourism is certainly the one where we can find the original

aspects and at the same time, factors that fully satisfy the needs of every tourist. In fact, integrated relational tourism, is that particular type of tourism based on human relations held by the tourist during the stay in the hosting territory. (Urbani, 2004).

It could be easily stated that many kinds of tourism, such as voluntary tourism, religious, tourism linked to events, can be forms of relational tourism, but to be integrated it needs sharing the tourism experience with the territory. The latter, even if characterized by sustainability, may not include integration with the local community: for example, pilgrims that visit a religious place do not always meet with residents since their path is exclusively dedicated to a spiritual experience.

Integration between tourist and the local community creates a close tie in such a way that it is possible to compare, come together, and even “clash” with the open territorial system. To be successful, this type of tourism must develop strong interlinks between environment and cultural resources with the wine-and-food, sport, naturalist and social resources present in the territory.

Relational tourism offers the opportunity not to fall in the vicious cycle of the tourism product marked by “everything and right away” and by “all for all”, since the local community should have an acting role thanks to “bottom up” actions (from the bottom to the top) in every phase of planning, creating, and carrying out the “tourism package”.

In order to succeed, human relations between the local community and tourists are the competitive benefit helpful to local growth, since they are based on the irreproducibility of the context and social relations. Therefore, the scoring of “good experience” is determined by the satisfaction from the tourist that is again a traveller, since he explores human relations with the hosting community and builds customer loyalty with that type of experience.

This form of tourism, based on human relations, allows a re-territorialization of economy, i.e., a new valorisation of “social capital” and of the mass of relations through which subjects taking part in it can pursue interests precluded from them or reachable at higher costs if they had not been part of the network or the trip. An important and useful role is given by the social responsibility of local businesses, which cooperate with the network “trustees” both to increase local production appreciated by this type of tourists and to involve more local participants is the main reason for the success of the trip. In fact, if this type of experience has good results, it's automatically repeated.

Involving all local participants, both public and private, is certainly positive since it determines a strengthening and reorganization of a cultural identity which in time obviously it flakes off for the continuous external impulses received from the territorial system. If this upstanding circle takes place, relational tourism becomes a tourism “guided” by the local population, which welcomes the tourist in an environment particularly attentive to the single person and for whom it is not possible to apply a tourism for the mass, i.e., an intrusive and aggressive tourism. Therefore, integrated relational tourism, needs special care from the offer of tourism services so as to integrate a tourist in the local culture (Naselli, 2012).

Satisfying the needs of this particular tourism demand can be reached thanks to the dialogue before the trip, since through social networks indicate what the tourists

needs are. This awareness is very useful since the territory arrange for the use of resources specific for that kind of tourism.

This relation (tourists- tourist offer – local community) (Vargo, Lusch, 2004 and Pine, Gilmore, 1999) constitutes essentially a form of participation of tourists to the local community decision on the choice of natural, environmental, cultural and social resources to use in the course of the trip. The constant contact during the trip, not only among tourist, but also with the local community, allows a positive relation between tourists and residents creating a mutual respect for the different cultures.

If these two communities (residents and tourists) converge in a synergic approach , it's obvious that external economic sources can facilitate not only tourists, but also the local community and relate with the surrounding territory. These benefits can be reached when the destination and the surrounding tourist area are prepared and organized to welcome tourists. Therefore, the territory is transformed in a local tourist system (Pollice, 2002). In fact, the latter is possible when at least three conditions are present: if it does not compromise the eco-system balance, the harmonic development of suburban and central areas, and the lifestyle continuity of the local community.

### **3. The Development of Networks**

In order to speak of relational tourism, good relations between tourists and residents are important. This cannot take place just during the trip itself since it would remain confined and superficial. In many cases the relation starts virtually, because people need to share their experiences in order to share mutual interests. *Social networks* and networks are methods thanks to which it is easier to meet, and make available towards one another, besides the individual skills and knowledge, also the willingness and cooperation to improve and increase one's own expertise. In such a context can relational tourism develop, which preceded by a virtual meeting is reached by carrying out activities aimed at the realization of the interests that brought them to contact one another. The uniqueness of human relations represents a trump card for this kind of tourism experiences and as a consequence it produces the constant search for new contacts.

At first a network can be formed by one or three persons that put a contact page on the *social network* to share with friends. The page becomes a starting point for the network and then it extends by sharing it with friends of friends and so on. The reasons as to why the network enlarges in the whole world are different, but no doubt two main reasons are: the natural confidentiality, guaranteed by the fact that the contact is indirect, virtual and not physical. People who access to the network are willing to meet new people precisely because of being virtually reached (see case study).

The second is due to the incomplete information of the social role held by each individual member of the network. Hence, there is no reverential fear or formality, but only knowing the role held within the network.

With some participants, after being in the web network for some time, does not mean that they are the founders of the network, they publish an event on the bulletin, to which they invite network members to join. In the meantime, the one advertising

the event organizes the event in the territory and becomes, or become, the “trustees”, that is, the link between network and territory.

The trustees, who can change from time to time, suggest a place where the event could take place and in most cases, choose the territory where the event can take place. Very often the choice falls on their residence location since they know the authentic genuineness and the resources offered by the territory. In fact, their main function is to activate the essential synergies with the local community and with private and public bodies for the *governance* of this kind of tourism, carrying out events related to local traditions, as well as specific activities of the network.

So, a network tourist is one with specific and particular needs for whom it's necessary to create a tailored trip. In fact, this kind of tourist chooses this type of holiday because he wants to experience something new and wants to know more about a particular interest that the network expresses.

This is how human relational networks are formed related both to the interest as well as to feeling the tourism experience. In this scenario, the territory has a double role: frame and privileged place for that kind of tourism. In order for the territory to turn from a frame into a useful destination to reach tourism goals, the territory must hold two kinds of “vocations”. The latter are analyzed by Cohen who distinguishes them as follows: “Hot authentication is an immanent, reiterative, informal performative process of creating, preserving and reinforcing an object's, site's or event's authenticity” (Cohen, 2012, p.7). “Cool authentication, is typically a single, explicit, often formal or even official, performative (speech) act, by which the authenticity of an object, site, event, custom, role or person is declared to be original, genuine or real, rather than a copy, fake or spurious” (Cohen, 2012, p.5).

Therefore, authenticity is not sufficient to make a territory the privileged destination of relational tourism. What's needed is the “certification” recognized by the relational tourist to the network, since that trademark becomes the factor that identifies the territory, making it more suitable compared to other sites, more attractive than the events proposed by the network.

Network relational tourism is greatly expanding as indicated by the high number of large and small events in sports, religious, dance, games, architecture.....

The role of sport events will be analysed later on, in particular the impact of organized rally for lovers of motor racing. Today these rallies can be considered as a form of integrated relational network tourism due to the large emphasis given to the relational factor before, during, and after the event including on social networks. The relationship becomes the primary motivation for the rally. In fact, motor racing tourism, as other kinds of tourism, in emphasizing the convivial and relational aspect, leaves out the motivation for its origin and becomes distinctly integrated relational network tourism.

Moreover, other kinds of tourism started this transformation since many years: for example, in religious tourism, many pilgrims prefer to be hosted during their stay in homes of the local community (for example, the Taizè Community or world youth rally, etc.) that not only share the aims of faith, but with whom a person may develop deeper and virtual social relations. In game tourism, bridge players are always more interested in the retention of customer loyalty in sites where they were already hosted for the relationship received by the hosting community.

In brief, in the network every kind of hierarchy and bureaucracy disappears, consequently human relations are direct and immediate. For this reason, the trip does not end with the simple event organized by the network, but continues thanks to the network and the virtual process to which the tourist and the local community are connected.

#### **4. Social Networking and Tourism Destination: the social and economic aspects**

Increasing the ability to communicate through the social network created a new way of thinking about tourism, which, moreover, is generated tourism related integrated. The latter no longer defined only as that activity of traveling in search of elsewhere, but on the contrary as the ability to consolidate friendships, communicate, search for emotions and relationships, build trails and explore environments known in a more personalized, thanks to iterations on the web before leaving.

In the present scenario, therefore, the tourist is defined as the person who is in search of excitement. The suggestions if acquired by a high are subjective, on the other hand, however, are the result of a previous action of sharing with others who have contributed to building the imaginary, the virtual representation and the mental map. If before the era of social networking and internet systems to inquire about trips were very simple, standardized, today, thanks to the new media systems in the future traveler discovers the land with all its resources and different angles before leaving, thanks to continuous contacts that intercepts before departure. In particular Social networks enable the sharing and then there is a unidirectionality in the message, but there is a continuous exchange that builds a representation of the target is different from the previous, more sophisticated and kaleidoscopic. This new image will contribute on the one hand to create the emotions diversified, the other to more easily insert the tourist within the territory, thanks to the interactions and information received in the network.

The information transmitted through the network, however, allow the area to become more accessible, usable and somehow more welcoming and hospitable so that the tourist can easily select Your purchases in local goods, thanks to the information received from the network, thus favoring the positive climate for the entire community.

For these potential effects, the exchange of information between tourists and the local community or individual residents is indispensable in order to segment and to stimulate tourism demand with an offer increasingly personalized.

Ultimately you have to think more and more that the network is not only virtual, detached from reality, but it is the first of the next steps then realize concrete activities. Being the first part of this process, the virtual communication becomes fundamental step to attract tourists and to grasp all its requirements so as to arrange for a suitable offer. The network, then, that encourages sharing and the retroactive effects of the users, it becomes the first moment of promotion and communication resources of the territory. The user, however, thanks to the relations established on the web, feels at the centre of communication, becoming the protagonist providing additional information for the purposes of tourism offer to the needs of diversified demand flows.

"With the use of web 2.0 tools (SNS, forums, blogs, etc..) that have fundamentally changed the way in which travellers and tourists seek, find, read and compare information (Agostinone D., Boero M., D'Alessandro S., De Nicola M., Di Federico R., Di Francesco P., Eramo R., Fabi C., Inverardi P., Malavolta P., Minardi E., Traini S., 2014, p.48)", the information is fluid and evolving stimulating both the supply and demand, establishing new ties that take to meet in real life, as in the case of relational integrated tourism. The relationship on the web, therefore, tends to reproduce the relations that are established in real life where the interest for a particular purpose determines a bond stronger or weaker. In fact, relational integrated tourism shows that it is precisely the purpose to confer the strength of relations during the trip. Certainly a key role for the success, both of the social networks that during the tourist activity, is carried out both by the trust that is established within the network, that the manager or the social opinion leaders who develops comments and increases user participation.

### **5. Territorial, Environmental, Economic and Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourist Networks**

"Network integrated relational" tourism at first may appear as lacking environmental impacts since we think especially of the virtual sphere from where it originates. But the reality is very different; in fact, when the network components create the event starting a constant and repeated interlocking of the network on the territory, if said tourism attracts a great number of tourists it may imply important territorial changes.

"Networks exist at macro levels, meso levels and micro levels. They overlap and interlock. They operate independently and interdependently. The intensity of network interrelations change according to a variety of factors such as the spatial scale the network traverses, the nature of the issues, the political salience of the issue and so on." (Dredge D., 2006, p. 568 )

As a matter of fact, the concentration of tourists in a well defined area determines environmental unbalances in the use of resources by overcoming the load capacity of tourists and strengthens conflicts in the use of resources, particularly if the local community is not totally involved in it (Bizzarri, Querini, 2006).

On the other hand, against possible negative effects we can also find positive effects, such as: enhancing environmental, cultural, and social resources, and minimizing impacts deriving from increase of infrastructures. In this kind of tourism, in fact, welcoming structures are places already existing, such as the homes of the network group, or existing buildings and structures, which just by being restructured could be sufficient for hosting – and not only welcoming – these tourists. Consequently there would be environmental advantages tied both to the efficiency of resources and the entire economic system, as well as to the development of external economies from which the local community would also benefit.

The presence of advantages tied to the reorganization of resources creates some positive economic impacts: growth of local production, which tourist should not only appreciate, but request in greater quantity and take home. In brief, if these tourists are foreigners and spend on local goods, export should increase and the added value would distribute in the whole economy of the region, at least in the medium term.

The demand for local products, from the standpoint of integrated network tourism, should drive producers, not to increase prices, as normally happens, but to find new ways to produce those goods in a more competitive way. This innovation push arises especially when the social capital formed by the local community creates a close tie of trust with the network and, therefore, it can't rise prices, but it only improves the quality of products. A tourist would feel greatly satisfied for a personalized service, and would be keen on spending more.

Another important factor that enables the network to have a very important economic role at a local level is the seasonal adjustment: the local community, wanting to keep the trust gained during the network formation, does not offer its area in high season and when services, especially those destined to tourists, are overused hence unpleasant and degrading. The local community addresses the network tourist to choose the site of the trip at a time of the year with less pressure from tourism, enabling the network to come into actual contact with it. Therefore, a network tourist feels protected and attended taking part in the local lifestyle.

Seasonal adjustment of tourism flows is, from both the environmental and economic profile, a great opportunity to strengthen the system, internalizing the relative diseconomies that could arise.

Therefore, integrated relational network tourism becomes a form of tourism that does not need large capital investments, but relations, meetings which, if on one hand are easy to imitate since they are inexpensive and not particularly risky, on the other hand they cannot be reproduced since they are related to the cultural and environmental context where they were created.

At last, but not the least important, is the social effect that this kind of tourism has on the local community. In fact, in the short period when the local community is very involved, there is a euphoric sharing with tourists of resources and local culture. Moreover, in the medium period such solidarity could produce a partial loss of the local community's cultural identity with a consequent cultural genocide, with economic effects also on the so-called "evidence effect" (Bizzarri, Querini, 2006). In the long run, instead, such a close relationship between tourist and resident could generate a hospitality denial and therefore the creation of "enclave" from residents who, feeling deprived of their culture, no longer welcome tourists consequently lose considerable shares in the market.

Another negative aspect produced by the network relational tourism in the social system is the strengthening of *élite*, especially in developing countries. The *élite*, if already in the network, manages resources directly with the tendency to keep the remaining part of the local population away, considering it far away from the needs of the tourism network. This situation could degenerate causing a conflict on the use of resources since the poor local population considers network tourists as the ones that take away the little resources they have without giving anything in return.

If we could have a SWOT analysis of this kind of tourism, we could certainly see its strengths: trust, cooperation, no intermediation and economic ties.

From these strengths we can also see the weak points of the system: a possible unprepared organization of the territory, a possible lack of timely programming and planning, attention to particular social groups, and the consequent segmentation of tourism demand. The offers derive from the worthy effect of tourism, that has the



ability to exploit even in a transversal manner new resources, such as the relationship between tourists and residents. At the end, ties are established by the relative presence – abundance or lack – of the needed resources for the utility of the network that determine the success of the initiative.

## 6. Tourist Supply and External Economies for Local Development

In order for networks to succeed in their activity, they activate the so-called trustees, that is, some network members offer to organize events in the territory where they live.

Their function is strategic since it's not only to communicate within the network, but also to organize and manage a network of private and public *stakeholders* in the destination for the success of the event. In both activities, the role of technologic innovation is significant – social network. Web 2.0 – to improve territorial marketing to attract tourists. In geographic literature there are many case studies that indicate how the role of social networks “such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube are the most important means for SMEs in any country that generate profits for their communities. Thus, the proportion of small and medium enterprises currently reaches that using social media in marketing is less than 5%. Also, it doubles the benefits of marketing through social media during this period. Accordingly, social media will occupy third place among the means of marketing to benefit including small and medium enterprises.....” (Alhroot, 2012, p.131 ).

Therefore, geographic literature contributed to enhance the role of associations, of networks between small and medium enterprises, and systems of local voluntary work as a motivation to improve the image, access and use of touristic resources in territories. (Alhroot, 2012 p.131).

Moreover, these studies allowed to validate the possibility of subsidiarity, so common in our European system, in a local community that organizes and manages resources directly, holding the needed culture and skills. The process, that starts from the bottom, allows the integration and sharing of goals not only from those that are already part of the local community, but especially from immigrants, foreign residents and residents for the natural and ensuing need to communicate with members of the international network in different languages, or to know the customs and needs of foreign tourists (see table 1).

If the network is satisfied with the work of the community, most probably by word of mouth other networks would get active, starting a cooperation with the local community thanks also to the external effects present in the territory. For example, let us take car tourism: motor racing, established for car racing, is not only meant for motorcycle racing, but also especially for those that want to race safely or want to become professional pilots. These different ways of using motor racing can activate new forms of tourism, that for the territory become external economies, that is, new professions and reduction of company costs for the different activities suggested.

However, the success of these new forms of tourism depends on the integration of the different enterprises with the public sector (Hassik, 2004), competition element in the market both for the enterprise and the territory.

The destinations, chosen by this new kind of tourism, are territories where horizontal networks are easily formed (among tourism enterprises) and vertical (between enterprises and the local community).

Consequently, relational network tourism will place events in those areas having two main requirements: the relation between the local community and enterprises, and the existence of an organized and cooperating territorial context. Both elements can be found in those sites, where the economy is mainly made up by small and medium enterprises that have strong ties with the territory and the traditional culture. Such characteristics, moreover, can expand from a local scale to a regional scale when, in order to form agglomeration economies and externality that are important for reducing internal company costs, *stakeholders* consider the possibility to adapt the needs of tourists to the regional peculiarities (cultural, social, environmental).

The regional spreading of this kind of tourism, in fact, is desirable also for large areas which relational tourism often needs. If it is true that in the past the central position of the territory encouraged the flow of tourists with a high purchase power, today, thanks to technology and transportation growth, the same type of tourists can rediscover the suburbs for spaces dedicated to the many interests and for differentiated and personalized services.

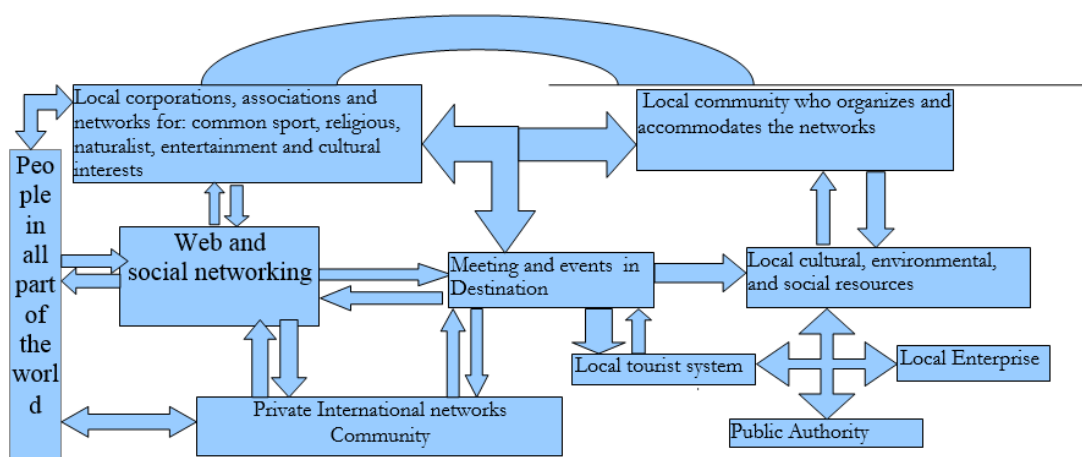


Table 1: The process of “Tourist Governance” of Networks

## 7. Case Study: Motor Car “Community”

Network relational tourism, described above, can be considered the growth of present forms of virtual networks present in social networks. The groups or the community constitute the network which is at the base of integrated relational tourism. In particular, motor car communities are made up of a group of people, keen on a particular car, which becomes a “cult” object.

Being part of the *community* means sharing the single interests and making the individual more confident with his car thanks to the analogy with others. From a form of rationality among individuals, the community is transformed into an actual network, where participants establish continuous relations, help one another and generate that added value both culturally and shared interest with all members. In fact, the motor car network becomes ever more an attraction when it binds its members thanks to a trust and cooperation rapport. This process can take place in

different ways,: for example, suggestions on returned items, special attention to personal needs of members, communication and conversation among members and so on.

But, to consolidate virtual friendship it's necessary, but not essential, to meet and take the trip. In a cooperation atmosphere, already virtually stable, it's easy to enter the following phase of trusting the group members that suggest the trip-meeting.

Let us take as an example the community of the *Golf - Volkswagen* owners. *The VW GOLF Community* was established in April 2006 and is a natural evolution of *The Golf 5 Community* established in 2003, exactly when the *VW GOLF 5* started in the Italian market. From then on it became a great love for all various users, particularly those that owned that car, that enabled the Community to grow and become an important reference for all those cars loves, especially the *VW Golf....*" (<http://www.vwgolfcommunity.com>, December 2012) .

Today there are 2762 registered users that talk about problems with their cars, and not only that. Even if they don't know each other physically, users become virtual friends. In fact, in the *Golf Community*, besides the daily sharing of general information, members of the community talk about the use of new mechanical and electric systems to improve their car performance and discuss it together. The discussions allow to develop relationships that generate new virtual friendships subdivided according to the issues discussed. As time goes by, friendship prevails over the *community*, thus generating a relational network of friends.

Moreover, participating in the network has bonds established by the staff acting as supervisor. The latter is formed by those that initially started the forum and the *community* so as to mediate what is being written and discussed. For this reason, the *staff* wrote the regulations that must be followed by all *community* members. Another task of the staff is to look for sponsors that cover management costs and especially so that the single participants are not burdened with rally expenses.

At present it's not clear whether sponsors are really useful to the community and to what extent staff is addressed by the single sponsors. According to the website, however, there seems to be a large degree of freedom in organizing rallies.

## **8. Gatherings: Local Integration with Tourist Network**

From virtual space, where relations are mostly horizontal, we go to an actual space, where sometimes relations are changed into vertical. These dynamics, both of places and relationships, must be taken into great consideration in view of territorial planning.

The transfer from a place with no boundaries and physical contact to a place where infrastructures and the landscape limit action, can change relations that become mediated by the surrounding environment, besides actually meeting the other members of the network.

In particular, car communities need considerable infrastructures in order to carry out all activities: the choice of the place cannot be by chance. In the place chosen for the meeting there must be at least a big highway artery, better if a *gateway*, where to gather coming from different places. Also, a square or parking area are needed to hold a large number of cars, trying not to damage the local people, and not at last,

motor racing where to test cars and the latest technologic and mechanical discoveries.

Generally, these events are promoted by the *staff* that asks community members, the so-called trustees, resident in the rally site, to get involved and activate local *stakeholders* to organize the event. In the meantime, trustees set up a preliminary program and publish it in the *community* while waiting for a feedback from members, who wrote down the positive and negative aspects both of the previous convention and the one presently advertised. In a short period of time, it's possible to determine with certainty the actual requirements and needs for a final program that enables many participants in the *community* to reach an agreement.

The *Golf Community* is now at its eleventh national rally, planned more or less in the same manner. Lining up and/or motor racing with some surprises to be able to try special cars and restaurants for the pleasures of the table. This way the *staff* is able to get facilities and permits for the *community* thanks to the cooperation of residents who have a direct contact with the local reality.

Moreover, in these events the relational aspect can be traced before, during, and after: before since the participation is tied to the expectation created by the community that organizes and enables all members to take part in the organization, publishing and then discussing the different choices, starting from the site where it takes place to the entire program. After all members share and accept this, the relational nature is achieved during the event: meeting and being together for one or more days creates a feeling of friendship among all participants. Following that, they share pictures, comments, and anecdotes and lay the grounds for the following rallies.

The communities of the different cars are many, just as many as the type of cars in the international market, and they constitute only part of what generally is the "car tourism". The latter has expanded greatly all over Italy, where from 1997 to 2007 there were over 846 car races for 14 different categories with 22.660 enrolled pilots (according to the Aci-Censis, 2008 Report). From the surveys made by CENSIS and ACI-CSAI in the ten-year period (1997-2007) – excluding "Formula 1" – the total sales revenue for this type of tourism at a national level could have been estimated for 2,4-2,5 billions and is destined to increase. According to an estimate provided by the organization of competitors, this growth was determined mainly by over 10.000.00 spectators, often residents of areas where the races take place or where the motor racing are, but also coming from areas further away.

Moreover, we should consider how the rallying and identity logic is represented exactly by a "tribe" motivation with its rules, products, aggregation areas (Aci-Censis, 2008 Report).

Therefore, car tourism is certainly a form of relational network tourism since rallying and the realization of events become both a useful time to know more about the car, source of the "cult", and also a way to get to know other cultures not only between members, but also with residents where the events take place. Certainly the relational aspect is recognized by members and residents, when the tourism offer is particularly careful to the needs of tourists. When a territory transfers to absorb the love and interest for the network, we can surely state that an innovative fruitful qualification of the destination is created. The more the participation of the territory

is of an economic-social nature, the more the network will be able to spread its interest generating that added value helpful for local development.

To make said qualification a stable economic activity to benefit from the competitive advantage, it's important that in car tourism local stakeholders plan the territorial asset so that events can turn out successfully with no sacrifices or costs for residents. In more pragmatic terms, in this case, for example, there should be established parking areas, roads, and prearranged paths, and at last but not least, there should be a series of services for repairing cars in the nearby territories.

### 9. Modena's Motor Racing and Community Tourism Impacts

Many of these rallies took place in the Motor Valley of Emilia-Romagna, which together with the area of Milano is where most motor racings take place (see appendix 1).

*Motor Valley* is an actual car district, since in the short radius of the Modena province are: the most prestigious car manufactures of the world (Maserati, Ferrari, Pagani and De Tomaso), four motor racings, car and motorcycle museums both period and prototypes, as well as innovation research centres for designing motor vehicles, besides training schools in mechanics.

This specialization, if on one hand constitutes a competitive benefit for the local economy, we must consider the conflict on the use of ground and territory, especially with agriculture, economic sector historically with high added value. In particular, in the Modena province, in fact, from 2000 to 2010 the Agricultural Surface Used decreased in an absolute value of - 9477 hectares with the percentage of -6,92 % (on the basis of ISTAT official data) and agricultural enterprises decreased, still calculating the variation between 2000 and 2010, of 3723 units with a percentage of -26,12%.

Year	Agriculture	Mechanic	Building	Transport	Services: hotels and restaurants
2004-2000	-9,65%	0,83%	21,66%	7,84%	8,61%
2008-2005	-3%	4%	7%	-9%	9%
2011-2009	-3,46%	5,31%	-1,95%	-4,12%	3,65%

Table 2: Variation of Enterprises by Economic Sector in Modena (2000-2011)

Source: <http://www.mo.camcom.it>

Moreover, the car sector in the Modena province increased greatly thanks especially to the spread and territorial outline of the phenomenon, tied to the promotional company skills of regional thematic as well as to the actual source vocations (ACI-CENSIS, p. 55).

The creation of motor racing in 2011 was certainly a very important sign for the entire sector, both the car sector, which since its establishment it pointed out the identity of these areas, as well as the tourism sector by imposing a strong intra-

sectors activity between business activities. Participation and the realization of tourism offer arising from these premises, constitute the basis needed for creating networks between enterprises giving tourists an opportunity to feel welcomed and part of the territorial context.

Through the years there have been more than 50.000 spectators attending car races, equal to about half of the residents and in fact the increase of foreigner tourists in the last years is significant in the Modena province (see table 2 ).

Year	Domestic	Foreigners	Total
2000-2004	-5,54%	4,39%	-3,15%
2005-2008	4.46%	16,03%	7,69%
2009-2011	-2,97%	3,72%	-1,21%

*Table 3: Variations of Nights Spent by Tourists in Modena*

Source: <http://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it>

The rallies that take place there have a big impact on the population. A first effect is social since residents become the first spectators of events. A second element is made by the economic activity: both cultural, for example car museums or the upgrading of local markets and areas not developed for tourism, as well as strictly economic such as growth in mechanical activities or car repairing. (see tab.3).

Year	Agriculture	Industries	Services: hotels and restaurants
2004-2000	-4,0%	7,3%	10,3%
2005-2008	10,9%	9,3%	17,2%

*Table 3: Variation of Added Value by Economic Sectors in Modena on Basis Price*

Source: <http://www.mo.camcom.it>

In fact, besides the certain positive effects, there are also negative impacts made up both by pollution arising from the increase of noise levels and carbon dioxide in the air, due to the concentration of vehicles in the area, as well as the lesser space and the soil taken away, generating a conflictual use of resources with the other economic activities. In fact, flat and fertile ground is taken away from agriculture for building roads and motor racings.

Moreover, the present technical characteristics are such that it is possible to foresee a strong expansion of professions related to a safe drive and sport driving,

very important for developing direct, indirect, and induced external effects on the territory.

Therefore, the rallies in the Modena motor racing pervade the entire territory both for the quantity and the quality of the phenomenon. Since this sport is in great evolution, even if niche, as compared to the present phase, there is a need for areas destined to this type of tourism, where to circulate and park comfortably – roads and parking areas – besides racing. Therefore, these places will be taken away from the local population that willingly accepts this type of tourism, if the local community can be compensated with social wealth. Hence, the participation of residents, becomes an important element for the success of the initiatives. To find a tourism offer able to be a network in itself and transfer the network structure to the tourism demand is certainly an excellent point. In the example given in the *Golf community*, the motor racing gathering is only one of the appointment that golf lovers have.

Another appointment, not less important, of the gathering is the convivial part. The tourism offer of Modena has many different economic activities that allow the realization of an integrated tourism system: for example, farming is connected with eating-and-drinking tourism, manufacturing is connected to so-called shopping tourism or so-called industrial, local handicraft to cultural tourism, thanks to a series of services interrelated also to the car world.

The realization of big and small events in the mentioned motor racing requires a well coordinated territorial planning among all stakeholders since, as we notices, guests do not go just to the motor racing, but are motivated by relational activities and integrate with the territory. The evolution of this type of tourism, virtually created, programmed and managed by locals, seems to be a model for a new type of tourism with important effects on the territory.

## 10. Conclusions

“Integrated Relational Network” Tourism seems to be a rising method finalized to generate tourism flows with great growth perspectives, though a “niche” sector. The trivialization of mass tourism made these forms of “niche” or “elite” tourism ever more interesting and attractive for special tourist.

“Integrated Relational Network” Tourism today is a form of border tourism since at present it’s not properly analysed in geographic writings – this is the reason why there are few references. Moreover, the impacts that can arise on the territory are very interesting since they cannot be traced easily due to the direct informal and spontaneous relation between the global scale and the local one. The case study indicates that the constant exchange between the global scale, the network, the local scale, and the local community determines relevant new infrastructures and new socio-economic and environmental impacts also due to the lack of a proper planning at a national and regional level.

In fact, integrated relational network tourism appears as a phenomenon based on trust that allows not only to exploit local resources, but generates increasing wealth for the entire economy thanks to the intersector and input-output effects of tourism. In the long run, this increasing the possibility to spend more for tourism, brings about an increase in small and medium local enterprises that can invest in the quality for

the production of goods, creating positive effects and externalities for the entire local economic system, as well as investments for the welfare of the entire community.

Hence, the small and medium local enterprises take part actively and invest in these forms of tourism both due to large spending of tourist for their products – consequently increasing the added value for the entire community – and for establishing a diversified economy, which reduces the risk of creating a tourism monoculture.

In fact, the destination welcomes tourists in the community in a *friendly* manner, so that it is possible to realize, in a bearable way, the minimization of environmental costs held by the local community. Another thing that confirms that this type of tourism can be met is due to the fact that it's not seasonal and therefore in the opposite trend of most other forms of tourism. This constitutes for the territory a positive element for the high dynamism and profitability that could remain unchanged through the whole year, feeding and developing the entire economic system.

An “integrated relational network” tourist, being a person that constantly establishes social relations in the location of his stay, is not enclosed in its *enclave*, which on the contrary mass tourism generally offers in holiday villages. Therefore, the main baggage that a network relational tourist takes is being culturally open, needed to integrate with the local reality and allows to get to know new cultures as a richness both for the tourist and the resident.

The relational dialogue between tourists and residents takes place before the trip, in the network – as in the case study of the *Golf community* – as well as during the stay. Obviously, during the stay in the locality a relational network tourist deepens and compares the cultural aspects that he had started on the network and this is why his stay has a longer time dimension than that of mass tourism. Therefore, from the tourism demand standpoint, “integrated relational network” tourism can be defined socially and environmentally affordable.

Finally, this kind of tourism may have good growth possibilities both for the present privileged position of social networks in a relational nature at all levels, as well as for the cooperation between the various public and private *stakeholders* in achieving a welcome aimed to satisfy the needs of tourists with a resulting tenable use of resources.

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## **ACTORS, IMAGINARIES AND POLICIES OF URBAN REGENERATION IN SOUTHERN ITALY: TOWARDS A SMART URBANISM?**

ARTURO DI BELLA<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

*Actors, imaginaries and policies of urban regeneration in Southern Italy: towards a smart urbanism?* – This article critically analyses mobile models of urban regeneration, such as smart city, and interrogates their role in Italian southern urban policy. First, it recalls some elements of neoliberal relationship between urban regimes and regeneration policy models. The focus is then directed at Italian southern context, considering the specific and contradictory transition from Keynesian to neoliberal urban regulation. Finally, through the lens of regeneration processes, the paper discusses critically the influence of smart city model on territorial imaginaries, governance arrangements, and policy practices.

### **1. Introduction**

This article critically analyses cutting-edge urban regeneration models, such as smart city, and scrutinises their implementation in southern Italian cities during neoliberal transition. The aim of the paper is twofold since I discuss the critical aspects linked with dissemination of smart city mobile model as a means for investigating the evolutionary neoliberalization developed in Italy during last decades, and then the influence of neoliberal scripts of urban regeneration on governance arrangements, territorial imaginaries, and policy practices in Italian southern cities.

The theoretical framework through which this topic is examined includes economic and political urban geography, especially studies on urban regime and regeneration policy. For the case study of the Italian Mezzogiorno, the paper makes use of the social science literature and of institutional reports in order to discuss the changing nature of urban policy cycles.

In the first section, I consider some elements of the relationships between urban coalitions, regeneration policy discourses and processes, and the mobilization of models of competitive urbanism through transnational circuits of policy transfer. In particular, the article critically interrogates the conceptual and policy dimensions of smart city model, as actually the most influential in urban planning, policy and politics, focusing on theoretical and operative limits, rhetorical aspects and the risks linked with its uncritical assumption.

In the second section, the paper looks at the context of southern Italian cities, focusing on transition from Keynesian to neoliberal urban regulation, through the lens of territorial regeneration processes. Drawing on a conceptualisation of neoliberalization as a historically specific and internally contradictory process of

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politically guided intensification of market rule in socio-spatial transformation, I discuss its evolutionary trajectories across the cycles of politics during last decades and its role in on-going processes of urban restructuring.

The third and final section examines “actually existing neoliberalism” in regeneration policy of southern Italian cities as result of a path-dependent, historically evolutionary and geographical uneven process of neoliberalization that in the economic crisis context is strongly energized by the emergent imaginaries of smart urbanism.

## 2. Urban regimes, regeneration policy and smart urbanism

Over the past twenty years or so, urban renewal and regeneration policies have developed in parallel with the new neoliberal economic policy and the reinforcement of entrepreneurial orientation in order to reposition the city on the map of the competitive landscape.

Competition is particularly central in traditional American urban regime studies, which focus on the role of coalitions in strategies of territorial transformation, and their protection of public and private interests (Stone, 1993).<sup>2</sup> The “growth machine”, introduced by Logan and Molotch, is the most notorious image of urban regime, a broad alliance of local elites engaged in the promotion of economic growth and in the creation of a business friendly climate (Logan, Molotch, 1987). The “welfare regime”, on the contrary, is that led by progressive coalitions and oriented to social inclusion, equity and citizen empowerment (Savitch, Kantor, 2002).

Currently, regime theory has become one of the prevailing paradigms for the study of urban politics also in Europe (Moulaert, 2007) and in Italy (Rossi, 2009; Métropoles, 2013), where scholars explore whether and how neoliberalism has been embodied in new urban imaginaries and the new governance arrangements have been progressively displacing the welfare city, and socio-spatial redistribution.

With the technological transition of ‘90s, new European regeneration regimes emerged, imposing their imaginaries of “urban renaissance”, based on discourses of creative and knowledge economy, while the economic imperatives are pursued through the attraction of investment capital and the “creative destruction” of urban spaces, under the impetus of the speculative need of further capital accumulation (Harvey, 2011).

The creative class theory of Florida represents the most famous and controversial discursive support of a new imaginary of “neoliberal urbanism” (Wilson, 2004) built on a pre-existing process of culturalisation of urban policy, insofar as its narrative have been widely successful, particularly amongst policy-makers and politicians,

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<sup>2</sup>A broad set of four regime types proposed by Stone (1993) captures the relationship between coalitional arrangements and policy agendas: (1) a *caretaker* regime, organized around maintaining the status quo; (2) a *developmental* regime, organized around promoting economic growth while preventing economic decline; (3) a middle-class *progressive* regime, organized around imposing regulations on development for environmental or egalitarian purposes; and (4) a lower-class *opportunity expansion* regime, organized around the mobilization of resources to improve conditions in lower-income communities.

due to its ability to connect in a logical, even if simplistic, sequence economic growth, exploitation of cultural resources, technological innovation, and urban regeneration goals (Florida, 2002). No other urban discourse has been so influencing and widely translated in so many cities, the world over, and since then, repositioning strategies have meant reimagining and recreating urban spaces not just in the interests of the inhabitants, but primarily for mobile outsiders, such as professionals, tourists or investors.

With the on-going internationalization of policy regimes, which involves the communication of neoliberal and market-oriented policies as best practices orthodoxy and the mobilization of certain neoliberal policy models through the mediation of fast policy circuits (Prince, 2012), a growing number of policy makers and urban leaders, persuaded by specialist intermediaries, *gurus*, centres (think-tanks, cultural, university-based), as well as by international agencies, such as UE and World Bank, in the form of public policy programmes and investment incentives, increasingly tend to invoke this, or similar, ideal types, often as the panacea for the many pressing problems of contemporary cities.

Most recently, the buzzword “smart” indicates a new visionary city, based on the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) applications in certain key dimensions, such as energy, mobility, buildings and governance, which through the negotiation between, and the incorporation of, economic imperatives, ecological integrity and social equity goals is directed at the planning of hi-tech-oriented urban efficiency and sustainability.

In smart city visionary framework, a multi-objective approach of integrated urban, ICTs and digital data development is presented in order to challenge problems of economic growth and competitiveness (smart economy), accessibility (smart mobility), quality of life (smart living), social capital (smart people), political efficiency (smart governance) and environmental performances (smart environment) (Giffinger et al, 2007).

In investigating how in an age of “market triumphalism” new urban models address a post-global recession context, scholars interrogate whether the aspirational discourses of smart city compete with, or are complementary to, neoliberal urban narratives (Gibbs et Al., 2013). In doing so, they point out risks of smart city model mainly focusing on logical validity and theoretical coherence, reconfiguration of urban imaginaries, socio-spatial and economic outcomes, and institutional implications in translating theory in policy practices.

First, the theoretical conceptualization of smart city model suffers from its open-ended definition, which mixes together discussions on smart, cyber, digital, wired, knowledge, intelligent cities etc. Such open-endedness makes the smart city’s vision more flexible and malleable, but it renders the achievement of its operative stage even more complex, the identification of related effects of “smart city” thinking, talking and policies extremely difficult, and the solutions it has to offer regarding fundamental goal conflicts between environmental sustainability and hi-tech-oriented economic growth cannot be tested (Hollands, 2008).

Second, the exaggerated and uncritical enthusiasm about the value of ICTs in resolving urban problems tends towards technological determinism in a way that disregards the social construction processes shaping technological usage (Aurigi, De

Cindio, 2008). The city is envisioned as a physical incarnation of an immense cloud of big data, functioning as a self-regulating organism where regulation and normalisation of body, service and data circulations enable a constant process of optimisation aimed at building a transparent, extendable and adaptable system of systems (Klauser, 2013). In smart city imaginaries and discourses complex problems are presented as abstracted and objectified facts that can be rationally handled through measurement, quantification, and impressive visualizations, with the consequence of a return to a systemic perspective of the city as a passive backdrop for action, where people are assumed as sensors and/or rational deliberative agents, reaction becomes more important than interaction, and potential for political mobilization is excluded from debate (de Lange, 2013).

Third, with regard to social outcomes, smart city has been presented as a “new paradigm” for urban development and innovation management that updates older arguments about digital cities (Komninos, 2009), thus punctually extinguishing more critical analysis, such as Graham and Marvin’s splintering urbanism analysis (Graham, Marvin, 2001). Instead, as smart technologies have the potential to change power structures within society, providing benefits to those with access to new technologies and constraining those without the skills to participate, the splintering urbanism theory offers a useful analytical framework in order to understand the role of the progressive integration of technological infrastructure networks in increasing urban fragmentation and polarization, both economical and social, and of the liberalisation of such infrastructures in creating inequality of access (McLean, 2013). Furthermore, in order to provide more specific directions regarding the selection of policy domains a smart city should address, technology aside, there seems to be an investment program for strengthening certain location factors in support of urban competitiveness (Caragliu et al., 2011), but whether and how key urban sustainability issues (e.g. inclusion, equity, quality of life) are to be achieved remains entirely unclear.

Forth, by adopting the theoretical perspective of governmentality (Raco, Imrie, 2000), other critical studies focus on institutional implications in the translation of theories into policy practices. In this approach, smart city model functions as “disciplinary strategy” (Vanolo, 2013) for administrations and citizens, they both made morally responsible for the achievement of their smart development. In the hand of local political entrepreneurs, these mobile models and their theoretical weakness can be used as “intellectual technology” (Ponzini, Rossi, 2010), in support of discursive strategies, seductive imaginaries and the politics of active participation, aimed at propelling new governance institutions, public-private partnerships and policy practices in search of symbolic justifications, and of adequate private and public funds. The smart city script acts as a “mobilizing discourse” (Peck, 2005), and the call to action for smart people and connected communities, indeed, could mask the intent to incorporate innovative forms of cultural and social expression by local policy-makers, real estate investors and hi-tech multinational corporations, in the name of new city agenda, with the gradual marginalization of those actors who do not share the urban leaders’ visions, and the exclusion of alternative models from the public debate (Hollands, 2008).

To sum up, terminological confusion and theoretical weakness heightens the danger that urban smartness becomes an umbrella-term, under which it is possible to

insert every kind of relationships between urban systems and technological innovation. The translation of this mobile model could mask simple territorial marketing policies, business-led interventions, self-legitimation of urban regimes, and their exploitation as channel for financial resources. Discourses of urban regeneration remain prevalently reductionist and elite-driven, aimed at justifying urban hi-tech-led regeneration policies as imperatives mostly oriented to economic boosterism, meanwhile issues such as socio-spatial justice and democratic inclusion seem to be marginalized, beyond rhetoric of e-participation and social innovation, and theoretical and operative frameworks do not offer any space for debating conflicts and alternative paths (Vicari, 2009).

All the problematic aspects discussed above require more detailed analyses in order to better evaluate the role of neoliberal restructuring project at the local level. Given that, an understanding of actually existing neoliberalism in urban regeneration policy in southern Italy entails an historical analysis of the interaction occurred between the evolution of neoliberal approaches and the contextually specific political-economic conditions, regulatory arrangements and power geometries.

### **3. Urban regeneration and neoliberal transition in Southern Italy**

This section is aimed at reflecting on the more general trends of urban policy waves and on prevailing imaginaries and policies of urban regeneration during the neoliberal reconfiguration of relationships over urban governing, but it is not intended to cover the whole spectrum of single cases, which show great variance across southern Italy.

Through a conceptualisation of neoliberalism as a variegated, cumulative and hybrid process that denotes a politically guided intensification of market rule and commodification (Brenner et al., 2010: 184), an historical analysis of the key moments of neoliberal urban restructuring is necessary to understand its evolutionary pathways in southern Italy. Furthermore, a discussion of the trajectories of this process is consistent with the strong path-dependent nature of actually existing neoliberalism insofar it is conceived as a result of the interaction of neoliberal and extra-neoliberal elements, i.e. of neoliberal regulatory restructuring strategies and pre-existing configurations of socio-political power (Brenner, Theodore, 2002: 357).

The Keynesian approach of post-war urban planning pursued the utopian vision of incessant development of Italian society, first fostering real estate speculation of historical centres, and then, during '60s-'80s, the building of new peripheral residential estates, imaged as model city, self-contained both morphologically and functionally. Locally rooted power blocs, acting as intermediaries between the centre, supplying financial resources, and the periphery, the local context, even if strategically driven and financially sustained by the central state, executed the territorial processes of regeneration and expansion of southern cities.

This “public spending bloc” is an Italian way of proto-neoliberal regime and its entrepreneurial orientation (Rossi, 2009) is associated with a perverse, often illicit, version a public-private partnership, with the latter taking a leading role in defining the rules of the game, pursuing maximal profits from a regulatory monopoly position, through complex networks of political patronage and real estate speculation

practices. Meanwhile clientelism has imposed further limits of coalition, as the main lever of southern cities conflict management and political regulation (Chubb, 1982).

Also in Italy, the early '90s saw the first steps towards neoliberal economic and political mode of governance and regulation, in order to reshape the role of the state in the economy. This process involved peculiar processes of deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation concerning, in particular, the labour market, the housing sector, and some of the most strategic national public utilities, such as energy, telephone, motorway and railway. Given that in Italy, as in many other European states, transition to neoliberalism mostly meant a realignment of state spatial policy and local governance, welfare state bureaucracies and public utilities were downsized and traditional redistributive approaches to spatial policy were significantly retrenched (Brenner, 2004).

Until then, the establishment of regional governments in Italy represented the only reform oriented towards decentralization of state functions, but the emotional pressure caused by the exacerbation of a mafia-state war and the collapse of older political caste after corruption scandals of "Tangentopoli" accelerated the downscaling of the state through the reform of local government, promoting the birth of a new political season marked by local politics taking a leading role.

During this initial phase of "roll-back neoliberalism" (Brenner, Theodore, 2002), because of the move away from Keynesian policies at the national level, municipalities are increasingly constrained to introduce a new neoliberal approach and principles in local governance, such as managerialization of local administrations, and the new public management, in order to lower the costs of state administration, and thereby to accelerate inward investment.

Since local political elites control the major planning and growth issues in urban areas, working closely with developers but largely in control of them, "directive regimes" (Dowding, 2001) emerged, often led by left-wing mayors and coalitions with a progressive orientation (Catanzaro et al., 2002).

The Europeanization of urban policy focusing on urban innovation and socio-economic experimentation supports, at once discursively and materially, widespread culture-led initiatives of urban regeneration drawn upon imaginaries of creative and entertainment economy and representations of competitive urbanism inspired by success examples such as the Barcelona model, and based on forms of public-private partnership, collaborative planning, and negotiated decision-making. Under this adaptation pressure, the experimentation of a multi-level arrangement of governance and of innovative "assemblages of projects" (Palermo, Savoldi, 2002), such as Urban I, Territorial pacts, and so on, guided Italian southern cities towards a late and partial post-Fordist transition (Ruggiero et al., 2007) and encouraged the planning of "culture cities" (Carta, 2004).

Regeneration policy became the central focus of urban policy and, some years before Florida published its theory on the creative class, truly innovative experiments of creative urbanism were developed through at least a partial integration of physical, symbolic, cultural, intercultural, and hi-tech oriented policies of regeneration.

Such a southern Italian way to urban regeneration as much is characterized by a strong decision-making tendency and a decidedly personalized leadership, as it is subject to internal differentiation in a continuum between experiences strongly



emphasizing the role of symbolic policies and of conventional “command-and-control planning tools”, such as in Naples (Bull, Jones, 2006; Rossi, 2009), and others more firmly engaged in new models of public entrepreneurialism, in the politics of making, and in the integration of the single projects as coherent parts of a more innovative planning process, such as in Salerno, thanks to the plan ideated by Bohigas (Palermo, Savoldi, 2002).

The policy discourses adopted almost everywhere a moderate and social variant of urban neoliberalism, based on the exploitation of urban cultural and historical identity, in order to restore civic pride and to boost urban economy.

The historic city centres become the target areas of renewal, regeneration and revitalization policies and played a central role in marketing a new image for the cities and for their regimes.

The development of several small-scale interventions aimed at the requalification and the functional reconversion of high symbolic value areas, monuments and public buildings offered the opportunity to materialize in the public space, with an immediate impact, the perception of change for local citizens as well as for investors and tourists. In many southern cities, the renewal of symbolic spaces, such as Piazza Plebiscito in Naples and Foro Italico in Palermo, the requalification of inner city such as in Catania, Salerno, Cosenza, Matera, Taranto and Bari, the enlargement or the repositioning of university’s infrastructures and/or the initial regeneration of the waterfront location generated new environments of creative production and cultural consumption. The improvement of creative environments was neither related to economic development in advanced sector, apart from some scattered attempt to affirm a sort of technopolis such as in Catania or in Bari, nor to residence of new creative professionals, nor really directed towards international competition, but however it brought benefits for the urban image and for the touristic attractiveness on the outside, as well as larger use of public spaces for cultural and leisure activities, the rediscovery of territorial identity, and a growing environmental awareness on the inside (Leone, 2004).

At the same time, some evident context-embedded peculiar characteristics erupted, coexisting with other more common features.

First, the hybrid model, as a mixture of top-down managerialism and urban entrepreneurialism, adopted in southern city regeneration policy appeared to be oriented to reassert public control of the planning policy process, in order to underline a clear break with the previous period, clearly in contrast to the public-private partnerships and negotiated schemes commonly pursued in Italy and further afield. Second, it continued to emphasize the spatial dimension of interventions (Palermo, Savoldi, 2002) and to privilege central areas to the detriment of already disadvantaged spatial peripheries, then causing initial processes of gentrification and spatial polarization. Thus, only sectorial output have been achieved, which are not effective by themselves to produce a widespread regeneration of the intervention areas (Governa, 2010), as well as issues such as the reduction of social exclusion and spatial injustice have remained at the margins of policies. Third, while the increased autonomy and power of the mayor effectively shifted decision making away from the intrigue of the party politics, and many projects prioritized procedural transparency and accountability (Rossi, 2009), frequently over a pro-growth strategy

(Bull, Jones, 2006; Dines, 2012), nevertheless private investment and civil society involvement remained very weak and inadequate.

In the political realm, new evocative terms, such as “renaissance” in Naples or “spring” in Sicily, were used as labels of a new city image and of an innovative urban regeneration policy, fixing the policy making on new discursive foundations of public space rediscovery and urban renewal, such as citizenship and inclusion (Dines, 2012). Nonetheless, the rhetoric of inclusion collided with the denial of any form of participatory governance. The imaginaries of an efficient and functional administration as well as their “dirigiste strategies” (Bull, Jones, 2006) appeared difficult to conceal with the issues of integration and participation, which are those of greater potential innovation in international experiences of urban regeneration. Frequently, a rather revanchist tone accompanied the discourse of change that highlighted the reclamation of public space and the rehabilitation of local identity (Dines, 2012), tending to marginalize the weaker sectors of local societies, from immigrants to those natives and social movements whose ideals and practices stood in opposition to official ideas about civic pride, decorum and their pro-growth agenda, or non-growth position (Lo Piccolo, 2000; Vicari, 2001; Rossi, 2009; Di Bella, 2012a).

The downturn and the consequent interruption of the trajectory of urban regeneration policy arrived at the beginning of twenty-first century, when the shift toward progressive government suffered the consequence of a drastic fall in political consensus.

This new cycle is largely characterized by the affirmation of more conservative, hyper-pluralist and entrepreneurial regimes (Stone, 1993), while an upsurge in organized crime and frustration at not seeing structural improvements reduced the initial enthusiasm.

Such a phase of “roll-out neoliberalism” (Brenner, Theodore, 2002) is defined, in particular, by the increasing paralysing political and territorial fragmentation of administrative powers (Swyngedouw et al., 2002), political-infighting and pluralism that renders policy making more difficult, schizophrenic and discontinuous, the return of old-style alignment within policy making process and of formerly excluded politicians, and the growth of criminal powers (Sommella, 2008).

The forceful return of party interference in administrative affairs goes hand in hand with the reemergence of forms of personalized patronage and clientelism, and with a partial change of priorities in urban policy agenda. A deeply interventionist national policy agenda emerges around “social” issues such as crime, immigration, policing and urban order (Peck, Tickell, 2002). The topic of security assumes a previously unknown central role among urban question at the national scale (Allulli, Tortorella, 2013), characterizing both the right and the left political coalitions discourses, especially in parliamentary elections in 2001. In the whole country, between 1998 and 2005, 194 protocols were signed in order to reaffirm the co-responsibility of the Mayor and the Prefect for the state of security in the community. Strengthening the revanchist sides of urban politics emphasized moral discourses about public order on the streets, calling for a zero-tolerance approach which combines repressive measures against the growing local criminality, the informal economy and the socio-spatial disorder caused by both natives and immigrants (Di Bella, 2010). Particularly in southern cities, the protocols were essentially symbolic

responses destined to disappear without producing any significant results, nevertheless, playing a pivotal discursive role in consensus politics of new urban regimes and political entrepreneurs, looking for public legitimation and exceptional powers to challenge the endless emergency state.

As result of a long tradition of exceptional governance in southern Italy (Belli, 1986), this period is also marked by the “normalization of crisis” as the breaking event used instrumentally for the justification of urban and territorial strategies (Amato et al., 2011). Through the relations between continuous and contingent crisis, regarding all the key urban questions – such as waste, water, mobility, housing, unemployment, immigration, criminality – and special powers and measures, the “exception” became the basic principle of social, environmental, and policy regulation (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Brenner, 2004), often used by traditional powers to confirm and reproduce their legitimacy and therefore, one of the most influential interpretational frameworks of current governance practices in southern cities (Amato et al., 2011; Cafiero, Urbani, 2012).

Despite the restrictions of state expenditures and investments, thanks to these special powers local authorities can continue to play the role of main intermediaries between urban economic interests and the central administrations, both at national and regional level, orienting the policy making towards greater entrepreneurialism, in particular by focusing the short- and medium-term aspirations of traditional sectors (builders, property developers and landlords), while more innovative sectors, such as the cultural and the hi-tech, mostly suffer the economic effects of austerity and of global recession as well as the progressive marginalization within urban regeneration policy agendas.

Under these conditions, also the attempt of launching strategic urban planning processes, aimed to the construction of shared future visions of area, produced limited outcomes. Notwithstanding its relevance in drawing up an orientation and in delineating the basic values concerning public policies (Zinna et al., 2003), numerous aspects interfere with its operational effectiveness: the planning tool too ambitiously conceived, the fragility of local leadership, the top-down guidance, the difficult involvement of private capital, and the substantial loss of confidence in local government (Pasqui, 2011). Thus, as purely rhetorical statements, they are confined in promoting the development strategies stated by the dominant urban regimes, appearing unable to express an effective capacity for action (Governa, 2010). Furthermore, a redundant evocation of creative, hi-tech and knowledge economy-oriented urban imaginaries clashes not so much with national ranking reports that attest the weakness of performances of southern cities on Italian creativity index (Tinagli, Florida, 2005) as with the “dis-regulation” (Donolo, 2001) that characterizes dominant mechanisms of policy making. On the one hand, particularistic circles of intermediation preserve their power by multiplying the opportunities that allow the mediators to mediate and the political leadership maintains influence and control over the processes of territorial transformation through exchange-based relationships, occasionally characterized by corruption and the involvement of criminal powers (Cremaschi, 2007). On the other hand, in contrast with such prevailing mechanism of political and social regulation, strategic planning and their visioning processes build on imaginaries of creative and knowledge city perform a significant symbolic function by making this dynamics

less visible and providing political actors with a repertoire of actions rhetorically oriented toward competitiveness (D'Albergo, Moini, 2013).

#### **4. Between the gap and the crisis: the politics of smart city**

Over the recent years of financial and economic crisis, a new urban question arising globally appears even more dramatic in southern Italian cities because of the legacies of previous crisis and of the imperative of cutting public and social spending.

Furthermore, the complex, confusing and contradictory Italian transition to neoliberalism had first prevented a coherent process of power decentralization, and then led to dangerous effects on the broader territorial national question, in parallel with the moral turn that is defying the whole political discourse in Eurozone.

On the one hand, over recent years we seem to have witnessed a reverse map of policy priorities in the national agenda, with attention shifting from the problems in the south to those in the north, through rhetoric presenting the latter as the engine of national development and the former responsible of its own decline (Viesti, 2009; Gonzales, 2010). On the other hand, the emergency due to the economic crisis is accompanied by the "return" of central power (Perulli, 2013) and used to link the notion of the public good with the repayment of the public debt, while southern cities, in ever more critical financial crisis, are subjected to coercive pressure to cut public services, rapidly privatize, sell public property, and increase planning deregulation.

Furthermore, the current economic recession, which has hit hard those areas mostly dependent on public support, has led to a further increase in the gap between the north and south in Italy.

Between 2007 and 2012 the gross domestic product of southern Italy decreased by 10% compared to 5,7% in the centre-north; the employment rate decreased by 5,1% in the south, while the centre-north showed an, admittedly poor, increase of 0,1%; more than 400,000 young people between 19 and 35 years of age have decided to leave the Italian Mezzogiorno for education or work; at the beginning of 2013, the southern regions per capita income is lower than in Greece; 20% of families are in a situation of poverty and another 30% are extremely vulnerable to poverty (CENSIS, 2013). The economic and social recession as much as the several controversial aspects of EU and national policy, combined with the quality of financial planning and with the economic commitment that the state has guaranteed in support of southern Italy (SVIMEZ, 2012), have caused a further deterioration of territorial competitiveness and of urban quality, with strongly negative demographic, employment and educational effects (CENSIS, 2013).

The inefficiency of southern public institutions to administer public expenditure, increasingly indicated as the main responsible in the analysis and discourse on the "new programming" failure (Gonzales, 2011), concurs in the reality with the effects produced by the context-specific process of neoliberalization, the lack of a national urban policy and the scant attention paid to the southern question, precluding a convergence across Italian regions.

The peculiar Italian way of neoliberal restructuring project has reinforced the tensions between centralization and decentralization in Italian public administration.

On the one hand, the affirmation of new concepts and principles such as subsidiarity, institutional pluralism, participation is accompanied, in practice, with the recentralisation of urban mainstream policy and resources allocation decision-making (Governa, 2010), clearly demonstrating that local authorities are seen more as policy takers rather than policy makers. On the other hands, the decentralization process meant mostly the affirmation of an “asymmetric subsidiarity” (Alulli, Tortorella, 2013) in which the growth of functional responsibilities assigned to local governments goes hand in hand with the restriction of resources and of autonomous decisional spaces and with the imposition of new local financial constraints, such as the Internal Stability Pact.

Furthermore, also the inattention in southern question can be observed in some national choices. The liberalization of local public utilities (transports, waste etc.), for example, in the partial form of public tender for commitment, started slowly, and furthermore ignored the institutions of effective competitive mechanisms, thereby preventing the opening up of important local services market to external providers. The result in southern cities is the protection of the interests of already existing providers and even the survival of “exceptional” management that remains outside any kind of democratic control and accountability (Barca, 2009; Amato et al., 2011).

At the same time, the absence of a national urban policy, that is the cause of the enduring fragmentation of the system of actors and initiatives involved in urban policies in Italy (Cafiero, Urbani, 2012), is partially compensated for by the incremental adaptation to the dominant policy paradigms (Alulli, Tortorella, 2013), and by the introduction of policies aimed at promoting “competitive relations among subnational levels of state power” (Brenner, Theodore, 2002; Brenner et al. 2010).

Over the last few years, two different plans have reinvigorated the debate on the regeneration of southern Italian cities: “national plan for cities” and “Growth decree”.

In 2012, the Italian Minister of Infrastructure launched the national plan for cities, a programme aimed at the regeneration of deprived urban areas that should result in the provision of new infrastructures, urban redevelopment, and the building of car parks, homes and schools. In January of 2013, there was the selection of 28 projects, 11 in southern cities, from 457 proposals of local governments.<sup>3</sup>

The Growth decree, in line with the European policy agenda “Horizon 2020”, is centred on smart city vision, by now also in Italy a priority instrument of urban regeneration. The smart city programme has launched two calls for tender in southern regions: “Smart and City Communities” and “Social Innovation”, first reserved only for southern Italian cities.

The first is part of a more comprehensive general programme “Italian digital Agenda” and has allocated 200 million euro for the partial financing of 38 “high-tech-oriented experimental projects” aimed at mobility and logistics, healthcare, education, e-government through cloud computing solutions, environmental sustainability and energy efficiency, tourism and culture. Thanks to social innovation

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<sup>3</sup> The list of selected projects is available on line [http://www.ediliziaeterritorio.ilsole24ore.com/pdf2010/Edilizia e Territorio/ Allegati/Free/Citta/2012/12/Schede.pdf](http://www.ediliziaeterritorio.ilsole24ore.com/pdf2010/Edilizia_e_Territorio/Allegati/Free/Citta/2012/12/Schede.pdf).

programme, another 58 projects by young people resident in the southern regions have been selected for access to financing of an additional 40 million euro by the European Fund for Regional Development 2007-2013.<sup>4</sup>

These two programmes have been followed by the launch of a further two: one for “smart cities and communities” in northern regions with a funding of 700 million euro, and one hi-tech national clusters of 408 million euro (40 million aimed at southern regions, 368 million at the rest of Italy).

Anticipating the activation of these projects, a first scepticism regards the regional distribution of resources that does not seem aimed at reducing the gap across Italian regions. Second, other justified doubts chiefly regard the ability of southern local governments to plan and execute such a projects. In fact, they have the task of activating participatory procedures between the public and private companies, of proposing planning tools able to connect spatial requalification with wider public interest goals, and of making technical offices and skills available in support of implementing actors (Ruggiero, 2012).

Third, there is the evident fragmentation of the proposed interventions. Although the call for an integrated approach to urban development is currently the most widespread in scientific literature, institutional initiatives still appear to be characterized by a sectorial approach.

This difficulty of translating the theoretical most emphasized integrated approach into practice is symbolized by the re-production of smart city benchmarking analysis (Vanolo, 2013), such as I-City Rate report (FORUMPA, 2012), which represents, in a hi-tech perspective, the historical disparities between northern and southern Italian cities (Gonzales, 2011). The use of a set of multiple statistical indicators reinforces a sectorial vision and reduces the complex urban dynamic and its smartness to assessable and enumerable units, in order to produce new and specific ways to organize problems and prefigure solutions. Furthermore, the rating analysis, as a “performance technology”, implicitly indicates the obligation of southern cities, most of them in the lower side of the rating, to become more similar to northern cities, and indeed to redefine their problems and priorities, and to reorganize their agendas, according to the smart city imaginary (Vanolo, 2013).

All the southern cities engaged in submitting their proposals, such as Naples, Palermo, Bari and Syracuse, have created public-private partnerships, in form of associations, composed by public, semi-public and private actors, think tanks, and especially big players that changes the geometries of power inside urban regimes. Syracuse for example is the only Italian, and one of 100 cities in the world, selected to receive a Smart City Challenge grant from IBM as part of its effort to build a smarter planet. As one of the most influent big players engaged in implementing hi-tech solutions for achieving smarter cities around the world, IBM advocates a techno-mediated regulatory apparatus that approaches reality as an ensemble of perfectly intelligible and manageable system of data (Klauser, 2013) that once is analysed and shared through software products, mathematical algorithms and statistical tools should enable city administrators to better understand and control

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<sup>4</sup> The list of selected projects is available on line ([http://www.ponrec.it/media/91513/elenco\\_progetti\\_di\\_innovazione\\_sociale\\_approvati.pdf](http://www.ponrec.it/media/91513/elenco_progetti_di_innovazione_sociale_approvati.pdf)).

their interventions through the optimization of the use of limited resources (IBM, 2011). In line with this approach, IBM is committed to actively supporting local administrators of Syracuse in the collection of specific data about urban core operational systems that are analysed in order to highlight strengths and weaknesses, to provide initial recommendations for urban regeneration, and to develop a contextually specific smart city strategy.

In the name of greater speed, flexibility and efficiency, these big players take the lead inside new quasi-private and highly autonomous organizations, without democratic legitimation, and become the main actors of urban renewal, while the claim for social innovation remains strongly subordinated to and mediated by dominant interests of hi-tech industry, thus excluding the concerns of the place-based constituencies that are most directly affected by their decisions (Brenner, Theodore, 2002) and marginalising alternative imaginaries of digital urbanism (Di Bella, 2012b).

Because also of the difficulties at state level in implementing the much-trumpeted Italian digital agenda, at the moment the politics of smart city appears no more than a new form of “managerial localism” (Raco, Imrie, 2000), based on the distribution of reduced financial resources through territorial competition (Brenner, Theodore, 2002) and on the redefinition of smartness at local level as relational resource in the politics of active participation through the devolution of its governance to public-private macro-actors (Ponzini, Rossi, 2010).

On the one hand, during the deepening phase of neoliberalization, the reconfiguration of the responsibilities to reduce the gap between the north and the south increasingly means a “downward” disciplinary imposition of regulatory experiments and of “competitive forms of policy transfer” (Brenner et al., 2010). On the other hand, the balance of power inside these new local governance institutions involved in leading such a cycle of urban transformation remains unclear (Holland, 2008; Vanolo, 2013).

So conceived and performed, despite of progressive potential, the smart city model runs the risk to be used by new urban governance arrangements exclusively for stimulating hi-tech global market or as the instrumental channel for obtaining funds and public legitimation at the local level, instead of as a means by which to image new solutions for structural problems that continue to affect southern cities today.

While awaiting an evaluation of context-specific impacts produced by the implementation of policies, at the moment the smart paradigm seems to have taken the form of a “discursive project” (Ponzini, Rossi, 2010), which offers seductive imaginaries and visions of urban regeneration (Pratt, 2011), without any guarantee of a parallel strong public commitment directed at meeting the bottom up demand for a real change and progress, at expanding social opportunities, or at shrinking historical gap between the north and the south in Italy.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of urban regeneration policy in southern Italy has provided evidence of the partial, confusing and contradictory Italian transition to economic and political neoliberal regulation and of the ambiguities and dilemmas associated with the increasing translation of fascinating discourses and models of urban regeneration into planning policy.

Over the recent years of economic crisis, Italian neoliberalization processes have intensified and accelerated as much as their contradictions and the pressure produced by the transportation of dominant paradigms and mobile models on local scale.

The new smart city paradigm became central in EU and national policy agenda and then transferred to locale scale as a means for new market-driven regulatory experiment of policy mediation and territorial competition, just at the time when the question of southern Italy seems to be sidelined in national policy agenda and southern urban regimes have to tackle an extremely serious economic, political and social crisis.

In a situation of impellent necessity for additional funds, the growth of the functional responsibilities of local governments coexists with the restriction of national expenditure and with the imposition of new local financial constraints. During last phase of roll-out neoliberalism, both conditions have already led urban regimes in southern Italy towards stronger dependency from the center, both national and regional, greater orientation to consensus politics, intertwined with the advance of a revanchist city, and economical entrepreneurialism, supported or replaced by special powers justified by persistent emergencies.

These context-specific facets of neoliberal restructuring project and all the other critical issues regarding smart city model discussed above should cause us to consider more seriously the ambiguities and the threats associated with euphoria that is accompanying the “smart” rhetoric in southern cities, by taking into greater consideration the consequences for socio-spatial justice, as well as the institutional implications and the reconfiguration of geometries of power.

In this respect, as the historical analysis has showed, public-private partnerships are nothing new in urban regeneration policy of southern cities. Nevertheless, as these have not been used to transfer risk from the public to the private sector, for wider economic development purposes and/or for outside investment attraction, rather to preserve dominant mechanisms of socio-political regulation and particularistic circles of intermediation, so the politics of smart city is reconfiguring in a completely new way the balance of power inside urban governance arrangements and institutions between public and private, and local and global, actors. Furthermore, smart city narrative, with its requirement for efficiency and sustainability, addresses economic crisis context by intensifying the open-ended nature of neoliberal urbanism possibilities, rather than leads to a fundamental questioning of marked-based approaches and of peculiar Italian neoliberal transition.

Politics, as public realm, is the only place where critical discourses and alternative imaginaries of smart city can deconstruct hegemonic rationalities, unmask the myths and reifications that pervade neoliberal prescriptions of urban innovation, reclamation and reconfiguration, and to then reconstruct determination of public



needs and planning priorities. Otherwise also smart city model is destined to be used as a label to justify allocation of public funds, to legitimise the birth of new institutions of urban governance, to enhance urban regimes and local politicians in neoliberalization of urban regeneration policy, and for political, hi-tech and land speculative needs, leading to a further intra-urban segregation and inter-regional disparity.

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