



State rescaling and new metropolitan space in the age of austerity. Evidence from Italy



Simonetta Armondi

Politecnico di Milano, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Via Bonardi 3, 20133 Milano, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Metropolitan city
State rescaling
Austerity
Italy

ABSTRACT

This article presents the changes that are emerging in the Italian national policies mainly through the discussion of the contents both of the recent metropolitan reform initiative, and the national programming documents for metropolitan cities related to European Programming period 2014–2020. In Italy, which faced severe political difficulty and economic stagnation after 2008 global crisis, the production of the new metropolitan scale became one of the tools for the implementation of austerity measures. The paper examines whether the understanding of the new metropolitan scale in the Italian geography of austerity can be strengthened through a careful engagement with the body of literature on state rescaling and on austerity policies. The paper illustrates how that the apparently neutral emphasis on metropolitan city scale, first can be understood as a crucial tool of an austerity measures; second, it implies a rescaling of public power and, third, it neglects the multifaceted notion of the urban and the trans-scalar territorial governance relationships.

1. Introduction

Countries such Italy, Spain, Greece, and Ireland have experienced state national crisis that have set up severe austerity measures, in part imposed by the European Union.

Against the backdrop of austerity – the restructuring of economic actions, service provisions and the institutional and territorial architecture of states as the attempt to respond to economic shock following the global financial crisis since 2008 – this paper is focused on the production of “metropolitan” scale in Italy over the recent years, using a spatial lens. In particular the paper examines and discusses whether the understanding of the new metropolitan scale in the Italian geography of austerity can be strengthened through a careful engagement with the debate on state rescaling.

Further cycles of state rescaling are seen as being mobilised in the wake of the crisis (Lobao et al., 2009), evolving in patterns distinctive from previous decades characterized by decentralization from national to sub-national levels (Brenner, 2004). Answering recent calls in the academic debate for stronger and more comparable methods for analysing institutions and explaining their rescaling over time and space (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Tomaney, 2014; Pike et al., 2016), the article pushes forward theoretical reflection not only on metropolitan cities and spatial rescaling, but, rather, it reflects critically on the instantiation of state rescaling as a tool of austerity policies, putting empirical exploration of Italian case in a broader theoretical framework.

The paper posits that the Italian nation state is not a static entity, but it is constant change, it discloses both a tendency to a centralisation of power, and new form of spatial polarization through the frame of the metropolitan scale.

Regarding the research method, this is an empirical study based on document analysis using empirical evidences from the historical trajectory of Italian urban policies, focusing in particular on the one hand, on the analysis of three legislative and official documents focused on the slow emergence of the notion of “metropolitan city”; and, on the other, on limits and contradictions of the actual National programming for the EU Policy setting 2014–2020: National Partnership Agreement and National Operational Programme for Metropolitan Cities, National Strategies for Inner Areas. The documents – laws and programming documents – have been selected for their implicit or explicit allusion to a rescaling question related to the notion of the urban dimension.

The article proceeds in five steps. After the introductory first section, there is a second section with a review of the main literature’s field of reference related with academic work on the critical conceptualization of state rescaling and austerity. The third section introduces the reform law and the programming documents focused on the production of the new metropolitan scale. The fourth section critically underlines limits and contradictions of the metropolitan notion proposed in the national documents with an emphasis on the misalignment between institutional boundaries and socio-spatial dynamics. Finally, concluding remarks discuss the results and the contribution of the analysis to the wider research.

E-mail address: simonetta.armondi@polimi.it.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.03.008>

Received 29 February 2016; Received in revised form 6 March 2017; Accepted 9 March 2017
0016-7185/ © 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

2. Mapping state rescaling debate

The literature has emphasized the strengthening of national governments across diverse states at the expense of subnational regional, city or local levels characterizing the Keynesian welfare state as post-war model of social and economic regulation related to Fordism as a regime of economic production and capital accumulation (Brenner, 2004; Rodríguez-Pose and Gill, 2003). This pattern has molded the geographies of spatial development up to the early - 1970s when the shift to post-Keynesian, post-Fordist paradigm occurred (Jessop, 1990, 1993, 2002; Martin and Sunley, 1997; Peck, 2001).

The conceptualization of the rescaling of the state, regarded as a tool to grasp contemporary phenomena, has found central place in an heterogeneous body of literature since the turn of the century (Goodwin et al., 2005; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999), notwithstanding there is not a universally shared definition of state rescaling, the concept, in the wide literature is being used as a generally descriptive category (Brenner, 2009).

Brenner's (1999, 2003, 2004, 2009) comprehensive contributions and Jessop's (2002, 2004, 2015) works on state power have provided a foundational unifying thematic framework. The connection between the de-territorialisation process of globalisation and the territorial reconfiguration it determines, produces rescaling processes (Brenner, 1999, 2000). According to Gualini (2006), rescaling, in this article, is interpreted as a manifestation of a "politic of scale" that considers an active contribution of state structures in promoting a scalar change.

Indeed, a deeper conceptualization of spatial scale is needed, because as Pike and Tomaney (2009) maintain, much of the existing literature on state rescaling has built on an approach that assumes scales as fixed, with each hierarchical level – the global, national, regional and local – that overlaps the one below.

As a consequence, if state rescaling processes in contemporary societies: (a) are elusive and contested spatial outcomes of fluid economic networks and sociopolitical mobilisation (Bolocan Goldstein, 2014), (b) reveal the misalignment between formal administrative boundaries and actual socio-spatial dynamics (Gualini, 2006), (c) refer to a complex set of political, institutional and social practices that puts spatial scale at stake in public policy, therefore, as noted by several authors (Brenner, 2009; Cox, 2009; Pike and Tomaney, 2009), how to interpret spatial scale itself is also a question to scrutinize for a better understanding of the variability of state rescaling phenomena. Many contributions challenge the meaning of scale shifting the treatment away from scales as an empirically self-evident geometrical tool (Smith, 1995; Jonas, 2006; Herod, 2011), debating how (and if) it should be conceptualized and the different ways through which public and private actors engage in scalar politics (e.g.: Swyngedouw, 1997a, 1997b, 2000; Marston, 2000; Brenner, 2001; Brown and Purcell, 2005; Marston et al., 2005).

I have used the scholarship on the state rescaling and on scale conceptualization with a clear aim: discover what this tells us about the category "metropolitan" itself. Research focused on metropolitan tier has become increasingly important in literature for understanding the geographical dynamics of urban region governance in a number of European Countries, such as The Netherlands (Duyvendak et al., 2009), Spain (Navarro and Tomàs, 2007), UK, (Dimitriou and Thompson, 2007), Finland, Sweden (Giersig, 2008), France (Kubler, 2012; Lefèvre, 2009), and Germany (Jouve, 2005; Heinelt and Kubler, 2005). These approaches grounded on analyses adopting fixed scales and conventional territorial units, are exposed to the "territorial trap" (Agnew, 1994), in which rescaling strictly concerns with reorganisation, rearticulation, and redefinition of the spatial scales and the corresponding (national, regional, urban) government levels entangled in the transformations.¹ However, a similar or divergent analysis has not yet been applied to the contemporary

¹ A recent book witnesses a renewed interest of theoretical reflections and debate on metropolitanisation (Cole and Payre, 2016).

Italian context.

Brenner (2004, p. 274) illustrates the different rounds of "rescaling upward" process throughout western Europe: the first round of new metropolitan institutions began in the 1960s and concluded in the 1980s, has had a top-down hierarchical-bureaucratic framework of metropolitan service delivery. The second round of metropolitan institutional reform started in 1990s and has been oriented towards the promotion of regional competitiveness rather than on administrative efficiency and local service provision issues that characterized the preceding metropolitan reform initiatives.

The conceptualization of state rescaling has been recently intertwined with the debate on the geographies of austerity after 2008 crisis, stressing its importance in gathering the consequences of austerity (Donald et al., 2014; Hadjimichalis, 2011; Jones, 2014; Kitson et al., 2011; Peck, 2012). According to Donald et al. (2014), which state that the concept of scale is crucial in understanding the spatial consequence of austerity, this paper aims to fill this void, by exploring how the interpretations of "rescaling upward" with metropolitan city concept have evolved in Italy and the power dynamics that have influenced this process across different scales.

3. Rescaling the Italian state through institutional reorganisation and policy trajectories

In Italy territorial organization of the State relates to the legacy of Napoleonic tradition. It is historically framed by three levels: the central State, 110 subregional authorities, the Provinces (*Province*), and 8.050 Municipalities (*Comuni*). In Italy, the 70% of Municipalities have less than five thousand inhabitants. In the last two decades the introduction of new Provinces, with several institutional clippings, met both local interests and economical and social change, beyond the historical North-South dichotomy. These data highlights an administrative fragmentation concern related to bureaucratic wastefulness and local political corruption. Nonetheless, the regional level was perceived as an anomaly, a leftover of *ancien régime*, in fact the 20 Regions (*Regioni*) were established in 1970, with an enduring inter-institutional conflict between Regions and Provinces.

Starting from the early twentieth century the issue of the appropriateness of administrative boundaries related to public policies is central in the Italian geographical and political debate (Gambi and Merloni, 1995). From the point of view of public policies, literature focused on urban policies in Italy (e.g. Bramezza, 2007; Dematteis, 2010; Allulli and Tortorella, 2013) has shown a lack of commitment in the national political agenda until 1990, emphasising that the following initiatives have been fragmented, because of an absence of consistent means to coordinate them and for shared actions.

To sum up, there are four controversial attempts crucial in stating the Italian "metropolitan" dimension:

- the first is "Progetto '80";
- the second is law 142/1990;
- the third is Del Rio law (law 56/2014);
- the fourth is National Partnership Agreement 2014–2020 between Italy and European Commission Services related to the National Operational Programme on Metropolitan Cities.

At the turn of the sixties and seventies of the last century there has been the first attempt to put city and territories in the national agenda: the "Progetto '80". This is a territorial reorganisation project at national scale promoted by the Ministry of Budget and Programming and aimed to overcome territorial imbalances and foster economic development starting from an alliance between national State and, *in nuce*, metropolitan cities. The never implemented "Progetto '80", with the annex on "territorial projections" (*Ministero del Bilancio e della Programmazione Economica*, 1971), refers to a multifaceted conceptualization of the Italian territories. Even though the report was inspired by a narrow

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073225>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5073225>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)