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The challenge of a place-and network-based approach to development in Italian regions

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of research networks inside local development processes to increase the competitiveness of underdeveloped territories. This paper, within the scope of local development theory, aims to describe the state of the art on the regional research systems resulting largely from programs co-financed between 2000 and 2013, with which the various regions are preparing to engage in programming for the period 2014-2020. The extent of consistency between the objectives of sectorial specialization set by policies previously or currently implemented and those in the planning phase (S3) is assessed, as is their connection with existing territorial specializations at a regional level.

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1. Introduction: context of reference and aims of the paper

The strategy for the period 2014 - 2020 foresees a particular attention to the place-based development (Barca, 2009), to the partnership in the planning of the interventions, to the definition of the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3), and to innovative logic not exclusively regarding the ICTs. According to Foray (2011, 2014 2015), the concept of smart specialization is "the ability of an economic system to create new specializations through the discovery of new connected opportunities to the concentration and local agglomeration of resources and competences (...)".

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The implementation of this new way of thinking of the policy in favour of local innovation can be considered as a way to overcome the gap between endogenous development and exogenous development.

Nevertheless, this evolution is possible by maintaining a delicate equilibrium between vertical (specialization) and horizontal (diversification) dimensions of the economic structure (Antonietti *et al.*, 2015). In the case of the industrial districts, where the first dimension dominates, we find the risk of lock-in that reduces the opportunities of discovery and exploitation of innovations. In the case of locations of firms that conduct to prevail the second dimension, it becomes more difficult to exchange critical knowledge and the creation of generative relationships among the local actors. On such weaknesses the debate is grown on "related variety" and "related branching", that sees an active role of the cities with their complexity, variety of the demand and social and economic actors, as incubators of innovation, able to also include traditional subjects in a wider system of relationships [Ciapetti and Dardanelli, 2011, Morgan 2013, Boschma 2014, Frenken *et al.*, 2007].

In the light of these considerations, the paper aims to respond to three aims:

- Mapping the various types of research networks in Italy;
- Illustrating the progress of regional and national interventions dedicated to those involved in research, innovation and technology transfer in the context of European planning aimed at promoting greater integration in the use of structural funds;
- Verifying the existence of possible synergies in terms of sectorial specialization between the research networks with the traditional industrial districts at an initial stage, and with the priorities emerging in the SS3s of the Italian Regions.

These objectives show that the paper restricts itself to studying in depth the cohesion interventions of the EU during the period 2007- 2013 devoted to the evolution of territorial networks, Technological Districts, Clusters, Poles of excellence, Centers or Scientific Parks in light of the presence of the existing industrial districts in the different regions. These subjects, that compete to compose the regional research system are the partnerships that have helped the regions to elaborate the Smart Specialization Strategy (SS3) and represent an "accumulation" of tied up routine to realized interventions until today. Therefore they must be considered an aware "territorial social capital" necessary also to form the critical mass of a politics that aims to valorize the interventions in light of a new strategy: that of a sustainable inclusive and founded upon the knowledge society. However, they are only a part of the innovative context, that must include besides the industrial and research fabric, the politics of public procurement able to apply innovative solutions for the demand and the policies of inclusion of the present human resources.

2. Knowledge networks and interventions of EU cohesion planning 2007-2013

The mapping of previous policies to the construction of regional research systems shows the following picture:

Table 1. Research organizations and innovation in Italy: a map

REGIONS	TD	IP	UNI.	STP	EC	RPO	TOT
Piedmont	1	17	4	2	1	21	49
Veneto	1	3	4	2	0	15	23
Friuli Venezia Giulia	2	4	2	2	0	10	22
Valle D'Aosta	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Lombardy	4	6	14	4	1	35	59
Trentino Alto Adige	1	1	3	0	0	5	10
Emilia Romagna	1	10	4	0	1	17	35
Liguria	3	4	1	0	0	13	20
Tuscany	1	2	7	3	1	33	48
Umbria	1	0	2	2	0	5	8
Marche	1	3	5	1	0	2	9
Lazio	3	2	12	3	1	47	72

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