
Generating local development in Italian fragile rural areas: drawing lessons from good practices

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Abstract

The EU rhetoric on local development in recent decades promoted a paradigm shift based on a transition in the discursive framing of sub-national contexts (Governa, 2010). Such entities have been seen as differentiated and having a unique set of resources to be harnessed to co-produce solutions, activating bargaining processes (Ray, 1999). Most recently, though, critiques have highlighted the failures of a purely endogenous model and how risky is to base strategies purely on embedded knowledge and processes of self-discovery, both usually insufficient to avoid a vicious path-dependency. Many called for a revision of such model (Barca, 2009; Barca et al., 2011; Woods, 2009 and 2011; Rizzo, 2013), highlighting the need to give preeminence to enlarging the interaction with wider socio-economic and territorial contexts while building institutional thickness as well as the capacity of public institutions to act authoritatively as intermediaries animating networks. Such aspects are all central to the so called new endogenous paradigm for local development: a model, that is, depending on the construction and mobilization of actors and resources from within and outside a locality (Rodríguez-Pose, 2011). The research problem we investigated links the above to debates on the new rurality, putting agriculture, local development and community-based strategies at the centre of a reflection.

New agricultural practices in fact are rapidly spreading in peri-urban, rururban and – now - mountain areas. There emerges a re-convergence to agriculture translating into new and re-rotted forms of the latter, as well as into a new and pervasive rurality based also on other interacting and complementary activities (Paniccia and Leoni, 2015). Such change indeed presupposes greater attention to the collective production of economic value, to community-based practices and the creation of relation-based and social assets. Various experience in Italy highlight features of the new endogenous approach. They could be seen as best practices since they seem capable of overcoming the constraints that the (purely) endogenous paradigm poses to rural areas (in particular when one focusses on the strategic capability of local governments and on how the proactive action of local communities on local resources succeeds in interacting with additional external forces/resources). New agriculture often paves the way, acting as a cornerstone drawing routes for development of shared planning and policies (also predisposing territories to be activated in other manners, f.i. touristic).

Via multiple case studies in Italy, our work aimed at identifying conditions that generate success to further develop theory. The analysis of development policies and of associated

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territorial strategies was carried out privileging an integrated approach (Messina, 2012), highlighting the "generative" elements (Lampugnani and Cappelletti, 2016) found in the different cases analyzed. The latter have thus been examined by comparing contexts to throw light on distinctive elements - endogenous and exogenous - that allow to detect best practices together with potential critical points. Understanding them is indeed central if one wants to offer guidance on how to better help marginal rural areas, also fragile from the environmental point of view; territories that have not yet found a way to emerge from critical situations (often still associated to stagnation, depopulation, shortcomings concerning the delivery of basic services, etc.).

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