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# REGIONAL PLANNING FACING GLOBAL CHALLENGES: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE ITALIAN CASE

*Giuseppe De Luca<sup>°</sup> e Valeria Lingua<sup>°°</sup>*

## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the models and practices of regional spatial planning activated in Italy in recent years, in order to evidence the innovations that occurred and challenges that Regional planning institutions are facing. Just after the devolution of local power in Italy in 1977, spatial planning competences began being organized into Regional Institutions. Each of the twenty new Regions must make a Territorial Regional Plan (Piano territoriale regionale) together with a Regional Landscape Plan (Piano paesaggistico), possibly in connection with a Development Regional Program (Programma regionale di sviluppo).

The first experiments in regional planning, carried out in the 1980's and 1990's, have led to the formation of territorial plans with an indicative planning setting, the development of special regional areas, and the planning of infrastructure, such as road networks and railways.

The new millennium opened with two important changes that have considerable influence on the nature and form of regional planning:

- the amendment to Title V of the Constitution (2001) that, by incorporating the principles of subsidiarity, adequacy and differentiation, has reversed the institutional hierarchy in favor of municipalities, making it urgent to reflect on the role of the Region and its planning territorial instruments;
- the approval of the National Landscape Code (2004), which has modified the landscape issue in the statutory of national and regional regulation.

These changes have generated important revisions of legislation at the regional level. A review of the regional spatial plans reveals that although the plans have different forms and work according to different timelines, they address one common need: to overcome the traditional approach to regional planning system with a set of innovations.

In this direction, the latest experiments abandon the traditional approach to regulatory coordination, turning to a regional territorial plan. A mixed model, characterized as strategic, structural and operational at the same time, the regional plan is required to convey an idea of the future, a common goal, and a shared vision. It is supported by a set of guidelines for the protection and enhancement of the elements of identity in the region and is made explicit in specific territorial projects. From a multilevel governance perspective, the local and provincial bodies are called on to share and specify both the regional

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scenario and the operational scenarios. This specification must also be accomplished through the coordination of bottom-up and sector-based planning in terms of coherence and conformity to the directions defined at the regional level.

Together, various cases of recently formalized planning (Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Tuscany), some cases-in-progress (Friuli Venice-Giulia, Piedmont), and the case of an interregional experience of coordination of regional spatial strategies carried out by eight Regions under the name of *Padano-Alpine-Maritime Area* can provide a framework for these reflections.

The paper addresses these innovations.

## **2. Nature and form of the new Italian regional planning**

Through experiences in regional planning coming to fruition at the turn of the late 1990's and the new millennium, we can identify three major trends:

- the first, expressed mainly by Regional Territorial Plans of the Valle d'Aosta and Umbria, seems to still be strongly anchored to the model envisioned by the traditional Law no. 1150 of 1942: a unified plan to coordinate and address, giving an overview of the issues of territorial government, through a subdivision of land for fields and an explanation of the program lines in the region, in close connection with the regional program development
- the second, a strategic concept of regional planning, is made explicit through the construction of shared vision and cooperation of the scenarios of perspective, as in the case of the Territorial Indicative Plan in the Marche Region and/or of the Piedmont Regional Spatial Plan
- the third, a structural approach to regional planning, is one in which the regional plan is considered a real "warranty" actor for all of the choices which are considered to be priorities for the land, landscape and environment. The indications of the plan are aimed to build consensus among the institutions in order to ensure resource quality and resilience of the reference system. This approach is developed in the experiences of the Tuscany and Liguria regions.

These three trends give rise to different forms and characters of the regional plan, as well as different modes of interaction, each having various limitations and opportunities.

All offer meaningful forms of interaction: the first, a hierarchical system, allows a clear distinction regulatory apparatus which enables public and private entities to have a clear awareness of their responsibilities and the scope of their autonomy. The second involves the construction of a coherent vision of the region among the various institutions, reinterpreted in a unique strategic vision. The third identifies factors to be considered as spatial structures of territorial identity (be they physical or intangible resources, social or cultural capital) and, as such, be subject to rules and performance criteria to allow for protection and reproducibility over time.

In all cases, the interaction required to give form to the regional plan involves critical issues: the joint rules of the Regional Territorial Plan of the Valle d'Aosta and the Regional Territorial Plan of Umbria assume that all of those involved in the governance of the territory are cooperative and willing to work together. This is because the objectives are not local, but

are of general interest. It also requires that the regional and local authorities take an active and constructive role in the process of transformation and development.

In the case of strategic regional planning, the likely limits are related to present interests within the political market, without taking into account possible future interests. While moving away from more traditional territorial coordination plan, in fact, collective interest can be considered as pertaining only to the interests of so-called “strong”, that is, those who are organized and structured.

Structural regional planning also tries to consider the interests of the weaker parties. This gives rise to an instrument consisting of a set of elements characterized by the nature, dynamics and different degrees of uncertainty and inconsistency. As a result, the instruments sometimes penalize the design aspirations, reducing them to tools for defining “structural invariants”.

However, the latest plans, newly approved or soon to be adopted, appear to show a decided movement toward the reconciliation of these trends in the same instrument landing. A new trend may herald the desired formation of a mixed system of planning that contains within it both structural and strategic elements.

The “mixed” nature of the regional plan seems to resolve the dichotomy between strategic and structural planning which is highlighted in the experiences at the turn of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rather than being considered an element of incoherence of a structural plan, the presence of elements with cogency and different degrees of uncertainty creates a point of strength when inserted in a strategic plan. The term strategic refers a sharing process which helps define a shared regional vision. It also refers the product of such sharing, that is, a plan which is broken down into strategies, goals and actions to be followed accordingly, in a more or less prescriptive manner.

In this sense, it is possible to find consistency between a strategic vision which is more focused on economic development and visions which are more oriented to the protection and enhancement of the environment and landscape.

Most recent regional plans, therefore, are not only strategic or structural, they have a mixed valence in which there is predominant tendency towards a balance among the different natures. Balance that comes from “eclectic” processes of formation of the regional facility, which offers some form of institutional cooperation, participation and inclusion of very different interests, results not only in creating regional legislation, but also the political and technical imprint given to the plan.

In relation to finding a balance between the three dimensions of the regional planning (strategic, structural, land-use oriented), we will highlight some common issues and experiences in the emerging regional planning in progress, all converging towards the identification of appropriate forms of cooperation:

- the construction of strategic vision with multimedia tools and methods, as is reflected in a plan aimed at defining the vision, objectives and actions that revolve around the strategies outlined in the form of intriguing slogans (as in the case of Emilia-Romagna and Veneto) and involve the interests increasingly marked by experiment, in addition to traditional instruments (Lombardy), and modes of participation involving citizens in a broader sense (Veneto, Apulia, Tuscany).
- the relationship between spatial planning and landscape planning, which assumes very different shades because of how the two dimensions are conceived in the regional legislation. The regions, in fact, may choose to provide a landscape plan in addition to the regional spatial plan, or they may choose to merge the two

dimensions (landscape and territory) within the spatial plan. In any case, to avoid the excesses typical of strategic planning (non-inclusion of weaker interests and future interests), the identification of identity elements (structural invariants) and the definition of strategies for the protection and enhancement (landscape quality objectives and guidelines) involve a wide cooperation and the capability of acknowledging and addressing the complexity of territorial interests.

- finally, the operation of the plan is resulting in the identification of design areas at the regional level (Lombardy, Marche, Campania, Liguria) which are able to stimulate public interest and private agencies, both in terms of the local practices of area-wide planning (inter-municipalities, unions of municipalities, etc.) and through the identification of possible areas of inter-institutional cooperation (Friuli Venice-Giulia, and Piedmont).

The current experiments evince a new turn towards co-planning, and while the activation of widespread participation practices is still in an embryonic stage, there are episodes of great interest. In particular, the theme of the landscape seems to imply a close search for consensus on the resources to protect that, at the regional level, requires more consideration of both the weaker and more general interests. It should be noted, in light of the first experiments, that the regional level necessarily implies a selection of interests and actors through a process which can occur in several ways:

- through self-selection, when meetings, conferences, etc., are called which involve institutional entities, citizens and associations. As already noted for conference services, the very act of attending the conference and presenting the plan would entail the consideration of its contribution, while non-attendance has the value of self-exclusion
- randomly, when the process is based on the extraction of a larger representative sample of participants, as in the case of the town meeting
- through a combination of the aforementioned approaches, for cases in which sample-areas and pilot projects are identified, and the use of localized participatory practices is activated.

Finally, the operation of the instrument is one of the main characteristics of the newest generation of the regional territorial plan. This involves implementing strategies which more and more oriented to the identification of contexts for regional or thematic projects.

In most cases, the regional level foreshadows programs and integrated projects covering a range of topics and areas of particular weaknesses and particularly problematic. If at first, this orientation to the project seems more evident in those plans that promote a strategic approach to planning, it is now an integral part of most more recent regional plans. Already, the regional territorial plans of Liguria, Marche, Umbria and Campania provided for an extensive use of operational tools with multiple definitions and objectives (regional initiative projects, pilot projects, integrated projects, project areas in the Regional Territorial Plan of Liguria, shipyard projects in the Marche region, field projects in the Campania Regional Territorial Plan, and plans and programs in the Umbria Region). Today, the latest plans make extensive use of tools and programs that include character design, as well as inter-institutional cooperation and the intervention of the private sector.

It is clear that the identification of areas of regional planning involves the activation of a direct relationship between the region and the specific interests that focus on the design theme identified on the scope or area defined in the plan. Strongly related to this way of understanding the operation of the plan, through thematic or territorial projects at the

regional level, is the identification of areas for for intervention or co-planning above the local level.

In some regions, in fact, there is an evident link between territorial cooperation and the operation of the regional plan, for which the identification of geographical areas based on historical characters, and socio-economic identity is not only aimed at the specification of objectives and policies of the plan, it is also the basis for how to activate co-planning and institutional cooperation. It is the case, for example, in the Piedmont Regional Territorial Plan (PTR), approved in 2011, which identifies 33 Areas of Territorial Integration (AIT) and defines them as supra-regional systems. These areas represent the aggregation of systems against economic social, and territorial decline.

To these areas, the plan takes an compliant approach to urban spatial planning , in order to provide for “government guarantees” (environmental protection, standards, monitoring tools, etc.). This is a multilevel governance which activates a process of interpretation-design-decision to be implemented both in each regional system and at the local level. Decisions may result from governments’ specificity, from traditions and from values expressed by local communities.

In summary, the current experiences show a common issue related to the possibility of implementation of the regional plan: the strategic vision conveyed by the spatial plan necessarily requires an effort of integration among policies for large areas, including financial policies. The Regional Spatial Plan, in fact, suffers from two problems. Firstly, it needs to include estimates of regional development in a framework that offers increasingly globalizing trends. On the other hand, the regional plan is affected by difficulties affecting some industries more than others, difficulty reconciling the need for effective correspondence between the policies of the regional plan and the provisions of the Regional Development Plan (PRS). The political will to implement certain actions rather than others still determines the emergence of the strongest themes (mobility, living, renewable resources, etc.), since they are better funded and supported at the political level, as opposed to issues such as weak rural areas and the landscape.

In this case, the experiences in Tuscany and Piedmont seem the most interesting while the regional program development one developed in Apulia is more strongly bound to the political landscape with.

The years 2007-2013 were marked by a strong period of ~~of~~ hybridization between the two dimensions in the construction of regional strategic frameworks. While in some regions (Emilia Romagna and Lombardy), the strategy was built through policies and actions related to the programming of resources to planning, in other cases (as Tuscany, Umbria and Marche) the strategies were built together, so there has been a real territorialization of policies. Throughout this last experience, however, the relationship with the State has been inconsistent and sometimes it did not take into account both the national strategies and the possible interregional strategies.

Despite being characterized by advanced tools, spatial planning systems (Plans and regional) of the regions of central Italy failed to generate a collaborative process. Collaboration was not possible even when the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation had proposed “regional platforms” as strategic areas of cooperation, within the *National Strategic Framework 2007-2013*.

### **3. Horizontal forms of governance: the inter-regional table of *Padano-***

### ***Alpine-Maritime Area of the North Italy***

The definition of an interregional experience of coordination of regional spatial strategies was mainly driven by the need to shift some weight away from the European context. The approach can be considered a particular and significant one for the evolution of the regional plan in Italy: the process of collaborative governance organized around an Interregional Table which aimed to develop a Padano-Alpine-Maritime Zone in Northern Italy.

The Interregional Table was created in 2007 and included the regions of Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venice-Giulia, Piedmont, Lombardy, as well as the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano. It served as a moment to capitalize on the institutional learning conveyed by their participation in the EU's Metrex network. This new cooperative form was intended as a technical working community, firstly aimed to build a shared cognitive framework within which strategies could be generated for the sustainable development of the first so called "Adria-Po Valley".

The Interregional Table is a committed that was designed to identify a system of coherences and to promote the competitiveness of the regions concerned, both in the new context of European development and within the media planning. In practice, it was created as a space for discussion and exchange of knowledge in the process of construction of instruments of regional planning, with the aim of promoting, on an ongoing basis, initiatives for the comparison of relevant inter-regional issues.

The Interregional Table also aimed to acquire a role as a forum for the sharing of a common position regarding the construction of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, an agenda which is also based on the sharing and dissemination of results of trans-national and trans-border cooperation activities .

This committee, politically motivated, is supported by a technical committee which prepares materials and activities for the Interregional Table itself: in fact, after the signing of the Charter of Venice, it soon became clear that the real promoters of the Table were those of the technical regional administrations, appointed for the formation of governmental instruments for the territory (regional territorial plans and regional landscape plans).

The Interregional Table for Adria Po Valley was then immediately established for a "technical discussion", in which the revision of spatial planning instruments became the common theme of the exchange. Many regions were preparing the new regional territorial plans and this forum facilitated comparison during the meetings, as evinced by the themes for discussion: «the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and the strengthening of the economic system and the networking of excellence; the development of cities as engines of the future; strengthening the connections and intangible assets; the promotion of innovation activities and research and the promotion and enhancement of best practices to reduce energy consumption and combat climate change» (Interregional Table, Venice Charter, 2007).

The first results of this experience, presented in July 2008, led to the creation of three landscape-related charters for a shared vision of the Padano-Alpine Area, concerning the system of ecological structures, the layout of infrastructure networks and the system of urban polarity.

This vision was built expressly to form an intermediate level of knowledge between the European level (usually borrowed from the ESPON program) and the regional level. For this purpose, there has been an analysis of the area of the relationships and influences of some urban centers and infrastructure systems and systems of other nuclei and, in general, the



spatial contexts of belonging, which often go beyond the regional borders. The vision, which has been defined as a “gentlemen's agreement”, was inserted directly in the planning tools through a sharing process at the technical and political meetings, which were held in each region. Between 2008 and 2009, those regions with more active participation have formalized their instruments: Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy have received approval, and Piedmont has adopted the plan. In all cases, the scenarios prepared have been incorporated into the plan, particularly in the cognitive frameworks.

The year 2009 is considered a stagnant period, due to a change of legislature in almost all regions which led to a lack of sharing at the political table. After launching a committee which emphasized balance between politicians and lobbies at the European level, the political participation (and therefore the interest) seemed to slowly wane. The technical component, however, continued to meet regularly, both for the promotion of initiatives in cross-border and transnational cooperation (participation in tenders ESPON and Interreg), and for the sharing and dissemination of the results of project activities. In addition, interregional coordination (in its technical component) has been indicated as a reference for the ministerial committee appointed to integrate the requirements of the Leipzig Charter.

The technical component has thus promoted the continuity of the committee, which first took the political path on October 12, 2010 through the signing of the *Pact for Sustainable Development of interregional Padano-Alpine-Maritime Area*, and then through the signing of *Bologna Agreement*, January 27, 2012. In fact, a new program of committee activities is set to begin under the new administration, based on the following objectives:

- promoting the area of the Mediterranean basin as the most important macro-region for central Europe (with its 120,000 square kilometers and 27 million inhabitants, the production of more than 54% of Italian GDP, the largest share of research and for its innovation)
- sharing policies for the regional territory and the landscape, through the definition of strategies and objectives for the recognition of the importance of macro-alpine region of the Po Valley in the European context and at national level, in particular relating to landscape matters
- implementing coordination in the strategic planning of large areas, which comprises development, environment, landscape, location of major functions and infrastructure, defining common rules to ensure efficient use of resources, and the containment of land consumption
- building a map for landscape identity in order to link the policy of protection and enhancement of landscape with strategic environmental assessment
- spreading good practices.

The final goal, therefore, is the certainly the need to transform a common vision (at the time, more oriented towards knowledge than to projects) in a model of self-representation and of a strong and valid territorial marketing in order to compete in the European space.

It is necessary that this vision be reinforced by other Italian regions, especially those of Central Italy, even if it is not yet fully realized.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The focus of the paper are the theories and practices of regional spatial planning activated in Italy in the last 20 years, in order to evidence the innovation which occurred and the challenges that regional planning institutions are facing.

Compared to a theoretical framework and regulatory environment that tends to separate the different areas of planning (landscape, land, cultural heritage), the evolving experimental framework outlined by the most recent experience of regional planning is characterized by pluralistic approaches in which, in the face of the widespread use of strategic rhetorical orientation, different aspects of planning seem to prevail at various times (alternatively, strategic, structural, or both).

The new regional plans, therefore, are not only strategic or structural, but have a mixed valence in predominately striving for a balance between the different natures. The balance comes from eclectic training processes of regional facility, which offer some form of institutional cooperation, participation and inclusion of very different interests, resulting not only in regional, policy and technical legislation, but also the political and technical imprint given to the plan.

The problems of consistency of views on the one hand, and social equity and distribution on the other, seem to find a synthesis when the following elements are identified within the same regional territorial plan:

- a vision for the future with fewer in strategic objectives, so the nature of the regional plan has a long-term time horizon
- structural elements which are required for performance and quality criteria, with medium to long- term horizons, especially in reference to the system of landscape protection understood as a cultural product and identity;
- operative projects and programs that collect instances of the territory of the meeting and therefore involve a feasibility of short-medium term.

In a context dominated by globalization, the future vision, as well as operational programs and projects, necessarily require a leap in scale that allows for movement outside the regional boundaries and into to macro-regional areas located in a specific European space. In this sense, regional authorities have already recognized that the notion of 'legal region' is weak; and that a new "soft" association is the future strategy. In this context, interesting examples of intraregional and interregional cooperation are maturing: the example of the Interregional Padano-Alpine-Maritime Area in Northern Italy is one that has possibilities.

The experience has provided a unique opportunity to activate a process of co-planning at the supra-regional scale- planning that is characterized as bottom-up and not imposed from above. The simultaneous preparation of spatial plans in each region allow for the representation of the area as macro-region through a shared vision and common indicators. At the same time, it allows regions to work together on common themes, translating them into a set of skills and strategies that have a common language for all the regional instruments.

However, the potential of this approach does not seem to be fully explicit: the regional planning documents, for the most part, treat the vision as a piece of a cognitive framework, without a real inclination to the project. This is due to the lack of an approach geared to action, which will lead to an , effective coordination expressed by the various plans, if not an actual strategic plan. While this coordination is indicated in the objectives of the new cycle of the Interregional Table, it should have emerged earlier during the phase of drafting the instruments- instruments that are by now institutionalized and, therefore, not subject to

revision.

If this weakness emerges at the national level, within the EU, it is likely to be amplified. The degree to which weakness will be amplified will depend on the nature of cooperation, the size and characteristics of the partnership, and relations with the European Union.

To free itself from the characterization as a community-based project and really project itself in Europe, against the local marketing done by creating a shared vision, there should be a strong political marketing operation of the committee, to boost its value and capability as an instrument of interregional co-planning in the broader landscape of European development...

In this sense, institutional arrangements for the partnership must be established. These may be based on the European model of the EGTC, or even without creating new institutions, as envisaged in the recent macro-regional experiences. Such arrangements will give legs to the table, through formal agreements on inter-regional strategies that are able to project Northern Italy in the competitive system of the European Union.

The other regional experiences seem too weak and little prepared to set up macro-planning experiences in Central or South Italy. In this sense, only the Northern macro-region, which has already taken wing, can be a real example of competitiveness in the European system.

Competition must be built, nationally and across regions, through a substantial effort to integrate the regional spatial planning and development policies so that there is a profitable relationship between local-regional and global.

In this framework, the Regional Spatial Plan can play a key role in providing a regional development strategy for the next season of the Structural Funds (2014-2020). It is the tool that - when integrated with the Regional Development Plan - can provide a territorialized vision of development strategies, to meet the objectives of territorial cohesion with place-based strategies (Barca Report, 2009) and inter-regional strategies, based on shared projects and geographical areas that go beyond the institutional boundaries.

To take on this ambitious task, the Regional Spatial Plan can only assume a cooperative nature, made explicit through processes marked by inclusiveness and capable of :

- systemizing, the different options of the regional government, in particular the different interests and the different governing options they have pursued;

projecting these options into the broader framework of the relevant macro-reference area (in Italy we can speak of north, central or south) through inter-regional planning experiences like that of the Po Valley -Alps-Maritime. A thorough national strategy based on its regional cooperation will facilitate entrance into the system of European territorial cohesion.

Stronger political support, as well as the development of innovative practices provided by operative interregional projects, can play an important role in improving and strengthening the interregional tables, leading to a real cooperation of a scope in which geography and economy converge to develop the necessary requisites of competitiveness and sustainability in an European and global panorama.

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