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## Europeanisation and urban policy initiatives in the Italian Mezzogiorno

Carla Tedesco

During the 90s many towns in the Italian Mezzogiorno were involved in a series of initiatives concerning the setting up and implementation of urban policies. Most of these initiatives were either promoted and/or funded by the European Union Structural Funds (1) (Urban Pilot Projects, Urban, Urban II, actions within Regional Programmes) or in any case linked to them in terms of innovation in ways of interventions and objectives. The relevance of urban initiatives promoted and/or funded by EU within the evolution of urban policies in Italy during the 90s has been widely recognized in several ways (Camagni 1998; Dematteis, Governa, Rossignolo 1999; Franz 2001; Padovani 2002b; Palermo 2002). Processes observed in the Mezzogiorno (2) are part of this wider evolution. Thus, to use 'Europeanisation' as a frame for the analysis of the processes highlighted above would seem sensible. Recently, there has been much literature on Europeanisation. The term is used in a number of ways to describe a variety of phenomena and processes of change due to the European integration process (Olsen 2001). However, we will only refer to the definitions and the issues raised by Europeanisation research that seem relevant to the topics we are dealing with. In particular, analytical tools developed in Europeanisation studies seem to be effective for raising questions concerning both the outcomes of the new urban policies in the specific territorial context examined,

apart from the capacity to set up policies, and the diffusion of an 'European policy style' in local territorial action practices. This article is divided into three sections. In the first section we refer to some issues emerging from the debate on Europeanisation, focusing on the role of programmes promoted and/or funded by the EU within urban initiatives set up and implemented in southern Italy. In the second, the diffusion of 'European' characteristics in the local policy style is stressed. In the last section, questions about the nature and the effective impact of ongoing changes are raised. Of course, some questions are not only peculiar to southern Italian towns, but can be referred to urban policy initiatives in Italy in general.

### European urban policy initiatives: local action capacity

Some scholars (Börzel, Risse 2000; Fabbrini 2003) argue that the concept of Europeanisation has been mainly used in two different ways (3). Briefly, on the one hand, the concept of Europeanisation has been used to describe the institution building process at the European level and its impacts on the Member States (Risse, Cowles, Caporaso 2001; Stone Sweet, Sandholtz 2001); on the other, it depicts a process re-orienting domestic politics and policy-making (Ladrech 1994, quoted in Börzel, Risse 2000; Radaelli 2000). Each of these definitions can help to raise some issues about what is happening in the Mezzogiorno towns. If one looks at urban policy initiatives in Italy during the 90s, there is no doubt that they were concerned with Europeanisation as the "emergence and the development at the European level of distinct

structures of governance, that is, of political legal and social institutions associated with political problemsolving that formalizes interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative rules" (Risse, Cowles, Caporaso 2001, p. 3). In particular, documents on urban issues were drawn up (in particular, CCE 1997; 1998) as well as common policy tools for the different Member States, whose relevance in Italy we have underlined above. Referring to Risse, Cowles and Caporaso's definition, on the one hand, we can point out that there is no UE competence in the urban policy field (4). In contrast to other policy sectors such as the environmental and agricultural ones, where most of the existing policies are made at the European level, Community urban initiatives are policy tools offering funding within UE regional policy (Morata 2002). However, programmes have to be set up following the Structural Funds rules and Community regional policy principles. Thus, Europeanisation impact on urban policy is not 'direct' as in other policy fields. On the other hand, it is worth underlining that in Italy because of the absence of both an 'explicit' urban policy (i.e. explicitly directed to cities, given by Parkinson 1998, p. 415) and a shortage of funding for urban policy initiatives, it is 'oportune' that cities are successful in their bidding for EU funding, and all the more so in southern Italy. What is more, EU urban policy initiatives are funded within the regional policy. The latter aims to reduce uneven regional development. This has several consequences in the case of Mezzogiorno. In fact, the Commission stresses two different urban issues. On the one hand, the Commission looks at the

role of the cities as initiators in European economic progress; on the other hand, it takes into account that urban areas are affected by severe social problems (CCE 1998, p. 3). Given the difficulty in making coherent the promotion of competitiveness of a city as a whole and the attempts to reduce disparities within it, mainly within one policy initiative, it is not easy to understand which of these objectives is a priority in the case of Mezzogiorno towns, unlike urban regeneration programmes targeting deprived areas of prosperous cities. Due to the absence of UE competence, and hence of binding prescriptions in the urban policy field, the setting up of spatial actions can be seen as an indicator of action capacity of the local actors. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that within the growing global urban competition, whose promotion is one of the guiding principles of Community action, it is easier to compete if cities already have forms of social and political regulation allowing them to emerge as political actors within European Community (Le Galès 1998, p. 85). Accordingly "the weakest in this system run the risk of finding it hard to benefit from the new rules of the game" (ibidem, p. 64). Following the above considerations, promoting urban policy initiatives based on competitive bidding processes can be considered an attempt by the Commission to support the weakest regions to resist global competition pressure: from this point of view, the competitive bidding process can be seen as a way to promote local actors' action capacity (5). Hence, the first question to ask is if the capacity to set up and implement urban

policy initiatives in the Mezzogiorno towns can be considered a way 'to benefit from the new rules of the game'. In order to answer this question we can cautiously analyse a series of issues concerning resources available to 'the weakest' (such as Mezzogiorno towns) to compete, ways and processes of resource activation, objectives and long term outcomes of this mobilization.

A more cautious analysis needs to specify some more details concerning the lack of rooted experience, and often of any experience at all, in Italian towns in the field of initiatives based on concepts such as 'integration' and 'partnership', which underpin the Bruxelles programmes. In other words, what we need to point out is that during the 90s, when the European integration process had its first outcomes in Italy in terms of urban policy initiatives, Italian urban policy frames were rather different from the European ones.

The proposition that the misfit between European and national policy, processes and institutions is a condition for expecting domestic change in response to Europeanisation is non-controversial (Risse, Cowles, Caporaso 2001). In particular, this misfit constitutes adaptational pressure, which is a necessary but not sufficient condition for expecting change. This condition becomes sufficient if there are some 'facilitating factors', among which learning (6) (Risse, Cowles, Caporaso 2001).

When looking at differences between Community programmes for urban areas, and generally with a spatial target, set up in the Italian Mezzogiorno within the 1994-99 and 2000-06 programming periods, a

learning process can be observed, not only concerning Structural Funds spending capacity, assumed by some scholars as an institutional learning (or lack of learning) 'track' (La Spina 2003, p. 288), but also in relation to the principles underlying the programmes set up: for example the fact that integration and partnership concepts became popular also in discourses concerning urban initiatives promoted and/or funded by other institutions.

Despite the fact that some concepts were taken for granted in urban policy initiatives, their concrete meanings are still to be explored. Only through analysis of these meanings, in fact, is it possible to understand what kind of learning characterized the examined processes. In particular, according to what Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001, p. 12) suggest, it is possible to distinguish single-loop learning and double-loop learning, as defined by Argyris and Schön (1978) (7). Thus, we can highlight both how some European concepts spread in southern Italian towns policy contexts and how they started underpinning urban policy initiatives set up locally.

#### **Urban policy initiatives 'European style': local outcomes**

Although concepts such as integration and partnership have been diffused also in southern Italy, if we look closely, their local interpretation is profoundly different from both the way they were conceived in Brussels and their interpretation in other Member States: these concepts seem to be peculiarly hybridized in the different local contexts with concepts, practices, actions already circulating therein (Tedesco 2002).

The definition of

Europeanisation given by Ladrech (1994, quoted in Bache 2000, p. 2; Börzel, Risse 2000, p. 3; Radaelli 2000, p. 3) is particularly relevant to this case. In Ladrech's view Europeanisation is an "incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy making". Radaelli (2000, p. 3) widens this definition to refer Europeanisation to: "processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies". As far as the concept of integration is concerned, if one looks at the contents of programmes drawn up and implemented in southern Italian towns during the 1994-99 programming phase (i.e. within the Urban Programme under Community initiative), many of them are made up of different projects put together (cfr. Palermo, Savoldi 2002). In most cases 'assembling' projects was perhaps the only way to set up a programme to compete within the bidding process because area-based regeneration initiatives were still unknown in Italy at the time; however, afterwards it became possible to recognise ongoing learning processes in the setting up and implementation of urban regeneration integrated initiatives (Barbanente, Tedesco 2002), so much so that it is possible, for instance, to argue that in

some cases integration between physical, economic and social actions was produced during the action (Soda 2002); in other cases even the idea of initiating a development process which could tackle different dimensions of deprivation had emerged during implementation, not just in relation to operational, but also to argumentative aspects (Granata, Savoldi 2002).

Moreover, the integration concept has been used more widely in Italy than in both Brussels and the Member States the Commission had referred to when setting up urban initiatives, the latter looking only at the integration among policy sectors and funds (Padovani 2002a). In particular, in most cases in southern Italy European and national programmes often targeted the same area. In addition, these initiatives were related to wider planning strategies. The profound link between policy initiatives and between plans and policy initiatives is a meaningful characteristic of the Italian interpretation of the integration concept, especially if one compares this interpretation with present difficulties, for example in Great Britain, after 30 years of urban policy there are many difficulties both in relating to each other different initiatives targeting the same area and in relating urban policy initiatives to wider planning strategies (Tedesco 2002). This local interpretation characterizes Programmes under Community Initiative and Single Programming Documents within the 2000-06 programming period (Barbanente 2001; Moccia 2002) as well as other spatial strategies set up during the same years (Cremaschi 2003). There are other aspects of this interpretation that are worth

mentioning, such as attention paid to the historical part of cities and to the environmental, historical, cultural heritage as crucial resources for development. Furthermore, in the Italian interpretation of the integration concept, the stress is on the physical aspects of re-generation (Palermo, Savoldi 2002). Of course, physical actions are more expensive, so their weight in the budget available is greater. Moreover, in southern Italy the physical aspects of urban deprivation are very severe. What is more, in the urban policy field, as in other policy sectors (for example in the environmental policy one) the problems on the Community agenda are the problems of the 'leaders' (countries which are more expert in the field, often northern European ones), but these problems are different (and differently constructed) (8) from the problems of southern Europe (Börzel 2001). From this point of view local interpretation can be considered a way to resist maybe unintentionally (Börzel uses the term 'foot-dragging'), as a response to Europeanisation, the Europeanisation process often being influenced by the unbalanced distribution of power among Member States. However, it is still not understood whether the prevailing of physical actions is a way to match local needs with European opportunities or a track of inactivity, hindering the more meaningful innovations the European actor could introduce. As far as the concept of partnership (the guiding principle for the implementation of structural policy after their reform in 1988) is concerned, its introduction at the European level was aimed at a broad involvement of local actors,

social and economic partners as well as environmental agencies and other non-governmental agencies being explicitly mentioned (Bache 2000, p. 7). Given this definition of partnership at the European level, the issue is which actors are concretely involved and what are their relations in the Mezzogiorno initiatives, both in the setting up and in the implementation of programmes. In this case too, more recent actions have been based on the partnership principle (the institution of a partnership often being explicitly required by the European or national programmes guidelines). Nevertheless, whether these partnerships are effective or just mention the actors is not understood. What is more, in the countries with greater experience in the institution of partnerships it is well known that instituting a partnership does not necessarily mean giving the actors an effective role (Atkinson 1999; Carley 2000; Tilson et al. 1997). A final feature of the impact of Europeanisation of urban policy initiatives in southern Italy that is worth highlighting is the short time implementation of UE programmes has had. This is not at all a banal issue in the Mezzogiorno. Community programmes enabled meaningful processes of physical changes to begin in most cases after years of inactivity. This happened at the same time as changes introduced in the municipalities with the election of mayors directly by the citizens. The new electoral mechanism made actions oriented toward territorial change with a precise time schedule an interesting element to use as a flagship in the electoral programmes of southern Italian mayors (9), often producing a renewed trust

in institutions. However, one can say that the speed of changes involves, on the one hand, problems concerning the quality of the interventions (which is a crucial issue in contexts with fragile environmental equilibrium and meaningful cultural and historical heritage such as the historical areas of southern Italian towns; on the other hand, problems concerning the risk of accelerating processes of transformation of the historical areas of the cities into places of entertainment for people coming from everywhere but from the area itself (Barbanente, Tedesco 2001)

#### **What is changing?**

Having analysed the processes taking place in many towns in the Italian Mezzogiorno using the Europeanisation literature can help us raise some issues. To sum up, even though homogenization or harmonization of domestic practices is neither a realistic expectation nor an expectation to be wished as an outcome of Europeanisation (Ladrech quoted in Bache 2000, p. 2), we can try to understand whether the hybridation of European concepts we have described is a way to match local needs and European opportunities in a long term strategy or whether it is just a matter of development of a capacity to benefit from funding opportunities, in particular from the structural funds. Hence, whether it is just a matter of formal assumption in urban policy initiatives of an European style (i.e. of European labels attributed to local practices not in keeping with principles underlying Community actions). If so, there is no mobilization in a European perspective of 'local knowledge' which is considered essential factor for development (Donolo 1999, p. 115).

In this perspective, it is meaningful to raise some issues both about the prevailing in the regeneration programmes of physical rather than social and economic actions and about the ways to match longtime strategies of planning and short-time European policy initiatives. In conclusion, one can wonder if the great number of European policy initiatives and the diffusion of a European policy style may be overall considered sign of new development patterns: do these policy initiatives create or contribute to development or are they just a different way of being dependent on the 'top'? Will mobilization by specific policy tools end up with the end of the policy tools? Is the risk of 'dependent development' ('sviluppo senza autonomia', Trigilia 1992) still present, even though the policy form has changed? Can we really speak of a 'big turn' (Bodo, Viesti 1997)? It is in the local contexts themselves where we have to look for some answers. It is in local contexts that the common problems the Mezzogiorno towns are coping with and the opportunities offered by European Union deal with differences of local systems. It is these different answers that make it clear we cannot speak of a single 'south'.

#### **Notes**

1. As is known, Structural Funds finance Community Regional Policy, aiming at promoting development in the less prosperous regions of the European Union.
2. The author recognizes the risks when speaking of the Italian Mezzogiorno as an homogenous territory. However, recognizing the profound differences in southern Italian local contexts often did not mean taking them into account on

the analytical plane, but focusing on each of them. This article does not aim at looking at the Mezzogiorno towns as a whole. Meanwhile it does not have the ambition to go into differences thoroughly. This article simply tries to take into account some common issues concerning the urban policy field.

3. Different definitions of the term 'Europeanisation' are also in Radaelli (2000) and Olsen (2001).

4. The Maastricht Treaty does not include any specific reference to cities nor does it give the Community a specific remit for the development of an urban policy. However, the urban dimension has acquired growing relevance in the Community agenda, in particular within Directorate 'Regional Policy'.

5. 90s competitive urban policy initiatives in Britain, that had a relevant influence on the Community ones, were based on this idea (Oatley 1998, p. 11).

6. The authors recognize as mediating factors also: multiple veto points; mediating formal institutions; political and organizational cultures; differential empowerment of actors (Risse, Cowles, Caporaso 2001, pp. 9-12).

7. The different terms distinguishes the processes where learning is an adjustment of tools and strategies used for given objectives and preferences and the processes where actors change their objectives and preferences.

8. For problems underpinning public policy as a (strategic) construct see Crosta, 1995; 1998.

9. There is no space to go further to this issue, that has been developed, with reference also to some southern Italian towns in Catanzaro et al. (2002).

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