



Urbanistica n. 132

January-April 2007

Distribution by www.planum.net

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An Atlas as a way to approach the territories of Vicentino

Valeria Fedeli

The Atlas of territories and actors, part of the preliminary studies for the Ptcp of Vicenza, is meant as a tool to approach, get in touch with and discover, the territories composing the Province and at the same time as a way to approach one territory to another, a way to develop the spaces for inter-institutional cooperation in the field of planning among the provincial administration, the municipal administrations and relevant economical and social local actors.

Approaching territories, so far, in a double sense

On one side the Atlas has been thought as a central space for encountering territories and use this encounter 'to probe' the interpretative frame built, within an expert approach, with the technical analysis displayed in the preliminary studies. Through the Atlas, the contents produced throughout the work, has been discussed with actors able to produce, for the public role they play, representations of their territories: mayors, presidents of forms of intermunicipal cooperation, representatives of economical association and trade unions have been interviewed in order to compare their points of view with the outcomes of the analytical studies. Starting from the perception of an advanced level of maturity of the public local reflection on the processes of transformations occurring on these territories, experienced throughout the *Progetto terzo millennio*, the group of experts of Diap, charged to develop the preliminary studies has opened this space for discussion and interaction with the local context, in

order not only to improve the outcomes of this exploration, but also to contribute to launch the debate among local actors. On the other side, it has been built as a way to make territories (as social and political construct, and thus institutions and actors) closer one to each other. In which sense? In the perspective of promoting a renewed approach to interinstitutional cooperation. Several have been in fact in the last decades the attempts to promote horizontal and vertical cooperation in Italy: the majority of them have been unsuccessful. Often based on a narrow vision of decentralisation, or on a general hope in the possibility to find out homogenous areas for the efficacious functional organisation of competences and power, most of them have shown their limits in the light of new problems and processes obliterating the meaning of municipal boundaries. Most of these precarious solutions often provided in the absence of forms of cooperation based on association around problems and interests and based on the constitution of new levels of government, have shown to be unable to offer interesting answers to the crisis of the relationship among territoriality and sovereignty. This is especially the case of a reflection offered by the tool for planning assigned to an institution like the Province: an institution whose main role is that of coordination, and which as far as now, in Italy, has failed to find out forms and ways to achieve cooperation. The Atlas aims, so far, to offer materials and, at the same time, methodological suggestions, able to contribute in this search for cooperation; enlightening the existence of different forms of associations of local actors built around problems, interest, and

coalitions, it aims at proposing a different approach to this problem, able to move from a normative dimension to innovative paths of institutional innovation. With this general objective in mind, the Atlas is constituted of maps of cooperation, collections of discourses on possible relational approach, with a special focus on the field of planning, and finally of fragments of agendas: in so far it tries to develop a map of possible, eventual and existing processes of engagement of public actors around problems and opportunities, inquiring them under the light of a general question: which is the role local can play in a moment in which the territories of Vicentino are suffering not only from a crisis of the traditional production model, but also a crisis concerning the role of public and private actors at the same time of a general condition of sufferance of the territorial model? The article focuses on three different materials in order to answer this question. The role assigned by the regional legislation to territories in the field of local development public policies; the changing landscapes of local institutions and finally the solicitations to the public agendas proposed in the discourses of main economical and social actors (economical associations and trade unions, in particular). The picture sketched by these materials is a rather problematic representation. On one side the local results still central in the regional policies. There has been in the last decade a renewed investment on it, in order to encourage the formation of networks of actors able to promote projects and policies. Nevertheless the recent regional legislation recognises, as a result of processes of reterritorialisation, the fading

of the traditional economic, social and political geographies. Asking for a new definition of districts as actors of local development based on the empowerment of economical and institutional actors, at the same time, deconstructing, so far taken for granted the forms of organisation of production, the law ends with stressing the geographies of local actors. Actors which appear in general already disoriented and looking for new description of their territories able to allow the production of policies and the reproduction of economical, but also social capital. On one side the Atlas maps the stress which local institutions are undergoing. Municipalities in particular have developed a new conscience of the inefficacy of an action based on their traditional boundaries in order to solve the problems produced so far by the economical and social. They are experiencing forms of cooperation, which, though are still weak and in particular unable to move towards the field of decision-making in planning; while in general these same forms show evident limits, remaining as a matter of fact, very weak kind of ties, though felt as very engaging. Both the Unions of Municipalities and the Comunità Montane are showing this lack of consistency or strategic vision: some other forms of less institutionalised cooperation show interesting outcomes. In general we could conclude there is a spreading conscience of the necessity of cooperation but the capacity of dealing with a relational dimension of autonomy still seems far from simple to be achieved. On the other side economical and social actors declare a deep concern related to the situation: what once was conceived as a bunch of

problems to be locally solved by the local actors, is now looked at as a problematic mosaic which must be strategically faced. At the same time economical actors lament the problematicity of the context, and come back to ask for the intervention of those public actors which once they looked to with distrust, they discovered the weakness of public actors to which they have contributed to, in promoting a model of local society based on individual action and to a model of growth and development uninterested to the reproduction of public good and resources. At the end of the day, the article concludes, the Veneto laboratory and in particular the context of Vicenza seems to be exposed to a risky condition: territory and territories seem to be again at the center of the general attention. At the same time processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are stressing territories and with them actors and institutions, and the society as a whole. While consolidated geographies fade, the roles of public, and private actors, so far taken for granted, are no more clearly defined. The result is a contradictory situation, in which there's a general reduction of trust in the private solutions to problems and the search for public action seem to be widening. At the same time there's still a condition of distrust towards institution, as shown by datas of Fondazione nord-est. Institutions don't look to be able yet to respond to the call of economic actors: while majors are asked to strategically produce answers to the problematic situation, they spent their time receiving citizens looking for a job and entrepreneurs looking for resources to keep alive their activities. On the other sides, economical actors, apparently unable to

represent their problems and to find out solutions, look at institutions with great expectation, though recognising their weakness and exposure to the blackmail of the necessity to rapid solutions to urgent problems. The recent experience of a related declination of the concept of autonomy, they can count on, result in a unease position of local. Suspended among compromise and reinvention, among the fading of a myth, with its most dangerous risks of hypostatisation and, as far as now, limited capacity to renew the meaning of a season of economic development.