
TERRITORIAL GAPS AND COMPETITIVENESS. A NEW ROLE OF THE NETWORK ENTERPRISE IN ITALY

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the Italian context in regards of two specific issues. Specifically, this contribution aims to discuss the relationship between territorial gaps and competitiveness and to provide an assessment of several theoretical approaches.

The first issue refers to current models of agglomeration and networks in local economies and, in particular, whether State and local policies are capable to sustain regional development through specialization to encourage innovation.

The theoretical background includes literary review: i) territorial point of view of Porter's value chain and competitive environment (Porter, 1990-1996); ii) economic determinants of competitiveness by Kresl (1995) and Kresl and Singh (1999); iii) competitiveness and regional development referring to specialization in small economies by Manskell (1998); iv) New Economic Geography of Paul Krugman (1995); v) the specialization approach (Storper, 2014); vi) new perspective of industrial district (Saxenian, 1994). But we should also consider the point of view of Thomas Piketty to frame the analysis within a European context. The second issue refers to concurrence and deviation determinants in the European context: the territorial gap.

Economic growth has led to economic wellness, but it appears to be ineffective in terms of "social" wellness (Piketty, 2013). In order to reach social wellness, it is necessary to analyze how economy stands within society. Furthermore, "theories around the growth of the human capital and generational class conflict proved themselves misleading" (Piketty, 2013).

"During the last two decades, the most important model of enterprise aggregation in Italy – Italian industrial districts (Becattini, 1998) - faced a deep crisis caused by several factors, such as the coming of new international competitors, albeit in ways that differ extremely from activity to activity" (Olivieri, 2014).

Territorial complexity is a key point in the analysis of territorial gaps and processes of local development. Recognizing the determinants of territorial modifications and of economic and social development is fundamental if we want to understand the dynamics of territorial competitiveness. Spatial analysis and its evolution rely on the aggregation models of private actors.

In the case of Italy, the theoretical background can be limited to the following: i) the relationship between economic growth and socio-economic development linked to territorial gaps (Brogna, 2005; Celant, 2005; Celant, 2002); ii) spatial analysis of regional systems, featured

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by industrial take-off process, and specific strategy and different approaches: Rostow, Perroux, Myrdal and Hirschmann, on one hand, and bottom up approach (Bignante et al., 2014; Celant, 2005; Conti, 2012).

Since the end of World War 2, public policies have constantly failed at their goal to reduce territorial gaps: this was for instance the case of the Italian State ones (Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, IRI) and of European Regional strategies (Structural and Cohesion Fund). More in detail, the results lacked the involvement of local actors and communities.

We could summarize the reason of the above mentioned failure in the following: i) modifications of territorial economic and social system from agriculture to manufacturing (Celant, 2016; Celant, 2010; Conti, 2012; Spinelli, 1998); ii) the concentration of stimulating growth in some territory that involves the level of territorial development (Celant, 2010; Celant, 2005; Salone, 2005); iii) two conflicting interpretations of dualistic model of so called "Terza Italia" (Conti e Sforzi, 1997; Bagnasco, 1977; Muscarà, 1967).

An example of the local scale can be easily found in the territorial programs and projects aimed at promoting local resources, leading on one hand to diffusive economic growth – directly linked to the number of communities involved – and on the other hand to socio-economic development – directly linked to the degree of competitiveness of the territory. But how are the two issues connected? In synthesis, the last point we aim to discuss is the potential role of networks of enterprises as applied to territorial competitiveness. Territorial networks expand boundaries and intensify functional relationships between companies. An example of case history could be the tool of Contratto di Rete (Network Agreement), introduced in 2009 in the Italian Law to stimulate innovation and specialization.

Keywords: AGGLOMERATION, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, COMPETITIVENESS