



Managing territory and its complexity: a decision-making model based on the viable system approach (VsA)

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ABSTRACT

The globalization exacerbates the need to conceive sustainable and shared solutions to the dramatic environmental, social and economic issues at a local level, i.e. for a specific territory. Satisfying this need asks for a decision-making processes awareness of the specific environmental, social and economic features of the territory itself. Considering the challenge to linking effectiveness and efficiency with a viable sustainability at a local level (par. 1), the paper firstly aims to offer deeper insights in understanding the complex nature of the territory (parr. 2–3), and secondly it proposes a new model, e.g. the ConsulCubo VSA, helpful to support the decision-makers facing the increasing challenge of an effective, efficient and sustainable management of territory (parr. 4 and 5); final remarks are then discussed (par. 6).

1. Introduction

A few other concepts such as territory were manipulated by politics when, in a crisis of representation, they consider it as a place to delimit while defending themselves from the other, from the foreigner; few other resources have been so exploited by businesses (irresponsible ones) when treated only as a bone to strip the flesh from and to throw it away when there was no more flesh (Simone et al., 2016). On the other hand, the actual and urgent need to provide effective and shared solutions to the dramatic political, social and economic issues at a *local level* asks for a decision-making processes awareness of the specific features of the territory itself. In a such scenery, daily marked by competition, innovation, globalization and uncertainty, the territory is a result of a complex bundle of several interdependent decisions. Territory is synonymous with interdependence. It is a path dependent interaction among individuals, organizations, institutions. Interdependence that defines a plurality of interconnections to regulate the dynamic behavior of the different actors involved in the processes (Faludi, 2012). Interdependence that will strengthen the economic and social activities rooted in the territory and that shape, through times, its own, unique cultural identity (Borgonovi, 2006).

The Viable System Approach (VSA) focuses its attention on consonance and on opportunities but always believing in the delicate balance between being and becoming, between stability and development. Implementing a such efficient system, able to survive and to observe the bounds of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, represents an obliged but ambitious aim. The managerial literature is more and more

paying attention to the study of local production systems, of territories, of their history and of their vocation. At the same time, at a local level there is an increasing need to pay attention to a sustainable exploit of the local natural resources, to the quality of life, to the well-being of the heterogeneous stakeholders that belong to a specific territory (Barile et al., 2017). Transparency, clarity, elimination of waste and responsible management are emerging, then, as viable alternatives to speculation and to irresponsibility of many decision-makers that, over the years and in different ways, have addressed the economic and financial system to the current crisis. Actually, during these three last decades, the issue of sustainability has increasingly permeated the daily life of millions of human beings and organizations. Slowly but gradually it has gained the awareness that the advanced society has pursued innovation and progress by accumulating huge investments in technology, sometimes forgetting that they have to demonstrate their effective utility in widely solving problems of populations and environment. Next years the true challenge for decision makers (in public as well in private sector) will be linking efficiency and effectiveness to viable sustainability (Barile et al., 2017). In the era of globalisation, the capital and the knowledge are both emancipated from their local dimension (Bauman, 2000). Because of the globalisation, however, all the above mentioned issues are increasingly perceived as more and more urgent and dramatic at a *local level*. In the last four decades of the ‘end of geography’ (Virilio, 2000), the territory has been elected by the several bottom-up movements as a privileged social place to think (Viale, 2011), defend and represent the common goods such as the landscape, the cultural, ecological and labor environment (Bonomi,

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2012). Considering the challenge to linking effectiveness and efficiency with a viable sustainability (Simone and Barile, 2016) at a local level, the present paper firstly aims to offer deeper insights in understanding the complex nature of the territory (parr. 2 and 3) and secondly it proposes a new model, e.g. the ConsulCubo VSA, helpful to support the decision-makers facing the increasing challenge of an effective, efficient and sustainable management of territory (parr. 4 and 5); final remarks are then discussed (par. 6).

2. The territory: one phenomenon, several disciplinary universes

The word *territory* comes from Latin *territorium* that, in turn, comes from *terra* (land). The word originally denoted the district surrounding and under the jurisdiction of a town or city, specifically a Roman or provincial city (English Oxford Dictionaries, www.oxforddictionaries.com). Nowadays, according to its etymological roots, it indicates the land and waters under the jurisdiction of a nation, state, ruler, etc.; a geographic area under control of a single governing entity such as state or municipality; an area whose borders are determined by the scope of political power rather than solely by natural features such as rivers and ridges. However, over time, the word *territory* has acquired different meanings within different and several disciplinary universes and it has been characterized by syncretism and ambiguity.

2.1. The territory and biology

The biology is the set of sciences related to the living organisms. From the point of view of the classification of living beings, biology differs them in plants (botanical) and animals (zoology); but considering the aspects according to which the organism can be studied, we must distinguish the following as branches of biological sciences: the morphology, physiology, genetics, molecular biology, pathology, whether they consider the shape, functions, heredity, or abnormal conditions of the organisms. These disciplines are divided into various sections, depending on whether they have as object of study the plants, the animals or the human species. When applying the comparative method in the study, they are called morphology, physiology, comparative pathology". So, if the biology is the set of sciences relating to the living organisms, the habitat is the set of environmental conditions in which certain species live". So, we could say that the habitat is related to biology exactly as a part to the whole: biology studies all living beings each of whom live in a particular environment with features that allow it to be born, grow and develop. However, it is necessary to clarify that the habitat does not belong to only one population of species, but to a collection of many species that share the same space". And so the key word: space. It is in this particular space that the different species exist. By simplifying it, we could say that the habitat coincides with a certain geographical area, with a particular environment, with a particular territory. Each species has its own territory as well as each territory has its own species. A species-territory binomial that is indissoluble, balanced, strong, but not at all static: the species evolve and the territory is transformed. The evolution and the transformation are unstoppable. Such changes do not occur as the result of a voluntary adaptation, but they emerge from the wide redundancy of natural resources (*biogeographical and ecological vicariance*) (Wegener, 1966; Janvier, 1982; Berthoz, 2013).

2.2. The territory and sociology

The sociology "is the science that studies, using their investigative methods and research techniques, empirical (that sometimes directly produce their own data) and not empirical, the basics, the essential phenomena, the recurring processes of structuring and de-structuring activities, the typical manifestations of associated life and their transformations, the conditionings that the relationships and the social

relations exercise over the formation and over the action of individuals and also that individuals exercise over them, whom are generally found in society and in all types of communities, although aiming to a smaller scale, as any other science, to bring the variety of special events to a limited number of laws or general propositions connected together by means of explanatory diagrams and various radius theories. However, the sociology is not limited exclusively to the study of what is traditionally invariant, as are the biological foundations of social life or the bases of social communication, and embraces also all those phenomena that although there has been constituted and evolved into history - such as family, work, politics, the domination-do evolve and change with extremely slower speed than those considered by historiography, including the so-called history of long duration" (Gallino, 2006: 615–616). The sociology, in a nutshell, is the "science whose object is the social phenomena investigated in their causes, manifestations and effects, between their mutual relations and in relation to other events. The sociology, thus, is the science of relations: causal and ambiguous. It is the science that investigates the underlying reasons for certain decisions, for particular behaviors and specific actions. It is the science that studies the possible connections between spatially and temporally next events. Some authoritative sociologists through articles, books, conferences and interviews have always emphasized the many and various links between the most distinct social aspects and the most distinguished territorial aspects. And, in fact, it could not be otherwise. The behaviors and social relationships, as we will see in the course of this paper, are the causes and / or effects of the territorial characteristics. When we talk about the territorial characteristics, in order to explain or to understand the connections between these and the sociology we refer to something different and especially to something more than just the climate or the landscape of a certain place. The sociologist observes, by studying and analyzing the behaviors and relationships which take shape within specific groups of people, special organizations, in certain geographical areas. The geographical area is seen as a system, a very particular relational system. One example out of many, Gallino (2001: 127), one of the most important Italian sociologists, refers to the expectations of the territory, i.e. what the territory expects after becoming a knot of certain social and / or business relationships. This is because if it is true that the territory has an influence on the social phenomena which occur on it, it is likewise true that these social phenomena leave behind their backs in their footsteps, indelible signs of their presence and / or of their passage over that territory.

The areas change over time, they are transformed. Today more than ever, under the influence of globalization, territories undergo changes more and faster and rapid. The analyses of the evolution or of the involution of the territory are synonymous with the social changes subject of sociology researches.

2.3. The territory and the geography

The geography is the "science whose object is the interpretative description of Earth's surface or some parts of it, by 'Earth surface' meaning the three-dimensional space where the solid mass of the Earth (lithosphere) and the liquid (hydrosphere) are in contact with the gaseous shell (atmosphere); the space in which develops the vegetable and the animal life, where the locations are established and also human activities take place. Although it uses extensively the data of the natural and human sciences, the geography is located in an original position in relation to one and to the other. It does not study the physical phenomena neither the human societies, but considers both of these sciences as responsible agents for the physiognomy and organization of the territories. Therefore, a glacier, a forest, a city will be studied by the geophysicist, by the botanist, by the urbanism, but none of them will be able to read the whole view of the territory of which those items are integral parts; so it is necessary a different discipline, not natural nor human, but 'territorial', as precisely the geography should be

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